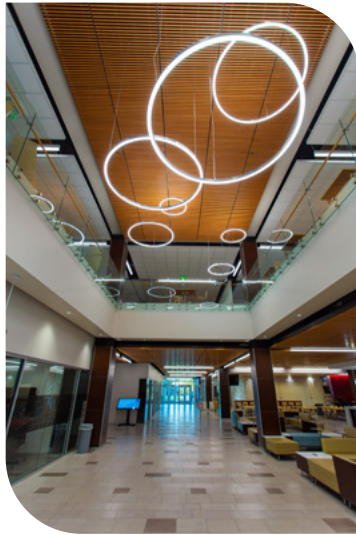
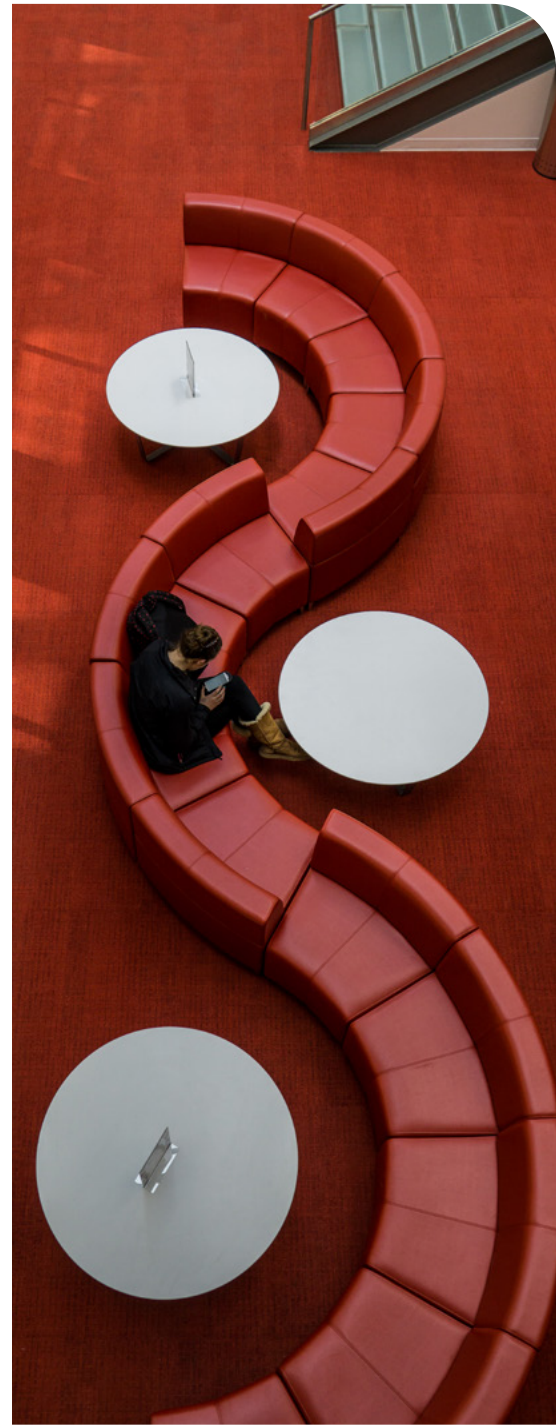


UNDERGRADUATE JOURNAL of Contemporary Issues & Media



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THE UNDERGRADUATE JOURNAL OF CONTEMPORARY ISSUES & MEDIA

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Letter from the Editor



Another year has passed, and another edition of the journal is ready to present to our readers. This year has opened up somewhat, with the conditions of the pandemic improved. What you will find in the journal this year are issues that continue to dominate the lives of young adults.

The pieces in this volume are commentaries on our contemporary society. Examining gaps in the system, many of the pieces evince the authors' steadfast belief that all people deserve the same attention and care... but are still being ignored at least some of the time. On the other hand, other pieces demonstrate a type of resilience in finding a way through uncertainty.

We hope the 2023 volume strikes a chord in you, readers—and that you recognize in the experiences and beliefs of these writers perhaps a kindred soul or two who shares in your concerns and hopes. There is much to do—and we can do so much more together.

Maureen M.

A Mighty Voice: A Case Study of Ernie Barnes

Dante Jervaise Kirkman | Stanford University

“I don’t listen to what art critics say. I don’t know anybody who needs a critic to find out what art is.”

- Jean-Michel Basquiat
(in *Jean-Michel Basquiat: 1960-1988*)

In 1971, a Black artist named Ernie Barnes finished an oil painting and named it “The Sugar Shack” (see fig. 1). This piece created a sensation, ultimately becoming an iconic part of African-American visual art and popular culture. It was featured in the opening credits of the Black television sitcom *Good Times*, which ran on CBS from 1976 to 1979. It was also featured on the cover of Marvin Gaye’s 1976 record album, *I Want You* (“Biography”). During the course of his career, Barnes became known for his expressive, Neo-mannerist style (Sayej), energetically representing athletes in motion and scenes of everyday Black life.

Ernie Barnes: The Sports Artist

Ernie Barnes’s early life did not follow the usual path of a typical artist. He was born in Durham, North Carolina in 1938—a time when Black children did not attend school with white children, and Black patrons were not allowed to visit white-owned museums. A talented high school football athlete, Barnes received 26 athletic college scholarship offers, but chose to stay in Durham because his mother promised him a car if he did. Since attending nearby Duke University and University of North Carolina was not an option because of segregation, Barnes attended North Carolina College (which had dropped the “for Negroes”

from its original name but was still all-Black). Barnes attended NCC on a full athletic scholarship for football and track and field, majoring in art (“Biography”).

As a young artist, Barnes found racism pervading people’s perception of art and the ability to create it. In his freshman year of college in 1956, Barnes visited the newly-desegregated North Carolina Museum of Art in Raleigh with his art class. When Barnes asked the docent where to find “paintings by Negro artists,” the docent replied, “Your people don’t express themselves that way” (“Biography”).

Barnes credits his artistic vision to his college art instructor, Ed Wilson, who taught him the value of life experiences in art. He recalls:

He made me conscious of the fact that the artist who is useful to America is one who studies his own life and records it through the medium of art, manners and customs of his own experiences....[He] told me to pay attention to what my body felt like in movement. Within that elongation, there’s a feeling, an attitude and expression. (“Biography”)

Though Barnes had mixed feelings about football, as he disliked the violence of the sport, Wilson’s perspective allowed him to see his football experience in a new light. His football experiences ultimately led to the development of the sports art style he is known for today.

In 1959, Barnes left NCC to pursue a different path when he was drafted by the Baltimore Colts into the National Football League. He then went on to

play for the Titans of New York, the San Diego Chargers, the Denver Broncos, and the Saskatchewan Roughriders of Canada. Despite building a noteworthy football career, art remained his first passion. After a career-ending injury in 1965, he attended the NFL owners' meeting to lobby for a position as an official NFL artist. New York Jets owner Sonny Werblin, greatly impressed with Barnes' talent, hired Barnes

professional athletes ("Biography"). Throughout his life, he received numerous commissions from professional sports organizations and teams, such as the National Basketball Association and the Carolina Panthers, as well as individual celebrities such as Kanye West. In 1984, he was commissioned to create paintings for the Los Angeles Olympics. His blossoming career coincided with the Black Power movement, and his graceful, elongated depictions of Black

people resonated with the "Black Is Beautiful" slogan of that time. As music producer and major art collector Swizz Beatz puts it, "There was something about flying Ernie Barnes to my house to pick the places he wanted to hang paintings" (Sargent). Despite the discrimination and racism he experienced as a young art student, Barnes enjoyed a long and celebrated art career in the world of Hollywood and professional sports. He passed away at age 70 in 2009 ("Biography").

Racism in High Art



Fig. 1, Barnes, Ernie "The Sugar Shack," 1972

onto his team as a salaried player—but off the field as the team artist. Werblin sponsored Barnes' first solo exhibition in 1966 at the New York Grand Central Galleries, a venue billed as the "largest art sales gallery in the world." With Werblin as his patron, Barnes gained a reputation as an artist in the sporting world and in Hollywood, featuring in several exhibitions across the country throughout his career. Late in his career, in 2007, Barnes exhibited again in New York City, this time hosted by Time Warner and the NFL ("Biography").

After the success of "The Sugar Shack," Barnes' work became popular with other sports organizations and Black celebrities, many of whom were also pro-

Despite his success, Barnes has remained a nonentity in the elite fine art scene based in New York City, which holds sway over "high art" in the same way that Hollywood controls the film industry. Barnes' work, belonging to the style of art composition known as "Black Romantic," is, according to professor and Washington Post contributor Natalie Hopkinson, considered to be "the visual art equivalent of the Chitlin' Circuit" ("Biography"). According to ArtNews journalist Linda Yablonksy, works falling in the Black Romantic category are "generally ignored by the art world." Barnes' work wasn't acquired by any prestigious New York art museums during his lifetime, he wasn't included in any highly exclusive art exhibitions, and he wasn't written up by any influential art critics. Even art historians have overlooked him. His

work seems to exist outside their canon of what merits notice and study. Bridget R. Cooks, a Black curator and art professor at the University of California Irvine, stated: “He’s not a part of art history. Barnes is not someone in any art history book that I own or have seen....He was ignored by the mainstream art world” (Sayej).

I have seen evidence of this dismissive attitude toward Ernie Barnes firsthand. As part of my research, I wrote to the co-authors of a multi-volume series on Black art. One of the authors, who is white, responded: “Ernie Barnes looks like an artist who appeals to people who don’t go to art galleries” (“Re: Stanford student research”). I was somewhat surprised by the casual dismissiveness of the response, which I would like to attribute to the rushed quality of the email medium; however, it seems to confirm the art establishment’s view of Barnes’ contributions as irrelevant or nonexistent—even a recognized expert on Black art hasn’t heard of him.

Although these realities may seem puzzling, the explanation is relatively simple. Ernie Barnes, whose artwork is well-known and highly recognizable, has been almost completely overlooked because of the individual, historical, and systemic racism in the high art world—a world filled with mostly white arbiters who evaluate artistic quality, relevance, and importance based on narrow, privilege-informed standards.

This reality is clearly demonstrated in various studies, including several Mellon Foundation surveys of diversity within art museum staff. Their baseline study, conducted in 2015, found that “among museum curators, conservators, educators and leaders, only 4 percent are African American” while 84% are white (Schonfeld). Similarly, a Williams College study from 2019 found that 84.5% of artists represented in major American museum collections are white, and just 1.2% are Black/African American (Topaz). In addition, a 2012 *Forbes* photo essay featuring top

art dealers provides a clear snapshot that art dealers tend to be white males (Esman). If white arbiters decide the quality and relevance of Black art, it seems certain that they will perpetuate historical, societal, systemic racism.

Barnes’ Enduring Legacy

Over a decade after his death, interest in Barnes’ work seems to be reviving, and some in the high art world are taking notice and joining the trend. In 2015, one of his paintings, “Late Night DJ,” which had graced a 1980 Curtis Mayfield album (“Biography”), was included in an exhibition at the Kunstmuseum Stuttgart in Germany, a notably prestigious institution. The exhibition, entitled “I Got Rhythm: Art and Jazz Since 1920,” grouped Barnes along with celebrated artists such as Otto Dix, Jean Dubuffet, Max Beckmann, Henri Matisse, Jean-Michele Basquiat and Kara Walker (The Editors of *ArtNews*). Just as some Europeans first welcomed Black artists during the Jazz age when Jim Crow was at its worst in America, they may be the ones to set a precedent which, in time, the New York high art scene might follow.

Regardless of whether the high art world grows to appreciate Barnes for his unique contributions, some members of the Black community are passionate about his work and dedicated to preserving his legacy. In 2019, Black curator and art professor at the University of California Irvine, Bridget R. Cooks, whom I quoted previously above, organized an Ernie Barnes retrospective at the California African American Museum in Los Angeles. The exhibition was warmly received in the Black and LA community. *The Los Angeles Times* covered the exhibit—in the arts section, not the sports section—reporting how museum goers “lined up” to see Barnes’ work and treating it as legitimate art worthy of discussion as such (Easter). The exhibition also inspired Kareem Abdul-Jabbar to write an opinion piece in *The Hollywood Reporter* on the significance of Barnes’ work, stating:

Art has a special place among people who have historically been silenced and their culture marginalized. Such sustained suppression stifles not just the outspoken voice, but can cause the oppressed to doubt they actually have anything worthwhile to say... This extensive collection is a revelation and inspiration—a testament to an artist who gave voice to his people and oh, what a mighty voice it is.

art galleries, and his paintings have not been acquired by the likes of the Metropolitan Museum of Art or the Whitney Museum of American Art. Perhaps this will always be the case; perhaps his importance will never fully be recognized by the white-dominated high art world. Yet even without the high art world's stamp of approval, it seems that Ernie Barnes' "mighty voice" can continue to echo through time and resonate with new generations.

Conclusion

Barnes did not exhibit in New York's most exclusive

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He has received numerous creative accolades, including being named a YoungArts finalist and a U.S. Presidential Scholar in the Arts. His work has been published in *The New York Times*, and he has attended the prestigious University of Iowa Young Writers Workshop. His visual art has been exhibited at Stanford's Student Art Showcase, as well as at UC Davis, UMass Amherst, and UW Seattle, and his documentary films have been Official Selections at the Black Hollywood Film Festival and the Idyllwild International Festival of Cinema.

At Stanford, Dante is an Ernest H. Johnson Scholar, an Art + Justice Grant recipient, and a student member of the President's Committee on Athletics, Physical Education and Recreation. Dante is also a USA Boxing Elite Level amateur boxer with national rankings and a creative intern for Mayweather Promotions.

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A Friend for Justin Russo

G.V. Bourgeois | Saginaw Valley State University

Inky blue peeked through cheap plastic slats and cheaper fairy lights. A poor substitute for starlight, but the two young women, one with her laptop propped on the overstuffed couch and the other hunched over the plastic dining room table, had no inclination to look up and critique their handiwork or the local light pollution.

A third, standing at the kitchen sink, broke from meticulously scrubbing the garlic and noodle particulate from her pot and cutlery. She peered around the wall separating the kitchen from the living room; her gaze met one of her roommate's backs. Mack squared her shoulders and injected cheer into her voice with a deep breath. "Bree, what did you think of tomorrow's reading?"

"Which tomorrow's reading?" Bree leaned against one arm of the couch and stared straight ahead as she clacked away at the pink and white Bluetooth keyboard in her lap. The laptop leaning against the opposite arm stared back at her blankly, manic keystrokes translating to a steady and amiable scrawl of text.

"Dr. Treant's reading. It's that biography and overview of Nietzsche--"

"Uhhh..." The computer's face contorted from

a word processor to a search bar. Bree's arm dove towards the spot of carpet on the ground next to her melted iced coffee and resurfaced with her red planner and her pink wireless mouse. She thumbed through the pages with one hand and tugged at a strand of strawberry blonde hair with the other. "Which book was- oh no, wait, here it is. Shiiiiit. Well, I forgot about it, so I guess I didn't think much of it, huh?"

Mack laughed breathily as her eyes darted around the room. She tried latching onto something that

would keep the conversation going. "Well, I thought--"

"Hang on, 50 pages? Uhhh, lemme just--" The cursor shambled across the screen to Bree's bookmarks as she dragged the mouse over the planner. In seconds, the computer's face morphed again into that of a familiar blue and white page with a small bubbly



asterisk in the corner. “There. Now I’ve pretty much done it.”

The computer’s face split in two, half paper and half tab, and Bree resumed her clacking. Mack let the rest of her thought drop out of sight.

Claire closed her thick textbook, leaned back in her plastic chair at the kitchen table, and stretched her arms above her head, inadvertently freeing her hands from the sleeves of her oversized gray sweat-shirt. The blue lion on her chest yawned at Mack, and Claire tilted backwards as far as her chair and her body would allow her. She got an upside-down view of Bree’s screen and the Property Brothers performing a gruesome pantomime on their television. “I wish I could use SparkNotes for my homework.” She let out a heavy, tired sigh.

“That’s what you get for being a business major, you bougie piece of shit.” Bree punctuated her jab with a loud slurp from her coffee.

Mack let out an appreciative chuckle as she emerged from behind the wall and shuffled into the living room proper. Claire sat up straight and barked out a laugh. Mack leaned forward, picked up the television remote resting on a sliver of space unoccupied by Claire’s mess of books, journals, and colored pens, and turned to Netflix, ending the silent conversation between the twins.

“Nuh-uh!” Claire twisted in her seat and tried to snatch the remote from Mack’s hand. “The other thing was fine! I can’t afford to get sucked into a new show.”

“Well then let’s just watch something old.” Mack flinched away before Claire could make another grab for the remote. “I heard that they have Drake & Josh on here now.”

Bree’s clacking stopped. “Really?”

Mack grinned. The trio turned to face the television, which bore a title card of blue and green arrows. They sat transfixed as the episode began.

Bree and Claire cheered when the true star of the show appeared on screen.

“Megan is hands down my favorite character,” said Bree.

“Oh, no contest,” said Claire.

Mack retreated behind the wall and into the kitchen as they talked amongst themselves, careful not to tread on their conversation. In truth, she had started rewatching the show days ago. Returning to media that she enjoyed as a child with the experience and perspective of adulthood was at once stimulating and comforting. Mack always left an old favorite with the feeling that she had been recharged. She swayed from side to side, and as she rinsed the dishes and put them in the drying rack, her hands came alive to conduct soapy water across the cheap laminate counter. She would clean it up later. In this moment, she was happy, and there was no need to keep her hands quiet.

“You know who Megan reminds me of?” Claire’s chair squeaked as she shifted to face the television.

“Who?”

“Katie from *Big Time Rush*.”

Mack stiffened and her mouth hung open.

“Oh my God, you’re right. I totally see that.” Bree shook the few pitifully tiny ice cubes left in her drink, hoping it would become just a bit colder.

Mack hastily dried her hands off and put them behind her back before stepping into the living room and pressing herself against the cool bare wall. She only wanted to listen. Her mouth never had an easy time keeping pace with her brain. She had learned a long time ago that keeping things to herself was

better for everyone, lest her tongue trip and fall on itself, or the fragile conversation crumble to ash with a misplaced word, or she receive another blank stare from another someone left in the dust kicked up by another one of her tangents.

She only wanted to listen.

“Girls like that were my whole life,” Claire continued.

The chill seeped through Mack’s thin sweater.

Bree nodded. “Yeah, I based my entire personality off of them for, like, years.”

“Glad that’s changed.”

“Oh, me too. They were super intense-”

“Really mean sometimes too-”

“But as a kid they were super empowering to me. I mean, sometimes you just want to see a little girl fuck shit up and prove people’s assumptions wrong.”

“Yeah, I-”

“Do they, though?” piped Mack.

“Do they what?” Bree craned her neck to look at her other roommate.

Mack stood against the wall like a cornered animal and did her best to look both women in the eyes. “... Prove people wrong.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean... Well sure, they’re both smart. Megan is an evil mastermind and Katie is a shrewd capitalist. That’s their whole thing. But they’re not strong because they’re smart. They’re strong because they’re always underestimated.”

“Yeah, and they take advantage of that all the time to get the upper hand.” Bree moved her keyboard to the floor and shifted to bear her weight on the arm of

the couch as Claire turned around in her chair to face Mack.

“Right. But they love the power they get from being underestimated. Think about how Megan never let her parents in on how she actually treated her brothers. How she engineered situations so her victims were always seen as the perpetrators. And how Katie never let her persona as a cute little girl slip until she could no longer use it to make money. How many of her ventures depended on the other parties involved having no idea how competent she was? If they lived in a society that recognized their full potential and their capacity for manipulation, they wouldn’t have been as strong as they were.”

Mack pushed off against the wall with open palms and began pacing the length of the living room, careful not to trip over anyone’s books or bags or catch her foot on their ill-fitting and ever-bunched geometric-patterned rug. The movement of her hands kept her words in time with her thoughts like a metronome.

“So you’re saying that Megan and Katie don’t actually challenge the hierarchies that are made to keep them own?” Claire’s eyes followed Mack thoughtfully, but her stomach tightened when one of Mack’s wildly swinging arms barely missed the floor lamp between her table and the front door.

“Exactly! They only find ways to circumvent them for their own personal gain. They’re actively invested in upholding unjust systems and notions that hurt millions of other young women just because it benefits them specifically. They stay powerful because others like them aren’t-”

“Mackenzie... are you saying that Megan Parker and Katie Knight... are class traitors?”

Mack stopped her pacing to look at the two women gawking back at her.

“...That’s exactly what I’m saying.”

A Greek chorus of two followed her declaration. Bree and Claire chanted for guillotines and the flesh of the rich and the heads of the bourgeoisie.

“Holy shit, your mind,” Bree wheezed as she wiped tears from her eyes. “That’s the most I’ve heard you speak in, like, the whole three years I’ve known you.”

Mack beamed. She stood tall and drummed her fingers against her legs.

“How long did you spend cooking that whole thing up?” panted Claire, still red from shouting.

“Oh, I mean, a while, I guess. I watch this kind of thing all the time,” Mack said as she motioned to the television. “You know. Stuff I liked when I was a kid. So I think about this kind of thing a lot.”

“Oh, I do that too,” said Bree.

“Really?” Mack moved closer to stand between the couch and the dining table.

“Yeah, we should do a marathon sometime.”

“O-okay!” Mack let her arms swing freely. They moved like a conductor’s as she paced the length of the room again. She felt the last of the chill leave her body as she scrambled to organize every single thought she had about her childhood favorites at once.

“I’m up for one too! Hey, got any other galaxy-brained takes like that?” Claire leaned forward in her chair to observe the spectacle and brushed a few stray brown hairs out of her face once, then twice, before slipping an elastic band off of her wrist and gathering it all into a ponytail.

“Well, you know how in the *Wizards of Waverly Place*—”

“Oh my God, I haven’t thought about that show in years!”

“Same!” chimed Bree.

“I loved Alex.”

“I was more of a Harper kid myself—” Mack’s pace quickened.

“Oh, me too,” chimed Claire. “I wanted her whole wardrobe when I was a kid.”

One time I hot-glued a bunch of Crayola markers to one of my church dresses so I could go as her for Halloween, and my mom was so mad that she grounded me for like a week.”

The three shared a laugh.

“Who were the brothers on that show?” Bree chewed on the green plastic straw sticking out of her flimsy plastic cup.

“Justin and Max.” Mack practically twirled as she began another lap from one end of the living room to the other.

“Which one was the smart one?”

“Justin.”

“God, I hated that guy!”

Mack stumbled on the rug before catching herself on the wall.

“Oh, me too!” Claire nodded emphatically. “He was such a know-it-all—”

“And a downer—”

“Yeah, and he always thought he was better than everyone else. Like, how do you not know that *you’re* the asshole here?”

Mack’s hands remained quiet, one still braced on the wall and the other balled into a fist at her side. She made no move to face them.

“Did he even have friends?”

“I think the only people who ever hung out with him were his brother and sister.”

“What a loser. Harper deserved better.”

“I-” Mack’s voice was drowned out by the kind of laughter that follows an inside joke. She bowed her head.

The laughter stopped. Mack felt the heat from their quizzical gazes burn holes into her skin. She turned to look at Drake, at Josh, and finally at SparkNotes. The light from the screens was not harsh enough to dry her eyes.

“Mackenzie?” Bree’s cup tipped over as she tried setting it back down on the ground. Nobody seemed to notice.

The only sound in the room was a guitar sting and the whizzing of painfully saturated arrows coming from the television. Mack faced the two women.

Claire clicked her tongue. “So, uh, what’s your *Waverly* theory?”

“Did you mean that?”

“What?”

“About Justin.” She no longer had the energy to mask the flatness that pressed itself upon her voice so naturally. She wondered why Justin may have kept an encyclopedic knowledge about something he so dearly loved. She wondered if his retreat into knowledge was what isolated him from other people, or if it was a response to isolation, or if they had always existed together, as inseparable as smoke and fire.

She wondered how he would feel if he knew that all his misery was set to a laugh track.

“Do you really hate him?”

“I mean-”

“Do you think he’s pathetic?”

“Why do you care?” Bree stared at her blankly. Her voice was a pointed kind of flat. Her words sank into Mack like teeth.

Mack opened her own mouth only to close it again. Her face grew hot and her nose tingled painfully as she scrunched it up to fight against the beginnings of tears. Her hands remained fists. “I-I’m sorry, I have reading-”

Mack brushed past Bree and Claire, past Megan and Katie, past Drake and Josh and Nietzsche. Nobody stopped her speedy retreat down the hallway. Nobody protested the slam of her bedroom door. Nobody knocked after the lock clicked into place.

Mack couldn’t hear anything over her own erratic breathing. She leaned against her locked door and ran her shaking hands up and down her arms. Her knees buckled, and she slid to the floor.

Mack tried fighting the rolling waves of memories.

My first day of second grade. I become best friends with my teacher. I ask about her career, and we list our favorite books. I even tell a joke that makes her laugh. I beam.

The bell rings, and I turn to face the other seven-year-olds. They’re loud and rowdy and all seem to share a language I can’t speak. They don’t answer my questions, they don’t like my books, they don’t understand my jokes.

I stop talking to them. I remain best friends with the teacher.

“Count five things in the room, then five more, then five more until you can feel the ground under your feet again.” That’s what her mom always said whenever Mack felt untethered to the world around her.

Fourth grade. Teachers love me for being “smart.” I feel special, but I don’t feel wanted. I give my trinkets and toys to the other girls in class because I don’t

know how else to get close to them. My mom catches me, and the friends stop when the toys stop.

Mack's eyes darted around the room. The small bamboo plant on her windowsill, the digital alarm clock on her nightstand informing her that it was 9:44 p.m.

Seventh grade. I'm a star student, and there's nothing to distract me from keeping it that way. I want my loneliness to be a good thing. A boy I don't know walks up to me during class and asks me on a date. I decline. He reddens, smacks the book out of my hand, and stomps away. The next day there's a rumor going around that I'm a lesbian. The rest of the year is marked by jokes about how I don't seem to like boys. How I don't seem to like anyone. Asking me out becomes a game, a joke. I get better at hiding my body and hiding away from everyone.

The room grows hot. Mack throws off her sweater. The framed picture of her mom and brother on the dresser. The half-empty clothes hamper next to her cluttered desk.

High school. I throw myself into one advanced class after another. I get close with anyone who will have me. I try asking questions, sharing books, telling jokes. Most of it doesn't land. I lose a lot of sleep trying to fix other people's problems and become something they would like. I have nothing to show for it besides the bags under my eyes.

Mack's vision blurred.

Homecoming. My first dance. I go with the few friends I managed to keep and leave in tears when they ditch me. My only dance.

She touched her freezing fingers to her burning cheeks and felt the tears dribble down her knuckles.

Senior year. I graduate with honors. I don't bother buying a yearbook. I already know that nobody would

sign it.

The weight of Mack's past flattened her. She slumped her shoulders, buried her face in her hands, and sobbed. She had hoped college would be different. She had hoped she would be different. She wanted to go home. She wanted to be done with this.

Mack stilled. She rose from her spot on the floor. The clock read 10:12. Her back told her she had been on the floor for hours. She stretched and shambled to her bed.

Mack closed her eyes. Even as she pulled the covers over her head and drifted into a fitful sleep, she could not escape the canned laughter that seeped through the walls.

Mack woke to silence. She wiped crust from the corners of her mouth and eyes and reached blindly for her clock. She held it close to her face and squinted. "12:45 a.m.," the glowing red numbers said. She smacked her parched lips. She needed a drink, but her stomach twisted at the thought of seeing her roommates.

She shut her eyes and listened for laughter, chatter, a laugh track from the adjacent room.

Nothing.

She crawled out of bed and pulled her door open a crack.

Nothing.

Mack slowly opened her bedroom door until the gap was wide enough to walk through, then she quickly shuffled forward and closed the door behind her, making sure to twist the knob so nothing would click. She couldn't help but feel like an intruder as she snuck toward the kitchen.

The fairy lights had been left on, and they bathed

the living room in a familiar soft yellow glow. Mack surveyed the room. The television was, indeed, shut off. Damp paper towel covered the patch of floor where Bree had spilled her drink. Claire's textbooks and notes remained on the kitchen table, likely a permanent part of the décor until midterms ended.

Mack stepped into the kitchen. Her dishes still rested in the drying rack, and there they would remain until morning. She couldn't summon the energy to put them away. She didn't have the bandwidth to do anything besides open a cupboard door, get a glass, and run it under the faucet. She brought the glass to her lips, drank half of it, then topped herself off again. With her immediate needs met, Mack stood braced against the sink, playing the conversation from earlier back in her head.

Could she have done something differently? Should she explain herself, or would telling them exactly why she freaked out make her look even stranger? What would she even say to them if she did decide to tell them? She shook her head. She could torture herself with these questions in her dark, quiet bedroom.

Mack rounded the corner with her beverage, relieved to have avoided a painful run-in, when-

"Oh." Claire stood in the entrance to the living room, her brown ponytail mussed, the rumpled blue lion on her chest yawning rather than roaring.

Mack's stomach twisted.

Claire scratched at the nape of her neck bashfully. "I, uh, I was just wrapping up for the night. Lots to cram for, y'know. Here, I'll just..." She skirted around Mack and gathered some of her things at the table into one messy bundle. "Room's all yours. TV too. I mean, obviously, it's part of the room. But, y'know, just so... y'know..."

Claire inched closer to the hallway as she trailed off, but she did not retreat. She furrowed her brow, stared at some fixed spot on the ground by Mack's feet, and shifted on her own as if she was trying to shake a thought out.

Mack was about to open her mouth to say something – what kind of something she did not know – when Claire stopped shifting.

"Mackenzie?"

The women locked eyes.

"...Yes?"

Each held the other's gaze. Both searched for something – what kind of something they did not know.

"...Goodnight, Mackenzie." Claire broke away and scurried to her room at the very end of the hallway. Her door clicked shut. They both came up empty.

"...Goodnight."

G. V. BOURGEOIS is a senior at the Michigan-based Saginaw Valley State University and is pursuing bachelor's degrees in both creative writing and professional and technical writing. They have won a handful of short story contests, and after graduating they plan to become a professional editor while publishing their own fiction. When they aren't working in SVSU's writing center or stressing about deadlines, Bourgeois is likely playing cute indie games on their Switch, catching up on a tabletop RPG show like *Dimension 20* or *The Adventure Zone*, or cuddling up to their girlfriend or their cat. Whichever is closest.

Side Effects May Include...

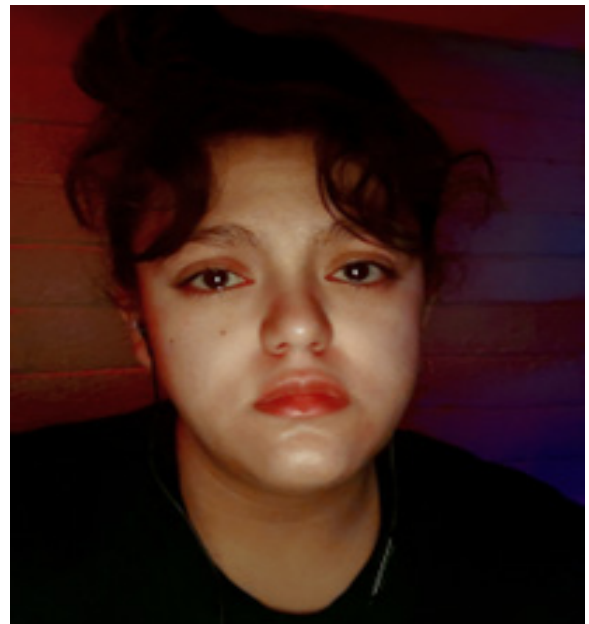
A Chronically Ill Latin Woman's Experience in the Healthcare System

Mabel Naomi Castillo | University of Utah

Introduction:

I started my menses when I was 11 years old, not uncommon in my family or even from a medical perspective. I started to develop symptoms of endometriosis about a year into beginning menstruation. The pain was chalked up to low pain tolerance, trying to get out school early, being lazy, and any other insulting thing that could be conjured up. I could not express that I felt like someone was reaching inside of me and twisting everything up. How it burned. How the Midol I took did nothing—it might as well have been a placebo. The Palgrave Handbook of Critical Menstruation Studies states that: “Delayed diagnosis serves as a high source of stress responsible for an important psychological impact on individuals with endometriosis. Average diagnostic delays worldwide

I lived like this for 9 years, until I turned 20, and found someone who was willing to listen—a kind, but shy, male gynecologist. However, the journey to his office was not easy.



Me after having spent 5 hours in the emergency room during an endometriosis flare-up (pre-diagnosis).

End(ometriosis)

It really did feel like the end,
of my dreams,
my relationships,
my life,
me.

I could feel the lesions inside,
laughing,
stabbing,
plotting,
pullulating.

This poetic autoethnography has been written to introduce able-bodied individuals who do not understand chronic illness to the everyday trials and tribulations of those with a chronic disease. How it strips people of their ability to do the most basic things, and how reclaiming loss of identity is an empowering but arduous journey. The poetry included in this arts-based piece will be grouped into sections. First, I address the issues plaguing those that struggle with endometriosis (medical gaslighting, as well as the gender and racial bias in medicine making it difficult for patients to receive care). Second, I address treat-

hover around 7.5 years or even longer, with continued resistance to timely intervention and referrals” (312).

ments that tend to do more harm than good. Last, I address the social and cultural stigma that makes it challenging for a chronically ill person to feel like they belong. It is imperative to discuss such pervasive issues that affect many women around the world in order to provide the best medical care possible for all.

Red Pill, Blue Pill

“Take these, they should help.”

And for many years I did.

I took the blue pill,

the advice of the women around me:

“Periods are like that.”

“Pain is normal.”

“So, what if you’re bleeding for 2 weeks straight? Just do it.”

“Stop complaining it’s not that bad!”

Until I sought the red pill on my own.

It wasn’t normal,

It wasn’t okay.

It was scary.

Debilitating.

The red pill had me going to doctors and specialists for over a year,

In and out of emergency room for 18 months.

And in the end, I was met with the life altering truth:

There is no cure

Methodological Approach:

This is a poetic ethnography, taken from personal writings to clinical charting, reflection to rebirth, and the creation of art from pain. This process involves a deep connection with oneself. It requires reflection on past trauma and experiences to illustrate the challenges that one faces as a chronically ill person. It also requires the acknowledgment of progression, from what was then to what is now.

This poetic autoethnography utilizes these methods

of writing and other records to support my research:

- a. Journal entries, symptom tracker, and medical records: Looking through past journal entries and my symptom tracker, while also relying on my own memory, I have been able to reconstruct a credible foundation for interpolating data from my own personal experiences into my poetry without concern of embellishment. This form of writing was dependent on what my rating of pain was that day, whether I had enough strength and energy to write, and it included very graphic accounts of my flare-ups. My medical records provided another detailed account of the most severe manifestations of my disease and are what I base a few of my poems on, given the detailed information in my chart at the time of my discharge.
- b. Poetry Writing: Upon reading and reflecting on the sources for my poetic inspiration, which were very sporadic and spanned years of documentation (requiring some memory recall for clarity, when points of confusion arose or when I was unable to decipher my own writing due to medication side effects), I started writing things that stood out to me. Some formed the basis of titling my poetry, while others added to the content of the poems themselves. I mainly wrote things down on my phone, not trusting myself to commit it to memory. I did this at night, when I found myself unable to sleep or when the pain struck, and I was waiting for my medications to take effect. I did not date my poems, as they did not necessarily correlate with a day that I felt unwell, rather they serve as a summary for some of the most debilitating and excruciating moments of my life that are applicable even today. My intention for my poetry, is to have it function as “healing for the writer and minis-

try for the reader” (Wakeman, 9).

- c. **Autoethnographic Writing:** I took inspiration from Mourning Writing, “the process of externalized experience in writing, questioning, self-observation, and discussion of that writing that understanding of oneself emerges” (Hanauer, 1). This portion of the writing process was done by culling my materials and forming an outline of this piece. I considered what aspect(s) of being chronically ill (specifically with endometriosis) I feel comfortable disclosing to enlighten my audience about the struggles people like myself face each day. I use my poetry as a guideline for relevant matters to include in the piece and contextualized them with my own personal anecdotes. I took excerpts and information from my medical records when my memory recall or journaling was insufficient due to pain or medications.



A photograph of an emergency room visit. One of many.

Time, in the life of a chronically ill patient, serves as a tool for acceptance, mindfulness, and ultimately, hope. Pain is not linear, nor is healing. Thus, the following poetic autoethnography was written to illus-

trate my own personal progression and experiences as a chronically ill woman of color.

The Doctor Will Be in Soon

Beep. Beep. Beep.

Brrrrr. Chk. Chk. Chk. Shoooo.

Again.

The sign reads: Please expect at least a 2-hour visit.

I clutch my stomach.

I grab the emesis bag.

I am not dying. I am not howling in pain. I am not gripping the sheets. I have a GCS of 13-15. So no, the doctor will not be in soon. But I know this pain will not be over either.

Beep. Beep. Beep.

Brrrrr. Chk. Chk. Chk. Shoooo.

Section 1: Diagnosis Takes a While

190 million women worldwide, 1 in 10, understand the excruciating and debilitating pain that comes with endometriosis (Sims et al., 2021). However, very little is understood—both in medicine and publicly—regarding the complexity of this chronic disease. Endometriosis is defined by “the presence of endometrium-like tissue outside the uterine cavity and can lead to complex outcomes such as dysmenorrhea, chronic pelvic pain (CPP), sexual dysfunction and subfertility” (Delanerolle et al., 2021). To elaborate on the complex medical definition, endometriosis is the presence of lesions that grow outside of the uterus primarily in the pelvic and lower abdominal areas of the body (though endometriosis has been found in the lungs and even the brain, in rare cases). The symptoms of

this disease can include (but are not limited to): pain and prolonged menstruation, chronic pelvic pain, pain with intercourse, and a lower rate of fertility, in addition to other symptoms and comorbidities like anxiety, depression, chronic fatigue, et cetera.

Big Poke

“Ready? Big Poke.”

Jab.

I taste salt.

I see gloved hands push a clear liquid into my IV.

Paradise.

I feel lightheaded, like I’m floating...nothing can touch me here.

Not even pain.

“How do you feel?”

Good for now. Until it comes back, and I find myself on the familiar white linens. My head on pillows that never have enough support. Wearing a gown that thousands of other strangers have worn before. Regurgitating my medical history to nurses whose faces all seem to blur, and doctors who look at me suspiciously for coming back so soon.

“Ready? Big poke.”

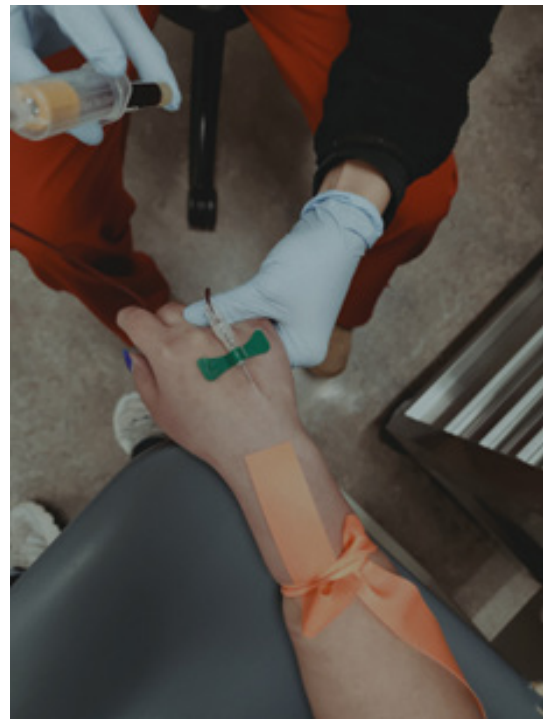
Jab.

I am no stranger to the 22-gauge needle that can never hit my vein the first time, the saline that tastes like ocean water, the blinding lights like I’m on stage for display, or the constant chatter of medical staff that make me paranoid.

I am no stranger to the imprisonment of my success every time I hear:

“Ready? Big poke.”

refer to as a GOMER, which stands for Get Out of my Emergency Room, because I was always in the ER with excruciating pelvic pain that they could only treat with opioids and send me on my way—until I came back again, seeking more pain management, not dying, but definitely not well. When I learned that this is a term doctors used to refer to patients seeking immediate care for a long-term illness, it made me anxious to seek medical attention, even when I desperately needed it. They did not know that I was on a 3 month wait list to see an OB/GYN—that I was trying to ration my opioids by cutting them in half, that I would skip doses and take thousands of milligrams of acetaminophen rather than take the opioids or go back into the ER. All they saw was a woman in hysterics over her period, asking for drugs.



A photo of a blood draw. And yes, I did hear the phrase: “Ready? Big poke.” Funnily enough, nurses don’t expect me to stare with such intensity during these draws or IV catheter insertions

Section 2: We Couldn’t Find Anything

I was a patient that was in and out of emergency rooms on a weekly basis, sometimes almost daily for approximately 18 months. I am what doctors would

Most women, when they are admitted to the emergency room with complaints of pelvic pain, are placed as low priority, often due to the inherent misogynistic beliefs that women are simply being hysterical over a

natural monthly occurrence, and that it is psychosomatic. Guidone states through her own research on misogyny in medicine, in her piece titled *The Womb Wanders Not*, that although "...‘hysteria’ has been largely abandoned in modern nomenclature, the legacy of its impact persists. Today, symptoms of endometriosis may be dismissed not as hysteria but ‘somatization’ (Pope et al. 2015). Women’s pain is routinely under-treated, labeled inappropriately as having a sexually transmitted infection, told their symptoms are ‘in their head’ (Whelan 2007) or too often, simply not heard (Moradi et al. 2014)" (274).

Hypocrite’s Oath

You, the physician, swear to uphold the autonomy of the patient

Yet here I am, clutching my lower abdomen,

Screaming,

Crying,

Bleeding,

“Just take it out! I don’t want children!”

And you shake your head,

“Think of your future spouse.”

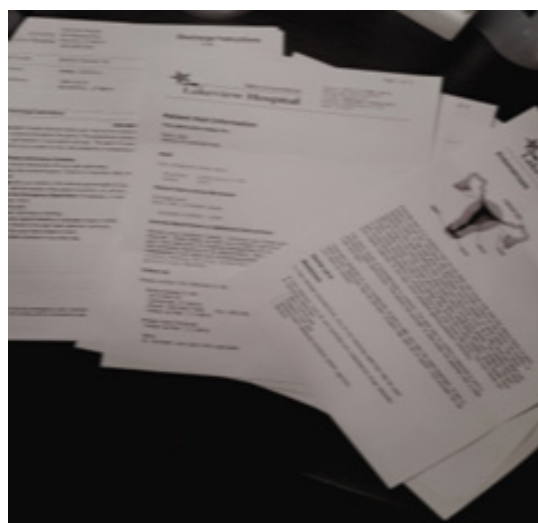
You leave the room,

Knowing I’ll be back next week.

I remember being told many times by doctors and nurses alike: “Stop complaining, it’s not that painful.” And, “The doctor will be in when he has the time, you’re not exactly at the top of the list.” Their negation still haunts me. In addition to my being shoved into a room for hours and writhing in pain, when I was finally given treatment, it was incredibly traumatizing. The procedures I had to endure to prove my pain, as if my tense body and my burning face were not enough to say: “I’m not making this up,” were violating and only served to make my pain worse.

A play on the term Hippocratic Oath, I wrote the poem (below) to show how doctors contradict the

very profession they have elected to enter. It describes my experience with only being given pain medications to manage my symptoms, and how I was so desperate to be free of pain, that I begged to be rid of my biological ability to reproduce. Doctors looked at me like I was selfish, telling me to consider the feelings of a complete stranger that I had not even met yet. They even knew there was a high likelihood of me returning to seek more pain management. They did not know that getting pregnant is not a cure for endometriosis, even though it is continuously touted as the only solution. Why should a woman have to subject an innocent being to existence for the sake of their own benefit? How is that the least selfish option?



I saved papers from almost all my ER visits during the span of 18 months back prior to my diagnosis. Every single page is a different doctor with the same response: “Think about your future husband.”

In the article “Stigma and Endometriosis,” Sims et al. states:

...in health care settings, participants reported experiences of providers laughing at their pain symptoms and, explaining in a condescending manner what participants were supposedly experiencing (e.g., gas or bloating) without further diagnostic investigation. This suggests both normalization of symptoms (saying there is nothing wrong) and invalidation (rejecting

or denying someone's emotions and experiences). (5)

This study was conducted in Puerto Rico, though my own personal experiences illustrate that this is a universal occurrence among endometriosis patients, regardless of location.

Black Box Warning

Caution: Opioid

Risk of overdose and addiction

Ask about naloxone use

I am not an addict.

I need these,

To live,

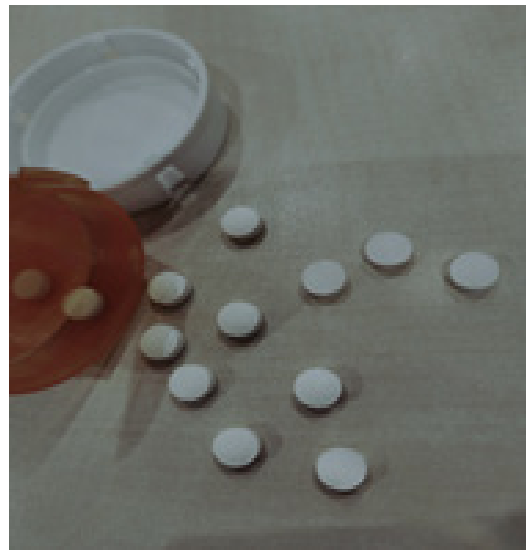
To function,

To do things most healthy people can do without a second thought.

My poetic autoethnography demonstrates how those that take the oath to keep us healthy and safe, can sometimes be the cause of distrust and trauma. Reminds us how the physician has an obligation to acknowledge one's pain and suffering. It is imperative that not only the physician, but the public understand that just because it relates to menstruation, does not mean that it is only during certain times of the month that one experiences this pain or these symptoms. Being chronically ill is a full-time commitment, from the appointments to the medications, the medications for the side effects, unexpected emergency room visits, and then symptoms that creep out once the pain has been managed...like extreme fatigue, brain fog, and trying not to spiral into suicidal ideation.

Section 3: Take Every 6 Hours as Needed

The medications I take are a point of contention for many Americans. They are a stain on the health-care system in this country and have killed more than 350,000 Americans since 1999 (Lamvu et al,



A photo of my opioid prescription, at some point I was being given 60 Oxycodone to take 2 times daily. And come back in for a refill every 30 days.

Side Effects May Include...

Nausea.

Vomiting.

Stomach cramps.

New or worsening depression.

Night sweats.

Dizziness.

Drowsiness.

Difficulty Breathing.

Death.

I wish.

2019). According to Lamvu et al. in the *Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology*:

...an estimated 40% [of opioid overdoses] involved prescription opioids. The majority of women in the case group involving opioid abuse reportedly begin with a medical prescription, used primarily to treat chronic pain or acute postsurgical pain. Given the associations between endometriosis, surgical interventions, and pain (potentially both chronic and postoperative), as well as recent concerns regarding medically inappropriate opioid use, it is surprising that there is little published on opioid use in this pa-

tient population. (2019)

Not only is opioid use a quite common method of treatment for me and millions of other women, but so are anti-anxiety, anti-depressants, and mood stabilizers. In a study published by Estes et al. (2021) in the *American Journal of Epidemiology*:

...women with endometriosis were 1.38 times as likely to develop clinically recognized anxiety, 1.48 times as likely to have clinically recognized depression, and 2.03 times as likely to have clinically recognized self-directed violence...the hazard ratios for all outcomes were stronger in women younger than 35 years. (3)

In simple terms, it means that in comparison to women without endometriosis that are under the age of 35, women with endometriosis have a much higher rate of being diagnosed with mental health disorders. It is no coincidence that pain is directly linked to mental health and a person's likelihood of engaging self-directed violence and even suicide attempts. That likelihood only increases as women are repeatedly dismissed by the healthcare system and the people around them.

Work Ethic

I call out of work
a lot.

It's hard for me to put in 40 hours like everyone else.
But if they saw how I work:

24/7, no days off.

Even vacation consists of doctor's appointments, hospital visits, and anxiously awaiting lab results...

Then I think they would understand,
That I work harder...

than most.

catch-up is horrific, especially when the only course of treatment is medication. Followed by more medication. I have a challenging time staying employed. I struggle with education, despite my best efforts to do everything right, and I end up being a burden on my professors and my classmates. I remember telling my doctors once, how debilitating and excruciating this pain was that I would rather die than continue this fight against my own body. While this may sound extreme, I was on more than 1 different type of birth control, 3 opioids, and other medications while returning to my university studies from a 2-year leave of absence. (I still do not know how I managed to survive that semester.)



A photo illustrating my courses for my academic year abroad. It wasn't easy to get here, and I had to do a lot of extra work academically and health-wise, while also being employed.

I was expected to work just as hard as a normal, healthy person, if not harder, because I felt like I had to make up for my shortcomings, even though I knew that would lead to more bad days, more pain, and ER visits. It was depressing to feel that not only did my pain not matter, but I also needed to prove that I was not lazy despite the pain. That I was not unreliable or incapable. That I was deserving of a chance at a good life, not a mediocre one, even if I was sick. But how do I live my life when I barely have one?

Section Four: I'm Calling Out

Living with a disease that constantly has me playing

Medications for the Medications

That's what they don't tell you.

That you'll need anti-nausea meds for the side effects.

More pain medications because the norco isn't working.

Take oxy,
tramadol,
morphine,
dilaudid,
couple that with meloxicam, and a few 1,000 mg of
tylenol.

That should fix everything.

Why are you still crying?



Just some of medications and vitamins I needed to take almost daily.

pain of women beneath the pain of men, that only increases as race is taken into consideration. According to lengo, in her publication *Endometriosis and Environmental Violence*:

...there are structurally violent reasons that have to do with the dominant language reproduced in gendered disability, racist medical practices, and heteronormative assumptions over who is the endometriosis patient. Women, especially working-class women of color, and queer and trans[gender] people are disregarded by the medical sciences both in research and in emergency situations. Women often wait longer in hospitals before their pain is recognized, believed, and eventually addressed. Black women receive hysterectomies more often than white women, while trans people are ridiculed when seeking the diagnosis of a "female reproductive illness". (353)

Temporary Suspension

Who knew that 5 milligrams would be all it took to make me fly.

This does not liberate me.

On the contrary.

*The price I pay for 5 milligrams, is a temporary suspension from my life, my dreams,
me.*

Why is race so prevalent when discussing endometriosis? In 1938, a gynecologist by the name of Joseph Meigs claimed that endometriosis was a 'lifestyle disease', by referring to the middle-class' use of contraceptives. He also claimed that there was a higher incidence of endometriosis among his private [white] patients, more than those he encountered in the hospital ward (Bougie et al, 1). Even now, in the current

Section Five: It's Because I'm Brown

The healthcare system is designed to place the

year, endometriosis is still thought of a disease that primarily affects white women. This is, in part, due to a way of thinking that has infiltrated modern medicine:

If endometriosis was a disease of white, middle-class women who had put off childbearing, as Meigs claimed, it followed that endometriosis would be rare among non-white women. Implicit in this formulation was the racist assumption that women of color were less civilized than their white counterparts and therefore less susceptible to the stress of modern life. (2019)

For decades, women and women of color have been dismissed by those who we trust to treat us and our bodies with the care and respect they deserve. It would be irresponsible of me not to acknowledge

Due Date

When was it due again?

What was I supposed to do?

Was it important?

At 11:59 p.m.

The exam, the group project, a 10-page paper.

Yes, now get it done.

I can't, I'm sorry.

how racial and gender bias has played—and continues to play—a role in my experience in the American healthcare system. How it placed me in painful and traumatic situations. How it forced me to become a 'lead patient', spending hours researching and studying my disease, the same amount of time a medical student puts into their finals. Except I am not trying to obtain a medical degree, I am just trying to survive. I am trying to do the right thing for myself since no one else will. But what does that look like? How do

I advocate for myself in a system that will not listen to me no matter how much I beg and plead for help? How do I free myself from the confines of medical gaslighting, bias, and trauma? By not backing down. By continuing to communicate with my doctors. By educating my family, so that I have someone sitting in the chair next to me when I choke on my words—so they can pick up where I left off.



A grainy, indescribable photo of my room. I took this to illustrate how oppressive, dark, and confining it feels despite the happy, floaty feelings narcotics gave me. How I knew I wouldn't be able to go anywhere or do anything after I took them. My room became an isolating environment during these moments.

Section Six: The Operation Was a Success

Fin

Back at square one?

The same white walls, the muted TV, the uncomfortable waiting room chairs.

A pregnant woman looking at me, pondering.

Why?

I check-in, my name is called, they take my blood pres-

sure, weight, and ask me how I'm feeling.

20 minutes later my doctor comes in.

I steel myself to face a man 20 years my senior, with 15 years of education and experience.

I will not end up back where I started.

I tell him of my pain, my fears, how this disease is killing me.

Not physically, but it wears me down, until I'm the one with the knife at my wrists, with the pills in my hand.

How I fail in school,

Call out of work,

How I can't live.

He sees me.

Not as a hysterical woman, but as a woman that is in dire need of relief.

He knows—and I know—that this surgery is the best option for me.

“Once you do this there's no going back.”

“I understand.”

“Then you are a perfect candidate.”

12 years. It took me 12 years. And now the battle is over.

I won.

I fought against the system that told me this was normal.

Against the white coats that refused to believe me.

And I am on the path towards a less painful future.

Mabel Naomi Castillo, 23-year-old female, will undergo a total laparoscopic hysterectomy.

Fin.

I would like to say that this story is over, but it is just the beginning. I know that I have many more treatments to undergo and medications to take. Lifestyle changes to make. Let it be known that, at this time, there is no cure for my disease and that a

hysterectomy is not a decision to be made lightly. I understand what I am giving up as a result of this decision and I could not be happier. Many women report a significant improvement in their quality of life, but this is just a small step in helping relieve my debilitating pain. I will face an uphill battle once my pain is gone. I will need to treat the underlying symptoms of my chronic illness—and potentially discover additional comorbidities—and I accept the challenge. This journey was traumatizing. It shook my faith in the institution of health and the people that dedicate their lives to the service of others. It led me down many dark nights where I could not envision my future.



Left: My wonderful OBGYN, Dr. Porter Right: Mabel Naomi Castillo, 3 months post-hysterectomy

Medical professionals are human, sometimes the worst parts. Sometimes, in the pursuit of greatness and progress in medicine, those we entrust with our

care fail to do good. However, having an OB/GYN and a support system that were willing to be educated on the life-altering effects of endometriosis beyond the symptoms of pain, to help me achieve my full potential, saved my life. I am forever grateful to the health-care professionals that understood I am more than my skin color and my gender. That above all, I am a human being that deserves respect and relief. I hope that more individuals like this enter medicine, so that one day there will be a cure.

The research for this piece is based on many medical and personal sources. Medicine is as much an art as it is a science, and the voices of those affected by trauma because of racial and gender bias in medicine matters equally as much as the relevant data. These

are contemporary issues that require great care and acknowledgment in order to properly support those affected. The data presented in this piece illustrates how pervasive these issues are and the real-world consequences of neglecting these problems, such as self-directed violence, depression, gaslighting, isolation, and even suicidal ideation. By utilizing both accurate and relevant medical data, in addition to my own personal data, this piece blends in the real-life struggles of myself and millions of other women with data that proves that this is not all in our heads, that we are here, and we are in pain. And hopefully, because of this, others will understand what that means.

AUTHOR'S ACKNOWLEDGEMENT: I would like to thank Dr. Porter for not only allowing me to be a patient at his office, but for also allowing me to be human. Letting me express my frustration at the system, at doctors, at my quality of life. For engaging in meaningful dialogue with me that allowed me to make the best decision for myself with the knowledge that I had. It was not an easy journey to get a diagnosis and then find the solution that would work best for me. Where others had turned me away or given up, he didn't. He believed that I deserved a better life than what I had. And thanks to him, now I have that. I am now 9 months post-operative from my total laparoscopic hysterectomy, and I could not be happier.

To my parents, Venus and Luis, for going through this journey with me. It is not easy to see your child going through such excruciating pain, and in the process watch them navigate life as they go into adulthood; hoping that they will be okay. But I am more than okay, due to your life lessons and support I am thriving and doing more than I ever thought possible. I will always be grateful to be your child, I could not ask for a better family.

To my Endo Siblings (online support group) and friends, your love and support throughout my life after my diagnosis has been crucial in allowing me to process the difficult emotions that come with this disease and its comorbidities. You guys have taught me how to assert myself with the medical community, and how to fight for my right to be treated humanely. You have seen me at my worst and have been there for me at my best. I am grateful for your presence in my life.

Without the help of these wonderful people in my life, this poetic autoethnography would not exist; so, I dedicate it to all you.

MABEL NAOMI CASTILLO is a Junior at the University of Utah, majoring in International Studies, Asian Studies, and the Japanese language. As well as obtaining a Political Science Certificate in International Relations. Set to study abroad at the prestigious Waseda University in Japan this fall. Mabel does not shy away from being open about difficult experiences in the world as a chronically ill, Colombian-Guatemalan-American; and hopes that being vocal about racial and gender bias within medicine will draw attention to a disease that deserves humane treatment and dignity. Mabel hopes that able-bodied people will empathize and begin to understand the struggle of those diagnosed with this disease. Mabel enjoys playing video games, traveling, trying new foods, calligraphy and creating niche Spotify playlists.

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In the ruins of Babel

Sanjana Ramanathan | University of Michigan

Give us the power of language—
let it rot on our tongue.
Give us speech and thought,
so we can share it with no one.

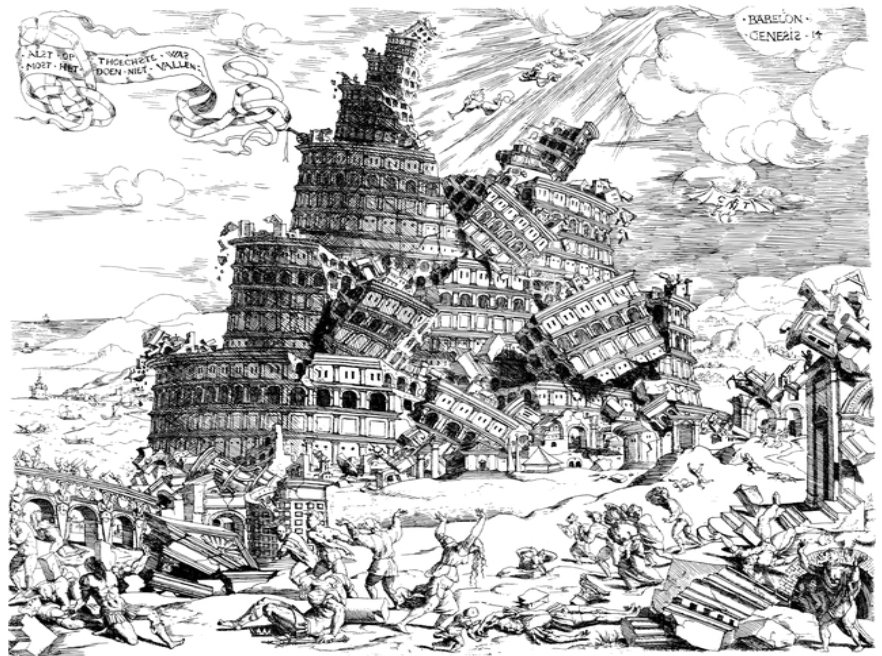
Let Scheherazade share half her tale
and kill her before dawn,
for what use is there for stories
if our own fates are foregone?

And what good are our hopeful oaths?
No promise can hold water
while words and all their meaning
have been given up for slaughter.

Come see the myths and fables
as they're strung up from the gallows—
and just ignore, that once before,
they were legends to hallow.

Bother not with fantasies,
give those dreams no quarter.
They must be weak, for that was how
those builders made their mortar.

Now we live in the ruins
of their flimsy citadel,
with no way for them to tell us
exactly how it fell.



Tower of Babel, etching

Histories burned and turned to ash,
old folklore left for dead,
our maps for the future turned
to babble and blather instead.

We're left with only rubble,
making castles in the dust—
a strong breeze could topple kingdoms
and what's left of our trust.

The smiles once made for secrets,
the ears once made to hear
now leap to cry out foreign!
and fabricate new fear.

How can we hope to lay a brick
or make honest amends?
For words were our foundation,
and we've forgotten how to bend.

SANJANA RAMANATHAN (she/her) graduated from Drexel University with her bachelors in English. She is now pursuing a PhD in Comparative Literature at the University of Michigan, focusing on Classical receptions in postcolonial literature. Her writing, both creative and academic, has been published in W.W. Norton's *They Say/I Say*, *Provenance Journal*, and *Augment Review*, among other textbooks and literary magazines. In her free time, she enjoys playing video games, chasing daydreams, and cracking open a new book.

Current Asiatic Racism and its Roots

Ryan Maneri | University of Southern Florida

When I was young, I never knew how cruel people could be without being conscious of it. I have been a stranger to my own culture because my grandmother made herself distant from my family after my father decided that the one he would marry wasn't a Japanese woman. But I have always taken pride in the fact that I was Asian, and I try to learn as much of my missing culture whenever I can. It was when I got to high

school that I really realized how many people belittled and humored themselves with that culture, and how many of them diminished it without even realizing. To hear someone make an offhand joke about what was a major tragedy, is something you never want to be forced to listen to. But there I was in world history class listening to one of my classmates casually saying, "Two bombs

wasn't enough." When I confronted him, his response was, "It was just a joke," and that he didn't really mean that. However, throughout that class I heard many of his "jokes" and, with multiple confrontations from myself and the teacher, there were still jokes. I still cannot

think of what goes through his mind that allows himself to make these jokes knowing well that they are full of hate. I still wonder whether he even realized how hateful his comments were. After that class, I realized throughout my life just how many times I had experienced instances of Asiatic racism from people who didn't even realize that they were being racist. It was my experiences in that class that made me interested

in why our American society has allowed Asiatic racism to become so common and normalized.

Asiatic racism has been embedded within the cultural fabric of American society and tolerated for far too long. Society itself fails to acknowledge this blatant racism and too many eyes turn blind on the topic. More people need to point out and call

out the actions of racist individuals. Too much inaction has allowed anti-Asian beliefs to fester and grow in society, becoming a tumor too many have come to accept. Focusing on the past shows us that society has had these beliefs for centuries, going through shifts in



focus from generation to generation while keeping a target on Asian Americans.

We, as Asian Americans, have dealt with issues of racism for multiple lifetimes, including constant generational conflicts due to racial and ethnic discrimination and intolerance. Many irrational and baseless political and cultural factors, including internalized American Xenophobia, anti-Japanese organizations, and mass-produced fear, lead to the establishment of Japanese internment camps during WWII. Around 120,000 people were taken from their homes and stripped of their belongings. They were taken from their known worlds and forced to live in camps in the middle of deserts or out in the mountains simply because of their ethnicity. In John Chambers' article "Enemies, Views of the. [sic]," dehumanizing propaganda leading to the alienation of those ethnicities within America. Japanese Americans were falsely seen as a potential threat to national security because of their ties to their homelands and their national pride, despite the fact that a vast majority of them had immigrated to the United States before the war (Chambers, 2000). The establishment of these camps created several lasting effects that have deepened current Asiatic racism within America, perpetuating the struggles of Asian Americans and the normalization of Asiatic Racism today.

Following the bombing of Pearl Harbor, many Asian Americans were persecuted and labeled a threat with little respect to their livelihoods, simply due to their race. Similarly, with the uncertainty surrounding the origin of Covid-19 in America, Asians and Asian Americans were targeted as a "source" to the pandemic and once again labeled as a threat to the personal safety of intolerant and uneducated individuals. Time and time again, we see on the news stories of Asians within America who were targeted, attacked, and sometimes even killed due to them simply being Asian. The prejudice of the past is still alive, skulking within the

darker parts of society while masking itself to enter our everyday lives. Wearing the mask of normalcy, prejudice poisons the minds of individuals, planting seeds of hatred into them. That hatred has turned humans against humans, leading some of them to believe that they have a false superiority over others, and for others to believe that they are lesser. These beliefs of superiority and inferiority have plagued our society for generations, prolonging the cycle of oppression that many Asian Americans are still victims of.

Presidential Rhetoric

One of the most powerful hands in play during the internment process belonged to President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Unfortunately, he ended up being a power against Asian Americans, and became one of the largest contributing factors in the establishment of the internment camps. Peter Stearns (2008) wrote about President Franklin D. Roosevelt's plan to have anyone of an Axis related ethnicity (German, Italian, and Japanese Americans) register themselves to their local police as an enemy alien. However, America's safety and strength were put into question following the bombing of Pearl Harbor, and the plan for this order was shifted to only Japanese Americans. The president also claimed that he preferred "voluntary" removal and resettlement; but as all instances of the removal and resettlement of ethnic groups go within our nation, it was much more than just removal. He found difficulty in the process of getting citizens to voluntarily get rid of their current lives and move into completely foreign territories. When Roosevelt struggled to find states that would accept and house the influx of Japanese citizens, he resorted to throwing them into camps located in mountains, scrublands, and deserts after liquidating their entire livelihoods.

Roosevelt claimed that the internment was a decision made of "military necessity" and transferred the final decision to the U.S. military. John Chambers

(2000) highlights that the government was most likely using this claim as a legal cover in order to hide the connections they had with several anti-Japanese American groups, economic competitors against Japan, racists in political power, and politicians who were attempting to gain favor by appeasing the public after Pearl Harbor. Theodore Roosevelt, a man who should've been dedicated to all Americans, ended up enacting multiple decisions that actively divided them, utilizing the situation to better secure his position and gain more support from the predominantly white American society.

Government Rhetoric

While the president was one of the stronger figures persuading the public into antagonizing the Japanese population, there were still several governmental organizations that sought to cage the “savages” from across the sea. The research and writings of I. C. B. Dear and M. R. D. Foot (2001) point out glaring similarities to the president's plan for the axis related ethnic groups. The United States government arrested roughly 3,846 German, Italian, and Japanese Americans deemed “dangerous enemy aliens” during the war. But, to this day, long after the end of the war, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) have not disclosed the criteria needed to meet in order to be given that title. The government decided that ethnicity alone was enough to imprison citizens who had no allegiance to their “homelands” without ever revealing to the public their reasonings, making racially motivated decisions without repercussions.

Similarly, Kermit Hall (2002) highlights that the government's rhetoric on the internment was “justified” based on false claims of national security. Because there was a clear absence of proof to those claims, it was clearly mostly a product of wartime hysteria and racially based antagonization of Japanese Americans. Hall additionally points out that the government gave full control of the internment process to General John

DeWitt, who claimed that making individual determinations of who was an actual security risk was infeasible and too time consuming (2002).

The government clearly used the Japanese as a scapegoat to empower themselves while easing the minds of a society that falsely saw them as a threat. The internment was pointless in terms of national security because, if it truly was a national threat, it would have been enforced nationwide. Ultimately, it was only enacted in California and the Western American regions where the largest and most prominent Asian American communities had already been long established.

Economic Subjugation

In addition to the inhumane treatment Japanese Americans experienced in internment camps, there was also no official statement following the end of the internment, just a sudden release of those imprisoned. Then, 43 years later, the remaining ~60,000 survivors were graciously compensated for the loss of their known lives and their suffering with \$20,000 USD (Stearns, 2008). This meager sum of \$20,000 (\$48,000 USD in today's rate) was supposed to compensate for their houses being sold, their businesses being closed, being moved miles and miles away from their homes, and forced to live in vicious, and sometimes deadly, camps. They were taken from the friends and families they had made for themselves and told to rebuild their lives themselves. The survivors received no extra reconciliation to help support family members or locate lost relatives. Only \$20,000.

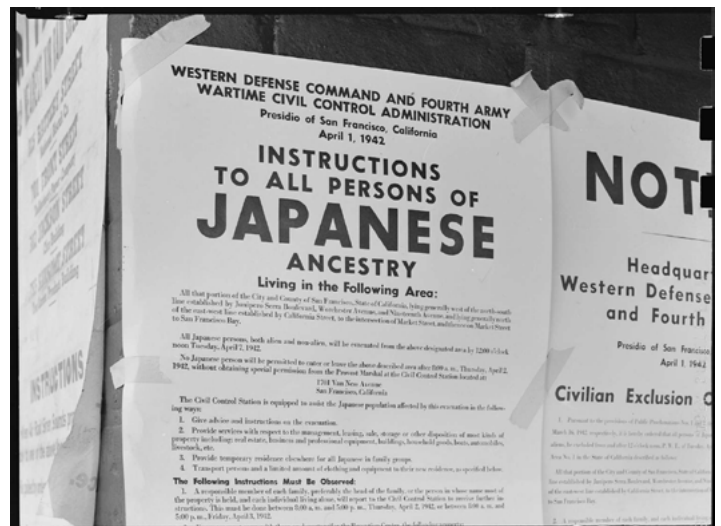
Part of the American dream is to build a livelihood, own a house, and raise a family. When we deny this dream to someone, we deny seeing them as an American. This is precisely what our government did to the interned Japanese Americans. They saw the roots that these people had planted into their own lands, ready to grow deeper with more generations to

come, and ripped them out of the ground. They were denied the American dream and punished; they were taken to camps as prisoners of war and forced to do body breaking labor because of acts they themselves did not commit. After 43 years of suffering, they were “given that dream back” in the form of only \$20,000. The American government put a price on Japanese American lives, on the lives lost, on the suffering they endured, and on the trauma perpetuated by their own actions. They rejected their own responsibility to build back the communities destroyed by their actions and proceeded to self-satisfy themselves by giving out a relatively small sum of money compared to the actions that led up to it and said, “At least we did something.” They saw these people in all their worth, all the grand things they had done, would have done, and all the things they couldn’t have done due to them being put into camps, and they decided it was worth \$20,000. The removal of Japanese Americans served only as a political steppingstone for the powerful, using the political state of the time to subjugate them.

Even though we are moving further and further from that point in time, there is still a sizable part of society that carries these same anti-Japanese and anti-Asian sentiments. Asiatic racism has persisted as a societal evil throughout the decades and, with this progression, it has become more and more integrated and normalized into the predominantly white American society. As this happens, it generates issues and, when these issues don’t immediately impact this society, it becomes more difficult to discuss and make lasting changes. The majority of the population is against change and will see no reason for change unless it directly affects them. As this normality spreads further throughout society, it begins to normalize within the individual, planting a seed of evil that further perpetuates this cycle of racism within independent people. Some roots have grown deep enough to even reach the victims themselves.

Model Minority

White society within America gave the Asian American community a title: the “Model Minority.” It acknowledges them as an ethnic minority in the nation, but one to be a role model within society. This title claimed that they had higher intellect and knowledge than most Americans, their unending worth ethic and drive made them fantastic for almost any job, and their hard work claimed that the majority of Asian Americans economic stability within the higher middle and even upper classes. While this would seem to give Asian Americans some level of privilege in society, it is indirectly the exact opposite. The title was based on the successes of a small percentage of Asians, and then society pushed it to apply to all of them. This led to any Asian who was not successful to be seen like an anomaly and someone who wasn’t really Asian.



The “Model Minority” title is a false label that actively hurts Asian American society. It assumes that their “privilege” due to being the model minority somehow makes them “immune to” or “above” racism, or that they can’t experience racism at all. In “Asian Americans and Racism: When Bad Things Happen to ‘Model Minorities’”, Alvarez et al discusses

how the title model minority leads to Asian Americans experiencing racial microaggressions on a very frequent, to even regular, basis due to the made-up standards society has placed on simply being Asian; 98% of the study's participants reported experiencing at least one racial microaggression every year (2006). They also pointed out that upon witnessing or experiencing instances of racism, many feel a sense of helplessness and depression, among other psychological effects. Knowing that society views their self-made title of Asian Americans as a way to impose new age racial stereotypes upon them, while acting as if they can't be offended due to a false privilege, is demoralizing. Additionally, when you know that almost every Asian within the "Land of the Free" is kept chained down to a false perception and forced to experience racism regularly because of it, you can begin to see why there is a loss of hope in those who live through it.

A similar study conducted by Andrew Young Choi, Tania Israel, and Hotaka Maeda presented the IM-4: the Internalization of the Model Minority Myth Measure. With the inclusion of the IM-4, they highlighted several of the ways that the model minority belief can affect Asian Americans with the ideas of an "Asian work ethic". Success and movement within a business' potential ladder can blind certain Americans, Asian Americans included, from the innate racism behind the model minority title and unrealistic workplace standards can affect Asian Americans' mental and physical health (2017).(2017). This work ethic label internalizes and allows for Asians to become blind or even neutral to the smaller forms of racism they experience. Some even become accepting of it, seeing it as a defined part of themselves and that they themselves are a flaw if they don't meet the standards given to them. This is another tool that white society uses to dehumanize and break down Asian Americans, as it allows for the acceptance of racial microaggressions as a social norm. They create a false sense

of self within Asians who internalize it and a stigma within the minds of those who don't accept it, but are powerless as individuals to act against it.

Internalized Racism and Media

The acceptance of the ways in which society oppresses Asian Americans alongside microaggressions such as the model minority label leads many Asians to internalize racism to varying degrees. David (2013) as cited in Hua and Junn (2021), indicates that this racial dynamic has lasting effects on how internalized oppression manifests within Asian American behavior even today. It "not only promotes the idealization of whiteness, but also reinforces Asian subjugation in the racial social order itself. Some contemporary examples illustrating Asian Americans' common displays of internalized racism include discriminating against other Asians and Asians Americans who are perceived to be less westernized and more "fob" (i.e. "fresh off the boat") and viewing Asian physical traits as inferior to white physical traits by engaging in cosmetic changes such as lightening hair color, using skin whitening soaps, or getting eyelid surgery" (Hua and Junn, 23). For one to be ashamed of their own looks that define their ethnicity, to hate themselves for what they are not and what they could be, is for them to be lost and broken. Society pushes them to this point and, while it is less of the demonizing of Asians when we were at war, it is still enough to make people be ashamed of their heritage. Hua and Junn also went to explain how this internalization leads to an unfortunately common issue of Asians discriminating other Asians. Be it whether to simply validate their own mindset influenced by racism, or to help make them seem less foreign to white people, there are many occurrences in which Asians will project their own internal racism onto different Asians and this helps create even more internalized racism. As society pins Asians against themselves and other Asians, they do not hesitate to pin non-Asians against them as well.

The recent COVID-19 pandemic saw an increase in Asian targeted hate crimes in the beginning and in no small part is the media's presentation of the virus to be blamed. As many people get their opinions from or at least base them on what they perceived through their intake of media, many saw another example of Asian scapegoating. Angela R. Grover, Shannon B. Harper, and Lynn Langton highlight the media, especially former President Donald Trump's role within COVID-19 related scapegoating of Asian Americans with their writing "Anti-Asian Hate Crime During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Exploring the Reproduction of Inequality" (2020). They point out how President Trump used the term "Chinese virus" in place of corona or coronavirus when he spoke of the issue on March 19th, 2020, and how various other officials within high ranking positions of government used similar terminology like "kung flu" and "Wuhan virus." They used Chinese centered terms in order to turn attention, not on the U.S. government's failure to handle pandemic related issues, but to once again demonize an Asian ethnic group. The negative connotations led to many taking a negative view against Asians within America. We see how quickly the influence of the media can divide our nation and, when an ethnic minority is targeted, we see the public is very quick to turn against them. Additionally, the lack of support for Asians is seen time and time again, which demoralizes and desensitizes Asians even further, leaving them with less and less hope for themselves and society. They are singled out, left for themselves, and forced to endure renewed waves of racism at any moment while knowing a single man can say something on the news and make the nation hate Asians once again.

The historical repetition of Asian subjugation and oppression is evident throughout history. The Chinese Exclusion Act was created when America was still a relatively young nation but familiar patterns can be seen now, even centuries later, with the COVID-19

pandemic shutdown of national travel being blamed on China. The majority of our nation's society is white and won't seek to make changes unless these issues directly affect them. I reiterate that point now to show that this is a sentiment this nation has carried for centuries. Society has always been intolerant of minorities; it's been stripping people of their livelihoods and relocating them since the birth of this nation seen through the removal of Native Americans and the Trail of Tears. The white majority uses its position as the majority to subjugate ethnic minorities in order to make sure that it keeps its power within society, as a truly free and equal nation would threaten the centuries old societal standard of a white majority. The internment of Japanese Americans is no shock when you look at the historical trends, and the rise in hate crimes following the height of the COVID-19 pandemic isn't one either. They are only two of many racially motivated control efforts in which society uses to ensure its power over ethnic minorities.

History doesn't have to be repeated. I wrote this in order to bring attention to the struggles of Asians and Asian Americans, as society fails to. Society makes false labels and exerts power to make it hard to speak out against Asiatic racism. But, that's exactly what we have to do. We, as a nation, have to speak out about these current issues and those of our past. We have to bring them to light and admit our faults. If we fail to do this, we are allowing this cycle of oppression and hatred to continue, harming many more Asian Americans and ethnic minorities as a whole within America. I wrote this in hopes of letting other see the struggles that I have had as an Asian American, from being witness to reoccurring ages of hatred, to being held to unreasonable standard, hearing slander of my heritage on a fairly regular basis, and even being seen as less of a human because of where my family comes from. There are millions more like me throughout this nation, struggling in the same way or even worse. Many have been beaten, brutalized, and even killed

simply because of who they are. I wrote this with the hope that others will speak out for those who are unspoken and that others might go to learn more themselves, see the hatred our nation breeds, and work to bring an end to it.

Unfortunately, we see this cycle repeat itself time and time again; so much so that, throughout my research, many of the sources illustrated here ended up being focal points of other published topics. For my research to have been interconnected with others shows that none of these events nor effects are isolat-

ed or independent. The societal majority spins a web in order to encompass those it wishes to preside over, with their methods of oppression building on one another to solidify their control. This is a deep-rooted issue that is centuries old, with a societal precedent still pushing for the continued oppression of Asian Americans. We must work as a whole in order to undo the wrongdoings of the past and lead society as a whole into a more accepting entity. We must acknowledge the past and learn from it, instead of allowing it to repeat itself once more.

As an Asian American, **RYAN MANERI** has personally experienced multiple instances of racism— directly and indirectly— towards Asians. Ryan realizes how normalized racism has become within American society. For this piece, he wanted to look into past examples of racism and how they connect to some of the more recent instances seen nationwide. Ryan’s goal is to provide an opportunity to help more people see his perspective as an Asian American with the hope that they, too, may help stop the normalization and societal acceptance of racist views towards Asians within America.

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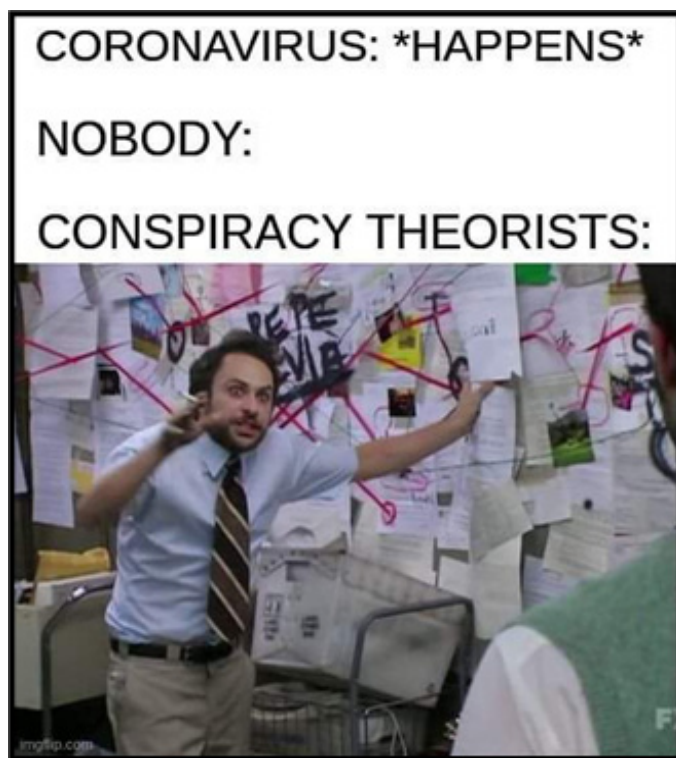
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COVID-19, Memes, and the Infodemic

Emily McGhee | Stony Brook University

Whether it was whipped coffee or the cult-like following that series such as “Tiger King” gained, the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns have led to the development of many an internet trend. However, some of these trends are far more worrying than others. Lockdowns and more time being spent online made it possible for misinformation, disinformation, and conspiracy theories to be shared far and wide.



Prior to the widespread and globalized usage of social media platforms, conspiracy theories had long been contained to the outskirts and outliers of society. However, with the advent of algorithmic social media and the continuance of the COVID-19 pandemic, conspiracy theories and accompanying information have been disseminated into the mainstream via inconspicuous means—MEMES. This rapid spread

of information, via outlets such as social media platforms and memes, is now known as the Infodemic.

What is the Infodemic?

Infodemics are described by the World Health Organization (WHO) as

An excessive amount of information about a problem, which makes it difficult to identify a solution. They can spread misinformation, disinformation and rumours during a health emergency. Infodemics can hamper an effective public health response and create confusion and distrust among people. (United Nations 2020)

The Infodemic coinciding with the pandemic has taken place all across the internet. Defining factors of the Infodemic can be found on video sharing platforms such as YouTube and TikTok, as well as image and text-based platforms like Instagram and Facebook. The lockdowns induced by the pandemic made for a perfect storm. People stayed home and were pushed out of their normal routines and social structures. In search of alternatives, online modes for social networking were used more heavily. Conspiracy theories were started and disseminated through these social media platforms, then brought to life in the real world with people acting upon the information they consumed.

In a study published by the Social and Personality Psychology Compass, researchers found that during the pandemic, people were faced with widespread disruption of traditional social and cognitive struc-

tures and instead turned to online alternatives. Once people had ingratiated themselves in these alternative online structures, social media radicalized their beliefs, leading to a greater spread of information and reinforcement of conspiracy theories. The nature of social media to display extreme opinions led to this radicalization, which has led to a change in behavior offline. Offline behavior was then found to be posted back online, displaying more radicalization; thus, an endless cycle of “real world” and online radicalization was achieved.

Facebook and the Infodemic

Facebook, in particular, played an important role in the Infodemic with its algorithms promoting content at a higher rate if the content elicited negative reactions like the “angry” emoji, rather than positive reactions such as “like”, “love”, and “haha.” This algorithmic phenomenon, although known about by researchers for a time, was recently brought into the light of the mainstream media by internal documents released by an employee whistleblower at Facebook. These documents are also said to recognize posts that elicited “angry reaction emoji were disproportionately likely to include misinformation, toxicity and low-quality news.” (Merrill and Oremus 2021, WaPo)

This is further evidenced by previous outside research into the platform’s algorithms. A 2020 analysis on Facebook found that the primary function,



the Newsfeed, sorted itself chronologically prior to 2009. However, after 2009, the Newsfeed prioritized high engagement; showing posts that gathered more engagement higher and more frequently in people’s newsfeeds. (Munn 2020) This type of information sharing and presentation leads to more reactionary posts being shown to users as soon as the app or webpage is opened, rather than the chronologically ordered personal posts of family and friends that longtime users had come to know the platform for.

What is Misinformation?

Misinformation is defined, quite simply, by Merriam-Webster as “incorrect or misleading information.” People spreading misinformation are not the same as those who are spreading disinformation. The difference between the two terminologies is the intent and knowledge behind the act of spreading the information. In the case of misinformation, anyone can spread it unknowingly. In the case of disinformation, the deliberate nature of the act of spreading the information is what sets it apart from the rest.

What is Disinformation?

Within the greater scheme of history and society, disinformation is commonly known to be “false information created by governments in wartime for military purposes and by totalitarian governments for political purposes in peacetime.” (Manning 2004) Under this definition, a historical example of disinformation includes the rumors and lies started by the Soviet Union in hopes of discrediting the United States--reportedly starting in 1923 as a weapon of the KGB.

We see the term being used differently now in the age of the internet. Merriam-Webster defines disinformation as “false information deliberately and often covertly spread (as by the planting of rumors) in order to influence public opinion or obscure the truth.” In that definition, there is no mention of the start or

spread of false information originating from government or politics; simply stated, it is spread purposely by any source in order to influence the public.

What's the role of memes?

Well, first of all—what even are memes? Many know memes as silly images or videos or pieces of text that are copied and reposted and remixed.

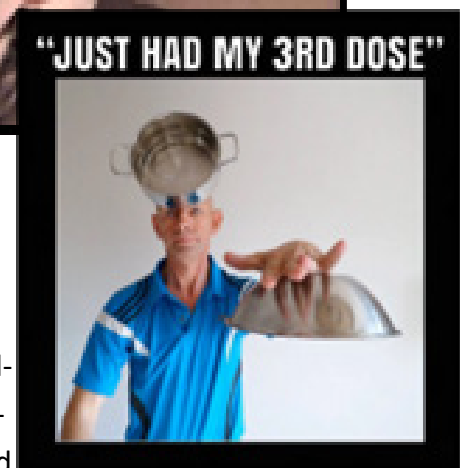
Perhaps the first image that comes to mind is a classic, the grumpy cat meme (above). Or maybe you are thinking about something a bit more cartoonish like the “y u no” character.



Regardless of what silly image you first imagine, their meaning to the internet and our culture runs much deeper than just a humorous image. Merriam-Webster dictionary defines memes first as “an idea, behavior, style, or usage that spreads from one person to another in a culture.” Second, it is defined as the meaning we commonly associate with the word in the context of the internet and social media—“an amusing or interesting picture, video, etc., that is spread widely through the Internet.” Through the first definition of the word, we can see that memes are much more intrinsic to our culture. Memes are representations of what culture is doing, the way it is acting, and what norms and values are being widely held. Through the second, more commonplace definition, we can see how memes are integral to the Infodemic with their capabilities of “spread[ing] widely through the Internet.”

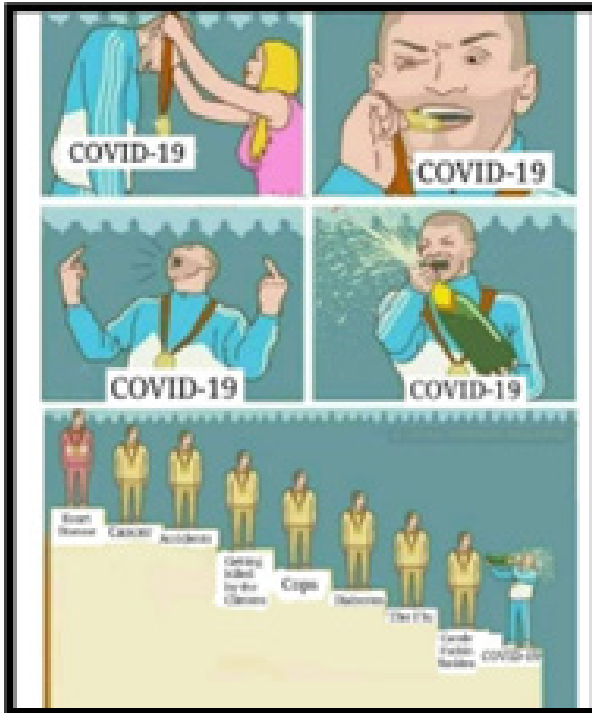
COVID Memes

The use of meme templates in the spread of information is of particular interest. According to Scott DeJong of the Algorithmic Media Organization (AMO), “using templates that recontextualize images from popular culture, meme makers have exploited the meme format to propel narratives that might be misleading or downright incorrect.” (DeJong 2020) In doing so, memes are presented and used by and for users and creators as an approachable template for giving opinions and starting discussions. However, the shareable nature and ease of creation lead memes to play a key role in spreading information. And of course, the spread of information in this quick and easy fashion leads to a greater spread of the Infodemic.

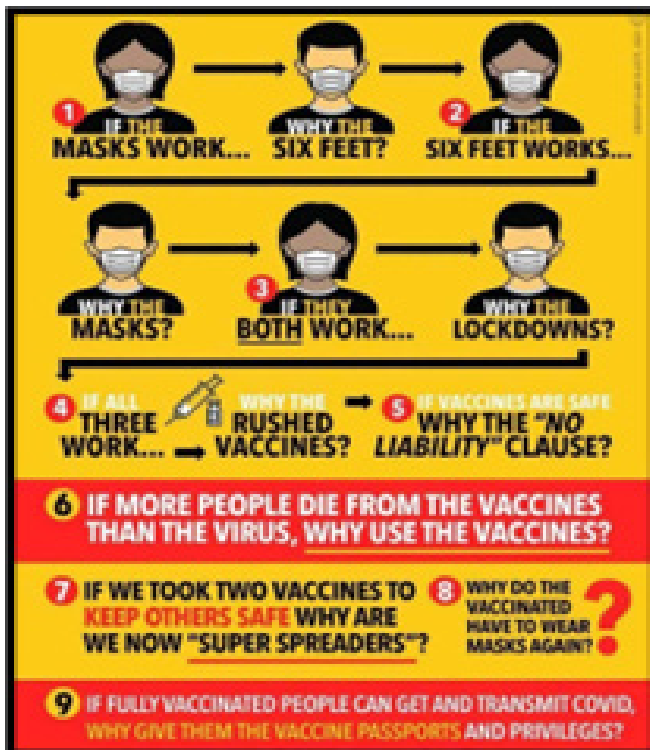


The memes spread about COVID-19 vary in their seriousness. This kind of variability leads to conspiracies being grouped in with jokes. For example, they range from the relatively silly and low stakes (above)...

...to the more serious, but still silly and excusable.



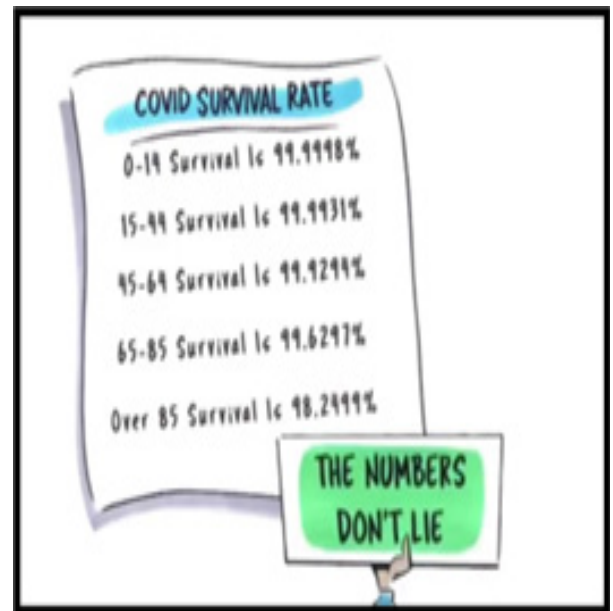
Finally, the most serious in the series, where the information provided is misleading and irrevocably harmful to gullible users; sometimes providing information in such a way that demonstrates a sort of knowledgeability and power with its visual rhetoric:



Other times it is presenting the information in a way that distorts or entirely leaves out the necessary context required to understand the gravity of the issue at hand.



Finally, sometimes the information is just flat-out false and purposely misleading to users.



Conclusion

The tandem pandemics of disease and information have created a complex and incredibly worrying issue that has plagued our internet-immersed culture.

Memes are of special interest within the Infodemic, as their mode of creation and dissemination lends itself especially well to how the Infodemic is perpetuated. We can only benefit from understanding the ins-and-outs of the Infodemic. By exploring the role of visual rhetoric (in the form of memes), understanding the

differences in the types of information being spread, and knowing where the significant bulk of disinformation is coming from, we are more able to become cognizant of the dangers of social media and its role in our post-pandemic lives.

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A Study in Misrepresentation: Holmes and the Criminal Mormons

Ygor Noblott | University of Utah

How does one “acquire the right to tell someone else’s story against their will?” Ronald Thomas asks of the famous detective Sherlock Holmes. To scholars like him and John McBratney, this was the problem with Victorian literature: that one could “discover the truth” about an “other” by merely studying or occupying the same spaces as them. In the eighteen-hundreds, the accepted empirical forms of knowledge profoundly affected the characterizations of foreigners, the colonized, and even poor British subjects, a practice that made its way from Victorian London to the twenty-first century US. In the case of Arthur Conan Doyle’s first Sherlock Holmes story, *A Study in Scarlet*, the criminal, having absorbed second-hand stories about the “criminal mormons,” travels from Salt Lake City to England to take revenge on the Mormon he believes caused the death of a good family. And just like this criminal, Victorian authors and a host of contemporary ones that followed, fall into the trap of committing wrongs to make a right—often without having witnessed them. And the members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—the Mormons—are left with a mistaken identity, founded mostly on rumors, which is almost impossible to correct.

“Good heavens! Who would associate crime with these dear old homesteads?” As it turns out, inspector: Victorian newspapers, famous anthropologists like Cesare Lombroso, and authors like Jotham Goodell who represents an entire group of “nineteenth-century anti-Mormon writers who wrote outside their experience” (Barney, 246). These per-

spectives along with Conan Doyle’s depiction of the Utah residents, however, reflect not just prejudice but an ignorance many had about the “other”—and how much they thought of themselves as authorities in representing those groups’ stories. Richard Burton’s *The City of the Saints* is a classic example, but the most common example of narrative usurpation comes from the media, in this case, newspapers. (Oh, newspapers. Notorious for undermining or exaggerating details to increase readership or support a political agenda.)

Because of a high influx of LDS immigrants and missionaries to the British Isles from 1840 to 1899, over 30,000 articles in London newspapers include the term “Mormon.” Common titles include: “Mormonism Unmasked,” “An English Girl Rescued From The Mormons,” “Narrow Escape From The Mormon Murderers At Salt Lake,” and “Annoying A Mormon Missionary” (The BNA). (a nice picture of the crime scene to give us a starting point.) Many entries included personal narratives similar to John Ferrier’s in *A Study in Scarlet*, though verified with no facts, testimonies, or formal documents (ibid). One such entry, published in the December 16th, 1843 issue of *The London Times* is about the accidental drowning of Robert Turner. The article mentioned that after Turner embraced the religion and began preaching, he invited anyone who felt “thoroughly convinced of the truth of the religious principles” to go to the river the next day to be baptized (6). Several people met him there, had a party where one preacher addressed them “as to the absolute

necessity of their being born of water and of the spirit, or else they could not enter the kingdom of heaven,” and then they followed Turner to the river to be baptized. This description, though accurate about the faith’s principles, set up the readers to believe the case was not accidental, with the premise of a coercive preacher when phrases like “absolute” and “or else” were added, which were not verbatim. “*You know my methods, Watson.*”

In contrast, *The Times* included the testimony of a participant, Matthew Gregory—which they introduce with “to use the man’s own words,” though the only words quoted from Gregory are his description of what the preacher did when baptizing him: “nearly slockening him.” To his brief statement *The Times* adds, “with great difficulty, half-drowned...much starved” and “frightened, [he] scrambled out of the river and saved his life,” suggesting that Gregory thought his life was in danger the whole time. (According to *The Times*, that was one heck of a party.) Gregory’s testimony is clearly not “from the man’s own mouth.” What they missed was that Gregory went in “having been thoroughly convinced;” and they described his struggle to keep steady during the baptism in a way that would create a sense of danger. They concluded by mentioning the statement from the coroner and jury, which said that the Mormons were “strongly condemn[ed],” reinforcing the group’s image as culprits and menaces, suggesting they converted a man only to cause his death.

But newspapers merely maintain the negative image of groups like the Latter-day Saints which more substantive literature popularized. “*Is there any point to which you would wish to draw my attention?*” “Why yes. *A Winter with the Mormons: The 852 Letters of Jotham Goodell*, authored by Goodell and his associate David Bigler, is a record of Goodell’s winter in Salt Lake along with several thousand other travelers, a number of which left records describing

their visits. Bigler argues that those travelers’ generally favorable accounts do not accurately represent the negative experiences of those that spent lengthier times among the Mormons. Goodell’s extensive five-month stay with them, he claims, was filled with harassment, threats, confiscation of his wealth, and fear of death. (Goodell doing his best impression of *The London Times* writers.) But Ronald Barney, a reviewer of the book, believes Goodell’s “religious fervor” shaped his negative encounters with the Saints,



since, after becoming a Presbyterian clergyman, he commenced a mission to Christianize America in Calvinistic orthodoxy, fostering “impatience at what [he] considered heterodox religious aberration” (246, 248-249). Barney then proposes that Goodell could have adopted a different attitude towards his hosts as did other travelers like William Bell, who lived with the Saints seven years longer than Goodell. Bell believed the troubles between outsiders and the

Mormons “sprung from meddling...on the part of the former,” because they believed the new religion’s institutions were “matters which everybody had a right to criticize, talk about, joke about, ridicule and oppose” (ibid). “But,” Bell continues, others who “attended to their own affairs, have lived in peace and been respected by the community”(ibid).And though Goodell may not have come to Utah with the same preconceived notions, one negative six-month stay does not grant him “the right to tell someone else’s story” with such claims of villainy as he depicts the Latter-day Saints to have.

In *A Study in Scarlet*, John Ferrier, like Goodell, settles in Utah for a time, during which he is at first filled with rumors of this “ruthless society” whose “deeds of blood and violence [were]doneunderthenameofreligion”(67-68).ConanDoyleherewasreferringtotheDanites, a group of extremists whom the church denied association with. This is a common thread even today where extremist groups like the DezNat (The Deseret Nation) use social media to promote theirprejudicedagendasandinturncontribute negativelytothechurch’spublicimage(Kincart). A few years after Ferrier’s arrival, he is visited by the Prophet, Brigham Young, who receives his salutations “coldly” and begins to scold him about not participating in the community, though Ferrier defends his participation and Young switches topics to Ferrier’s lack of wives (68-69).

The purpose of the visit is then revealed: Young is there to demand that Ferrier’s adopted daughter marry one of the young men in the community because, as “the thirteenth rule in the code of the sainted Joseph Smith” states, “Let every maiden of the true faith marry one of the elect”(ibid).The meeting ends with Young threatening Ferrier by saying, “It were better for you, John Ferrier...that you and she were now lying blanched skeletons upon the Sierra Blanco, than that you should put your weak wills

against the orders of the Holy Four” (69). “By heavens; I believe they are really after us.”

The interesting details are the fabled “thirteenth rule code of the sainted Joseph Smith” and the apparent leadership of the church termed “the Holy Four.” *The Articles of Faith*, the only LDS document resembling a “code” with thirteen sections authored by Joseph Smith, has nothing regarding “maidens” marrying “one of the elect” (Smith); the labeling of Joseph Smith as “sainted” is misguided and accusative since saint-ing is a Catholic practice, not an LDS one where all member are called saints; and the church has famously and continually been led by 3 individuals (a president and two counselors) who have a quorum of twelve underneath them, totalling in 15 (Prophets Today). Nowhere is the number four part of the religion’s leadership.

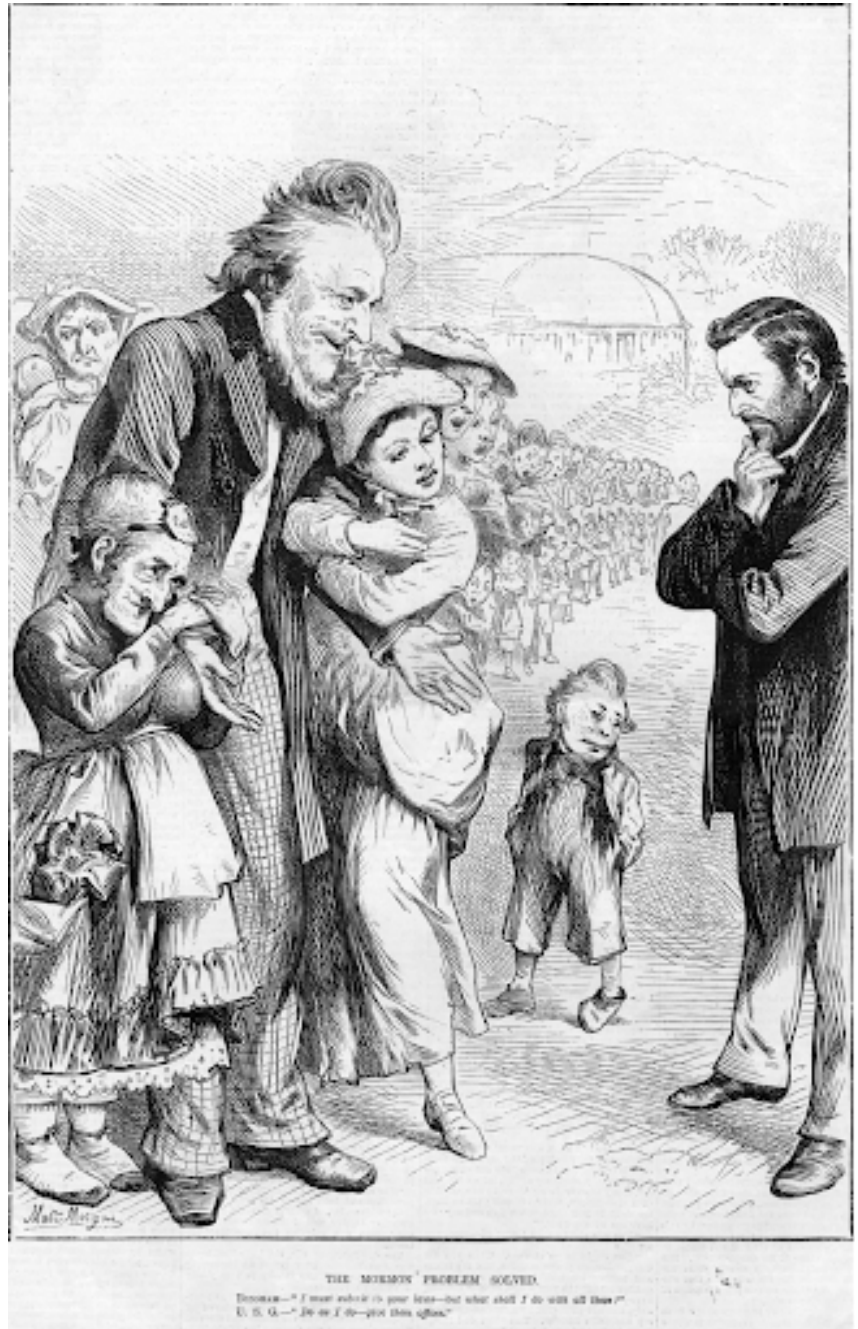
But let’s give Conan Doyle a break. Though his initial apology of the misguided depictions was evasive at best, he did give a full apology to Levi Edgar Young, a descendant of Brigham Young and an LDS general authority years later—in secret (Schindler). Conan Doyle’s lack of fact-checking is not at question here, but it is a factor worth considering when thinking about how popular fictions corroborate[d] and were affected by the scientific studies, anthropological pursuits, and personal narratives of the time.

There was a fascination in the Victorian era with analyzing and categorizing foreign bodies—to discover, as it were, the nature of such an “exotic” thing. John McBratney used *The Sign of Four* as an example of how scientific taxonomies created, affected, and reflected the imperial ideal in literature, with the examples of the Imperial Gazetteer, the Indian census by Herbert H. Risley, and the book *Criminal Man* by Cesare Lombroso (149-163). It is works like these that exacerbated the ideas of “the criminal,” “the foreigner,” and “the exotic”

in nineteenth-century British thinking. The signs of criminality are interpreted as signs of underdevelopments such as apes, children, fetuses, and “the lower races;” thus the “other” is not only equated with criminals but made into something not quite/completely human. Risley’s categorization of Indians and Goodell’s of the Latter-day Saints mirror the sentiments of another work with anthropological aspirations, *The City of the Saints* by Richard Burton, who, as Bell said about visitors, came to the Salt Lake Valley with the idea that the peculiar institution was a matter which everybody had a right to meddle into (249). And though Burton writes favorably of the Saints, his record still reflects this idea that some believed they had the power to tell another’s story and therefore discover “the truth.”

Burton’s *chapter V* is dedicated to the description of Brigham Young. He tells us the “fifty-nine” year-old-man, who looked “about forty-five,” had a narrow forehead, a fine and sharp-pointed nose, peaked chin, fleshy cheeks, and a calm demeanor (238-239). These already diverge from the characteristics in Lombroso’s *Criminal man* of a thin beard, projecting eminences, enormous ears, square chin, and large cheekbones—sentiments which Ferrier shares about Young and the Mormons (664-665). Burton does mention that Young had “been called hypocrite, swindler, forger, [and] murderer,” though, “no one looks it less.” An example of this would be Goodell’s 1852 report for *The Oregonian*, where he characterizes Young and the Latter-day Saints as a “most deluded people,” an “ungodly people,” a “den of infamy... utterly depraved and wicked,” and wallowing in the “mysteries of [their] abomination” (245-246). (And he was really being conserva-

tive here.) Young’s harsh reputation may have been in part due to his unforgettable style of speaking his mind, which at times made “the terrors of a scolding the punishment in lieu of a hanging;” and in part to the confrontations with the U.S. government in prior years—a point to which we’ll return to shortly (239).



Young’s reputation may have been one rumor that made its way to Conan Doyle’s notes as he wrote the exchange between Ferrier and Young. But to round out his depiction of the prophet, Burton states that Young’s “followers deem him an angel of light, his

foes a goblin damned: he is, [Burton] presume[d], neither one nor the other” (240).

Returning to the point of political tension, the differing beliefs between the Saints and the US, the Saints and Ferrier, and the Saints and Goodell, reveal another point from which these harsh depictions may have emerged. David Arnold, as quoted by McBratney, said “for the British, crime and political opposition were always intimately related” (156). “*You consider that to be important?*” Exceedingly so, you see, the British associated political opposition with criminal activity, thus Ferrier in the story, as did Goodell in his narrative, and *The Times* in their reporting, believed the Latter-day Saints to be crooks, at least in part, because they differed in ideals. Politics, religion, and social values, were all elements of the self-declared narrative of imperialism; a narrative that America inherited. Like *The London Times*, many opinion pieces today pass smoothly as credible reporting. “The LDS Church Needs to Step Back from Influencing State Policy” and “The Nightmare of Being Non-Mormon in Utah” are examples of the type of article titles that circulate newspapers and digital journals today. Opinion writers today portray the Church of Jesus Christ with condemnatory descriptions like nightmarish, unconstitutional, and domineering, simply to further their personal ideologies. Such writers neglect the fact that all citizens have a right to participate socially and politically according to the dictates of their own conscience—whether religious or not; and Latter-day Saints should not have their character stigmatized simply by association.

On a similar note, portrayals, characterizations, and paraphrasing of religious representatives are often unnecessarily ruthless—like that of Brigham Young’s. When LDS leader Brad Wilcox made racially insensitive remarks on a Q&A, columnists used the same tactics we saw from *The London Times*, Goodell’s record, and *A Study in Scarlet*: an aggressive

tone, using carefully chosen terminology such as “idolatry” and “throwing God under the bus” to attack the LDS community (Riess). They condescendingly comment on his references to other Christian groups and write: “Here’s a hot tip I learned at one of those useless Protestant divinity schools where they are only playing at Christianity: Don’t ridicule your congregants’ doubts or questions” (ibid). This writer reveals their prejudice is founded on differing religious affiliation, like Goodell, and falls under the trap of “ridicule[ing]” their opposition. In addition, when they accuse Wilcox of being “privileged”—though they may be right—they bring to light a complex history of marginalization for a group which many have mistakenly come to believe is exclusively white.

In reality, Latter-day Saints have had their own struggles with marginalization and passing. Historian Paul Reeves has shown how the almost totally white religion (in its inception) didn’t always qualify for the privileges of whiteness. Even though they were white, Mormons were assigned racial traits by other Americans in the 1800s to separate them. As a black man, for example, would be stereotyped as lazy or greedy, Mormons were “ignorant” and “superstitious,” and were often portrayed with physical features like horns that dehumanized them (Fabrizio).

Furthermore, because the church was led by a hierarchy, and “democracy is a government of the white people,” Mormons were associated with Muslims and Asians, other groups that posed a danger to the ideal (ibid). Latter-day Saints were often caricatured in ways that would highlight their threatening political ideologies; in particular, polygamy, which by the time many of these caricatures came about, the church had already discontinued (ibid). *A Study in Scarlet* certainly makes use of these representations, but the trail of clues leads straight to the Twenty-first Century. Race, gender, political correctness are all tools of a repeated discourse of

aggression against Latter-day Saints, as well as other groups, who do not share the same cultural or political ideals as column writers, anthropologists, fiction authors or politicians.

Whether positive or negative towards the foreign face, the exocitized white, or the minority, writers like Conan Doyle, Lombroso, Goodall, *The Times* columnists, and even Burton, saw their examinations as the ultimate law when it came to the stories and identities of those they wrote about. Holmes, the perfect reasoning machine, without personal bias, is a reflection of their self-proclaimed narrative, and of the narrative many writers so confidently display today.

Some dive into research with biased assumptions; some write negatively about experiences which they were “not eye-witness to;” and some publish critically without considering all of the facts or perspectives. These individual’s agendas mirrored Britain’s imperial agenda and identity as the source of moral and objective truth, a tradition we in America have yet to outgrow. But while this conclusion is not novel, it *does* help to further illuminate the complexities which led and continue to lead to misrepresentations in the annals of history; and leads us, on an individual basis, to be cautious about villainizing others, or assuming the right to tell their story against their will. *Elementary, my dear fellow. Elementary.*

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Discrepancies in Reporting Missing Persons

Kaitlyn Richey | Arkansas State University

On September 11, 2021, 22-year-old Gabby Petito was reported missing during a cross-country road trip that she took with her fiancé, Brian Laundrie. Petito was a moderately popular social media presence at the time who would share parts of her life on an assortment of different social media platforms. After she went missing, all of her social media accounts skyrocketed in popularity. While I didn't follow the couple's trip, I had seen photos of Petito on Instagram prior to her disappearance. As the story of her disappearance unfolded, I became consumed with it. There was so much concern and support shown toward this missing woman that I became intrigued with the attention that was drawn to other disappearance cases on social media platforms as well. The energy that was brought to Petito's case lit a fire in society to help solve not only her case, but others as well.

Once I became aware of Petito's case, I checked for more information on TikTok. While the app doesn't allow for much information in a single video, there were many different posts that helped portray a larger context for the case. However, there was one account, in particular, on TikTok, that compiled case information as it became available: Haley Toumaian and her fiancé Rob, social activists, who advocate for missing persons. The information they posted was the most informative and reliable and their platforms continues to be used for other popular missing persons cases online, bringing awareness to others who need help, not just Petito. The materials they posted on Petito consisted of a range of information, from official police reports to broadcast statements made by local news channels.

theaware@gmail.com
MISSING PERSON
www.theawarefoundationofvirginia.com
GABBY PETITO

Age: 22
Hair: Blonde
Eyes: Blue
Height: 5'5"
Weight: UNKNOWN

Gabby Petito was last seen on 8/25/21 in Grand Teton, Wyoming, heading for Yellowstone National Park. She was traveling in a white 2012 Ford transit van (pictured above), headed north, around the time of disappearance, however, we have received confirmation that she is no longer traveling in the van. It is unknown what Gabby was wearing at the time of her disappearance. Gabby does have "LET IT BE" tattooed on her right arm and a tattoo of a triangle with flowers on her left arm. If you have any information on the whereabouts of Gabby Petito, please contact the Suffolk County, NY Police Department on 1-800-220-8477.

SUFFOLK COUNTY POLICE DEPT
1-800-220-8477
Case #21-473289

The first video regarding Petito they posted to TikTok was on September 15, 2020, their second was the same day on her Instagram account. The comments on both surprised me, because usually when a missing persons case is posted on social media it gains very little attention. At most, one might receive a few local shares in the hopes that the person is safely found, and the story ends happily. But for some reason this case, like no other that I have seen, sparked the interest in audiences around the globe. The video on Petito's disappearance gained over 12 million views within roughly a month and every other social media platform Toumaian posted on exploded

in popularity.

Social media provides an easy and accessible mode for the dissemination of information on missing persons, with the hope they will be found...and quickly. However, the reporting is not always equal. It perplexes me that the young White woman caught the world's attention while countless young people of color go missing every day without getting the same amount of coverage. Social media is centered on the number of views, clicks, likes, and comments a certain post receives. When looking through NBC News' Youtube channel, this point is starkly proven. If you were to search the word "missing" on the channel, one of the most popular results is a video that was broadcast on September 19, 2021 titled: "Live: FBI Holds Presser Regarding Missing N.Y. Woman Gabby Petito NBC News," discussing the disappearance of Gabby Petito. As of April 2, 2022, this video had 406,955 views and 1,266 comments. A video posted just four days after the Petito video "Families of Color Feel Forgotten in Search for Missing Loved Ones," another video of Daniel Robinson, a 24-year-old African American man who mysteriously disappeared after work in Arizona only received 17,174 views and 211 comments. In the video, Daniel's father, David Robinson, answers the heartbreaking question posed by the interviewer, "why do you think that is cases like your son's go unheard?" (Hilton 0:28) Robinson responded by saying that people "think it's not an urgency for us," (Robinson 0:36). Afterward, the interviewer mentions the cases of 25-year-old Jelani Day, an African American graduate student, as well as 30-year-old Lauren Cho, an Asian-American. Such cases began to receive more attention when the issue of racial disparity in coverage of disappearances began circulating during the Petito case.

According to the Black and Missing Foundation, there were 543,018 missing persons reported in 2020. The foundation found that 59% of these cases reported were Caucasian (this percentage including Hispanic

missing persons), while 37% of the persons were a minority. Three percent of missing persons cases were determined as 'unknown' to officials. Most of the cases that gain traction on the news are ones that involve young white individuals that are typically female, although a large percentage of people of color go missing, too. The discrepancy in coverage highlights one aspect of systematic racism today.



Petito's case drew attention to at least two important issues. While most of the conversation on missing persons was centered on Petito, the realization that coverage goes overwhelmingly to white victims has raised awareness of the thousands of others who go missing but receive very little coverage because of their skin. Second, more people are using Petito's story to bring awareness to domestic violence victims, an issue not well-understood.

Everyday injustices need to be acknowledged before they can be acted upon. Hopefully, the attention given Petito will be given to others in the future.

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The Role of Medical School Education in Racial Health Disparities

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The effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the human population has resulted in millions of deaths worldwide. Additionally, with the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement as the result of police brutality, there is more public attention on the topic of equality amongst minorities in the United States. As an Asian myself, I am well aware that racism has existed in the United States history for centuries and is an extremely sensitive topic for the mainstream media, even today. With civil rights movements and protests occurring earlier this year, the topic of racial equality has once again been brought to the public's attention. As we grapple with the continuous break out of novel coronavirus, this attention has been directed to a crucial component of racial discrimination: racial health disparity.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), minority populations have higher rates of cases, hospitalizations, and deaths of COVID-19 diagnosis, compared to White and non-Hispanic populations. Statistics from the CDC showed that American Indians have a 5.3 times higher chance of hospitalization and, at the same time, African Americans have 2.1 times higher rates of death. These higher rates are the result of many different factors, such as the lack of resources and access to health-care, as well as policies to support minorities who are suffering through these disadvantages. The lack of attention given to racial health disparity in medical practice results in workers not having enough knowledge or understanding regarding the minority popula-

tions they are giving treatment to.

The issue of racial health disparity, in connection to the systemic racial discrimination, has been a long-existing issue in our society. In an article published by Nancy Robb in 1998, the issue of racism is extended to the lack of curriculum within the medical schools. The conducted study concluded that, "85% of American medical schools incorporated cultural sensitivity into their course, however only 9% devoted their courses to the subject" (Robb 66). While the medical schools play a tremendous role as gateways of higher educational institutions for the future medical workers, people often ignore them in terms of discussing the systematic discrimination for racial minorities that existed in the medical field. The lack of race-specific curricula results in the misunderstanding of medical practitioners when they are treating minority patients. This causes doctors to not be able to provide efficient treatment for minority patients, therefore delaying their treatments. Robb further revealed that "students who attended group meetings expressed concern about the inappropriate portrayal of minorities in undergraduate cases, patient prejudice and thoughtless comments by faculty members" (66). With this scholarly article published in two decades ago, it is clear that this issue of racial health disparity is in connection with the systemic racial discrimination that is still a problem today. Through the study, Robb showcases the idea that medical schools, as the result of systemic discrimination and continuous neglect on this topic, fails to incorporate more di-

verse programs that helps students and faculty bodies understand and respect the minority population.

As a result, this lack of a diverse curriculum in medical schools lead to doctors being unconsciously biased in the diagnosis and treatment of their minority patients. In the news article “Medical schools must play a role in addressing racial disparities” published in 2017 by Cameron Nutt, the Clinical Fellow in Medicine from the Harvard Catalyst, talks about how “failures in medical education are failures of public health.” His research around the lack of curriculum concludes that half of the white medical and students in a studied sample were found to be “endors[ing] at least one false belief about biological differences in pain perception between blacks and whites” (Nutt). Furthermore, he further discussed the issue of racial disparities with the statistics that “black patients in the emergency department are 22 percent to 30 percent less likely to receive medication for the same level of pain as white patients” (Nutt). Additionally, in an article written by Ike Swetlitz, the study conducted with white medical students stated that half of the students thought black patients tended to feel less pain and thus recommended inappropriate treatment methods (Swetlitz, et al.). The lack of knowledge on minority patients in combination with racial stereotypes result in these medical students still upholding incorrect knowledge. Yet these issues are just one small portion of the larger systematic discrimination currently going on in the medical field.

From the research, studies, and experiences of the minority patients, we can see how a lack of proper curriculum results in medical practitioners having distorted perceptions which cause them to make inappropriate medical decisions based on false beliefs. Moreover, in a journal article published in 2020 on the Harvard Health Blog, the practicing physician at Massachusetts General Hospital and the clinical instructor at Harvard Medical School, Dr. Monique

Tello, shares the story of a Black patient with a painful medical condition. The emergency room staff were not giving her efficient pain treatment and were questioning her condition in a rather inappropriate manner. Dr. Tello was convinced that the patient was treated poorly simply due to them being a minority. She further discusses similar behaviors through the concept of “implicit bias”, which can affect the way physicians treat their patients. Racism and discrimination within the medical field can be directly connected to different structures of our society (Tello). These articles demonstrate the idea that this lack of diverse and professional curriculum leads to implicit bias in the medical field and medical practitioners’ false perceptions cause patients to not get the appropriate treatment right away. These three articles show how the issue of racial health disparity is connected to the larger, systemic discrimination within the structure of our society today.

Additionally, the lack of specified courses and training on specific circumstances of illness lead to minority patients getting inefficient and delayed treatments. In the same 2017 article published by Cameron Nutt, he further expands on this issue through the example of melanoma, a type of skin cancer. Black Americans have four times higher chance compared to White Americans to be diagnosed only after their cancer has already spread to other parts of the body (Nutt et al.). Furthermore, half of dermatologists reported that their medical schools did not prepare with the skills to diagnose cancer on darker skin. This resulted in only 1 in 10 dermatology residencies being able to gain specific experience treating patients with skin of color (Nutt et al.). Due to this lack of training in their medical schools, the dermatologists were not able to correctly identify cancerous maladies and therefore risked the lives of the minority patients. This significant lack of specific courses and training is putting thousands of minority patients in danger and thus further highlights the important role that medical

schools play in the larger issue of racial disparity.

Some may argue that other factors, such as access to healthcare and policies that target this issue, are more essential to focus on regarding racial health disparities. In the 2018 article “Unequal Gain of Equal Resources across Racial Groups” published on The National Center for Biotechnology (NCBI), Shervin Assari — an associate professor of family medicine at Charles R. Drew University of Medicine and Science — discusses some potential policies as a solution. With consideration of socioeconomic barriers, social and public policies and programs, such as the quality of education and reducing discrimination in the labor market, the society should focus on the specific needs of minorities and address multilevel structural barriers which limit minorities’ abilities to help eliminate racial health disparity (Assari). These social, economic, and political policies and programs can directly impact the minorities with their current circumstances and improve their conditions. However, these changes often take a long time and involve other political factors that add to the complexity of this issue. Medical schools are known for their prestigious education that gives birth to historically renowned doctors and medical workers. By providing a more diverse curriculum and a wider variety of courses that focus on the minority population, it not only educates the medical students with the appropriate perceptions, but also gives students an opportunity to appreciate the minority populations. By doing so, it is direct and effective in targeting those who will become the future medical practitioners and will be actively making changes to such issues. The knowledge that they have for minority patients is essential when giving the patients effective treatment.

Thus, in order to resolve this issue of racial health disparity and improve on the current situation, changes must be made by the institutions of higher education. These institutions should incorporate a more

diverse curriculum, including race-specific courses for the medical students so they have the knowledge when dealing with patients of the minority. Additionally, they can provide different modules for all their students to raise awareness of the potential discriminations and the inappropriate stereotypes of minorities, therefore addressing systemic discrimination from the root and give more respect for the minority communities.

Aside from the medical school providing a more diverse curriculum and incorporating race-specific courses to better prepare the students, there are many other approaches that medical schools can take to improve on the current situation. In a journal published on Medical Education Online in 2015, Lynn M. Vanderwielen — Assistant Professor of University of Colorado — showcases some potential solutions for medical school to provide diverse and professional training experience for its students. She talks about how medical students who train with underserved populations are thought to learn and rediscover social responsibility and further understand the social determinants of health. She then further expands this idea through free clinics being, “an underutilized academic institution partnership”, that provide medical students hand-on opportunities (Vanderwielen et al.). These primary care learning experiences partner medical students with diverse, uninsured patients from the free clinics. Through these experiences, students are supported closely by the free clinic staff and professional faculty to work effectively and get in touch with a variety of patients (Vanderwielen et al.). This solution that Professor Vanderwielen proposes not only helps solve the issue of racial health disparity by providing medical student the knowledge and experience working with diverse patients, but the partnership between the medical school and the free clinic can also help change the lives of the minority in underserved areas who are disadvantage for resources and healthcare.

Racial health disparity has existed in the United States history for a long period of time and the complexity of this issue can be rooted back to the larger systemic discrimination in society today. The issue of racial health disparity does involve other factors and may not be solved with one single solution. However, it is important for the medical community and the general public to understand and be aware of the existence of this issue. With that understanding, together we can work step by step to make sure the lives of minority populations are appreciated and larger systemic discriminations can be resolved.

As a member of the minority community myself and, as someone who constantly pays attention to racial issues, I recognize that there is rising public attention around racial issues but the topic of racial health disparity is still looked over. People often neglect the fact that stereotypes alone can play a significant role in the disparity of minority health. Personally speaking, my mother is a former nurse and her medical experiences have influenced me a lot. She had told me multiple times that racial discriminations exists in the medical field and that patients were being discriminated against solely based on their race, ethnicity, and many other different factors. These issues result in them not getting the appropriate treatment they were supposed to receive. From her experience,

it is important for me to address this topic in order to raise more public awareness and better address this issue. In addition, the issue of health disparity is only a small portion of the larger systemic discrimination that minorities in the U.S. had to face in decades. By discussing this topic, we can expand onto the larger issue about race and emphasize the significance of racial health disparity to the community.

On the other hand, as a student who is interested in pursuing a career in the medical field, this topic is also important because people tend to not realize the fact that medical school and students both play significant roles in their connections to racial health disparity. Higher education institutions, including the medical schools, often avoid addressing the racial discriminations and stereotypes that exist in their communities. As medical students finish their studies and move onto their career, the lack of addressing such topic will not only result in racial discrimination on the patients based on their race and region, but also cause medical practitioners not having the abilities to handle specific scenarios in terms of minority patients. Thus, I believe it is an important issue to raise awareness and talk about so that the higher educational institutions and the medical community can better understand the significance of their actions and make necessary adjustments to resolve the issue.

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What Happens When Service Serves Us?

Laasya Gadamsetti | California Northstate University

“Just remember that your community service requirement is 120 hours per year in order to graduate!”, boomed the principal during our class assembly.

“120 hours, no less!”, he repeated.

I scrunched my face in disappointment. Of course, I would now have to waste more of my already minimal free time sitting in the back of another robotics tournament room doing nothing but passing unproductive time to create the illusion of more work done and more hours logged.

High school graduation and the college application process seemed like a rigged game to me. The volunteering opportunities in my town were seemingly slim. The more prestigious opportunities were more mundane to me because large organizations generally have a distrust of volunteers. To remedy this, these organizations have selective, laid-out volunteer programs that are designed to help students fill hours easily with little effort involved in the work and few lessons to learn. This is highly prevalent even in the healthcare industry, with volunteer positions being highly coveted but not always useful in terms of developing interpersonal skills. Some organizations tend to delegate volunteers to trivial tasks such as answering the phone and running errands, even though the volunteers applied for the program to give necessary assistance to nurses and physicians to increase their healthcare knowledge.

When I attended a conference about college admis-

sions a few weeks after the assembly, the admissions officer began to talk about “the importance of volunteering in the areas that we are interested in”. What was the point in choosing one of three volunteering opportunities that seemed like a good fit for me as an incoming biology major when I was so easily replaceable, and these volunteering experiences didn’t do anything to enrich my experiences?

The fact that there was a difference between the volunteering that our general education system wanted from us and the volunteering we were doing at the time soon occurred to me. As an aspiring pre-med high school student, I was working at the local assisted living center, which is a great concept in theory because of the opportunity to build experiences with the individuals residing there. However, I realized that, as a volunteer, I mostly did jobs that nobody else wanted to do or that the center didn’t have employees for, such as cleaning up plates after meals and setting up events. It was hard to build meaningful experiences that centered on my interactions with the people living there because I was busy doing work that didn’t have a lasting impact. Even though I was surrounded by people for several hours a day, I felt distant from them. I felt like I worked for the residents and not with them. I also noticed that the administration did nothing to address the lack of participation, enthusiasm, or commitment from other student volunteers. The administration saw that many of us came just to fill out the volunteer hours form,

but they failed to see that some of us came to learn more about different communities. As they assigned us work that was designed to pass the time but not build us into better people, our good intentions just remained as intentions.

As I applied open-mindedness and awareness to my tasks as a volunteer, I noticed some broad differences between what I was doing at the elderly center and what I actually wanted to do. I realized that volunteers tend to focus on jobs that reinforce both social advantages for the volunteer and disadvantages for the class of people that are being helped. For example, when working with the elderly community of my hometown, I saw that some of my fellow volunteers thought of senior citizens as burdens who were lower than the volunteers assisting them. However, these volunteers failed to understand the value and wisdom of elderly individuals within our community and the fact that they'd lived full lives. This shows how the volunteer can harbor feelings of superiority as a helper and also how they can diminish the value of the people they are "helping", increasing the divide between the two groups of people.

Truer Service through Active Engagement

At the beginning of my time at university, I realized that I had more time outside of school to work. Unlike in high school, where volunteering was required, it was up to us to make our presence matter in the community. This seemed optimal to me because interactions shouldn't be forced, but the opportunities to have them should still exist. At the university I utilized the understanding I'd gained from my work in high school at the elderly center: there is something to learn from everyone. I started to look for opportunities that made me feel like I was also learning something from the experience, such as volunteering in hospitals. Through my experience at the hospital, I began to learn from others how best to provide understanding and care through narrative medicine and

cultural awareness.

I started volunteering at a hospital where I was working to both better understand the medical environment and to work with trauma care patients. I noticed that patients' moods were based on the atmosphere around them. If physicians, nurses, and volunteers making their errands did so with empathy, happiness, hope, and care, the patients would be happier. I observed that the link between environment and mood was predominant in the practice of narrative medicine as well. Narrative medicine is the junction between the humanities and healthcare justice that allows for better patient care (Division of Narrative Medicine, 2021). It is a solution to the concern that doctors have tended to neglect specific patient interactions and stories and are focused more on what they see in their medical charts. I ended up utilizing narrative medicine by maintaining empathy and a sense of teamwork with patients in order to learn more about them for their care. My experiences at the hospital helped me realize the importance of cultural nuances and to see how those play into medical narratives and medical outcomes. I also learned about the impact of religion on the lives of people and how it can change the meaning of their lives. I believe that having exposure to experiences like this helps to gain a better understanding of what life and death really mean to different cultures and how to keep an open mind about their beliefs. More than anything else, making sure that we treat religion and science as two separate hemispheres but use them together to make decisions with our patients allows for intercultural empathy and impartiality.

Additionally, showing awareness and knowledge regarding procedural consent in the performance of procedures like blood transfusions and heart transplants increases comfort and the level of understanding between patient and physician to create a deeper bond and allow for better care overall. Although

narrative medicine seems like an easy practice, it demands high levels of empathy, care, patience, and connection because so much of patient care is dependent on it. I believe it necessary to utilize the concept of cultural moral relativism, which is about putting actions in a cultural context and understanding nuances in our behavior based on our community and background (Westacott, n.d).

I learned a truer definition of service, which requires us to put aside ourselves and focus on others as completely as possible to be efficient and create change. In service to others our self-reflection processes are important because they “move [us] from mindlessly drifting through life to connecting the current situation with past experiences and knowledge as a means of achieving a desired goal. That goal may be as fundamental as trying to make a more informed decision about whether and how to best offer [our] services to communities in the future” (Cress et. al, 2013, p. 101). By practicing and reflecting on these ideas, I was able to find connections between my work and myself.

A New Project, a New Context

I began to implement my new-found beliefs through my work with an organization called Project Optimism. It was founded by local residents in the greater Sacramento area who place a heavy emphasis on giving back to the community in which they grew up. They do so by organizing food and medical supply drives for individuals residing there and by teaching students in low-income school districts lessons about life and growth to push them to be their personal best. I became an after-school program mentor with them in my sophomore year of university. All thirty of the students in the after-school program were transitioning from middle school to high school. They came to us to have a safe place to stay until they could get picked up from school, so that they could make friends, and so that they could talk about their prob-

lems. They found a home here.



Most of the organization members and students share similar cultural backgrounds and experiences, which creates trust, allowing mentors and students to share their experiences more comfortably. Many of the mentors come from the same school districts and neighborhoods as the students, making conversations about home and day-to-day interactions very relatable. The schools in the districts working with Project Optimism have significant issues with a lack of resources, school supplies, and quality teachers who inspire their students. I was at a disadvantage in my ability to develop the same rapport as other members because of my background. Although I didn't attend school in the same districts, I was able to contend with this cultural barrier by finding similarities in their lifestyles and mine, whether it be over something as simple as my favorite Starbucks drink or dealing with universal issues like getting older, grappling with identity, and dealing with the practicalities of applying to community college.

Cultural bias and awareness are substantial in my work. As these conversations became more frequent, a bond was built, and students gradually came forward to share about issues closer to their hearts. It's

still difficult for me to always know what the right thing to say is, but I've learned that more than anything, being able to do little things for some of the students, like getting them their favorite jewelry beads or a bag of Hot Cheetos, shows how much we care about them. I love being personable with them and getting them to open up to me with their daily struggles. It was eye-opening to learn that they had witnessed domestic abuse and drug use at such a young age, but their perseverance, endurance, and approach to life taught me so much more than I could ever teach them. While I do believe that I helped the students I worked with by lending an ear and showing how much I care about them, my contributions to their lives don't seem as big as their impact on mine. By becoming a part of their lives, I saw a microcosm of a community that was supportive and strong in their solidarity.

More recently, I started working with Project Optimism to help with fundraising. This project entailed using different methods of fundraising to see what would work best for the organization, especially long term. I realized through this project that choosing a cause that resonates with one, makes a difference in the outcome; people generally increase their efforts when they feel that the difference they make is more meaningful. I look forward to showing the students of Project Optimism the results of my project and how I was able to use my passion for their cause to raise money to hopefully help make their dreams of higher education a reality by continuing to work with them.

Being able to participate in and observe interactions at Project Optimism has allowed me to learn more about the culture in lower-income areas of Sacramento and how higher education, family issues, and priorities can be subtly changed from person to person. I was able to learn and create a project through creating shared experiences to make meaningful, deep connections with individuals. Communication

between myself, the students, and the staff of Project Optimism helped me to better understand their needs and format something truly meaningful to both them and me.

Fixing the Gaps

Whether it be in a hospital or at Project Optimism, service is about being able to listen without judgment and help however we can. My previous roles in various communities had gaps in being able to connect with the people I was working with, but overcoming these gaps is what narrative medicine and intercultural empathy are all about. I want to fix that gap in myself so I can be a better volunteer, health-care worker, and ultimately, a better person. I want to continue making whatever difference I can in the lives of the people I work with, which is why I applied to become an employee with Project Optimism. The differences that I make, whether they're understood during a late-night hospital shift or a drive home from an after-school program session with young students, motivate us to be better people. They help us find it within ourselves to show up to work smiling, resolving to make a positive change in the people we see on a daily basis. Over the past few years of my life, the relationship between myself and giving back to others and their communities as a future healthcare practitioner has led me to become more empathetic, understanding, and well-rounded as an individual and as a service learner. I and the other mentors of Project Optimism, the volunteers at the hospital, and the employees of healthcare systems should rely on the idea of intercultural empathy and do our best to connect with both each other and the individuals we're committed to helping.

LAASYA GADAMSETTI is a third-year student at California Northstate University. She is currently studying Health Sciences and is interested in pursuing a career in the healthcare industry. She is a member of Project Optimism, whose purpose is to provide assistance to students in the Greater Sacramento region. Laasya credits her Service Learning mentor, Professor Tereza Joy Kramer, for encouraging her to delve into the lessons and experiences she has gained. This piece would not have been possible without Professor Kramer, and Laasya would like to dedicate this essay to her to thank her for all she has done.

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We Don't Like to Talk About the Hard Things

Addie Mendenhall | University of Utah

Introduction:

Whether we realize it or not, we all likely know somebody that has experienced divorce first-hand. Due to divorce still being a semi-taboo topic today, it is not commonly talked about. For some, it is a difficult subject to broach, while it makes others feel vulnerable and overexposed.

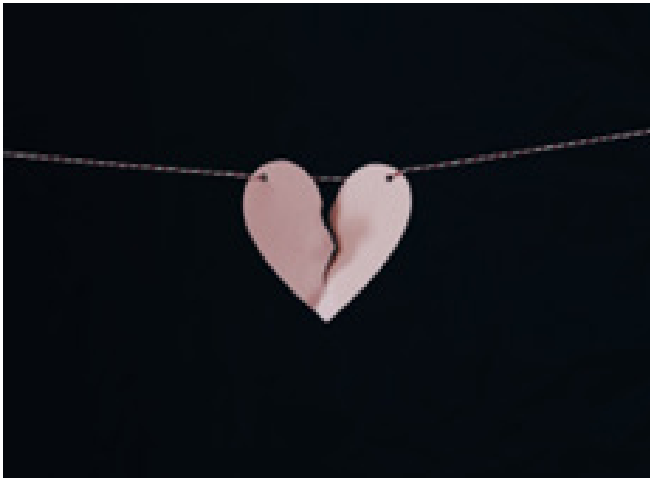


image cr., Kelly Sikkema

My trauma with divorce is still not an easy topic to talk about, even six years later, though it is necessary to discuss and understand how the effects of divorce on all ages of children can have different long-lasting consequences. These consequences can appear as mental health and behavioral issues, stress and trauma, and inability to create meaningful relationships throughout children's lives. At some point or another, anybody who has experienced divorce will experience at least one of these consequences. How individuals

handle and cope with them is what makes each situation unique.

Literature Review:

Divorce is a topic many avoid in everyday conversation. Although divorce is quite common, it is still shrouded in mystery for many. Despite each circumstance of divorce being different, generalized conclusions are still drawn even though they are not necessarily accurate or applicable. Going through a divorce "can be extremely traumatic for everyone involved," according to Romeo Vitelli, writer of "Life After Divorce." Due to the extreme mental toll that divorce causes, these individuals may not be so quick to banish any rumors and preconceptions, therefore keeping to themselves. Katherine Mobila, a journalist for the Jamaican Medical Center, writes that "Psychological trauma occurs when an event overwhelms, stresses, or scares an individual so much so that it prevents them from fully coping with his or her emotions" (Mobila). Divorce is much more common today than it was even ten years ago. Attorneys from Wilkinson-Finkbeiner Law state that 46% of all marriages end in divorce, on average between forty-four different states (Wilkinson-Finkbeiner). Both adults and children suffer the emotional and mental trauma of divorce, which is often unexplored or undiagnosed. All individuals carry residual trauma from any kind of divorce, even if the split is amicable. However, children tend to have longer-lasting disruptions that

stem from the psychological trauma that accompanies divorce, and with divorce being more prevalent than it ever has before, those disruptions are aplenty. According to Marija Lazic, “statistics show that about 50% of all American children will witness the end of their parents’ marriage” (Lazic). Though universally traumatizing, children involved in divorce have the potential to feel its effects just as much, if not more, than their parents.



image cr., Jackson Simmer

A Brief Introduction to a Narrative of Two Sisters:

My family and I were what you might call an “average” family. We attended public school and lived in a quiet neighborhood full of good friends. My mom was a stay-at-home mom, and my dad worked in computer security sales at the time. My dad often traveled for work, but when he was home, he had a flexible schedule. When my dad would travel for longer periods, he would always find cool souvenirs for my siblings and me. Sometimes it was a chocolate bar from the airport, and other times free swag from a conference. Either way, we loved that my dad thought of us throughout his business trips enough to bring us each something special. He began to travel less as we got older, but my dad would still do meaningful things

with each kid. For me, he often volunteered to coach my recreational league soccer teams or take carpool to school. For Sienna, he often attended her dance competitions, no matter the time of day. For Jake, he was a built-in best friend. Sienna and I had each other plus our mom, and Jake had my dad.

Nearly one in two children watch their parents get divorced. My family beat that statistic for the first thirteen years of my life. However, in July of 2015, that all changed. My siblings and I didn’t fully understand what had hit us until much further down the road. It’s been six years since my parents divorced, and I am still impacted by their decisions. My siblings, Sienna and Jake, who were ten and six respectively, were relatively young during the divorce; now, as teenagers, they are still surprised by its residual effect. The family dynamic once shared between parents and children was gone before we knew it. One day it was there, the next it was like it had never existed. The dynamic between me and my parents changed instantly, and that shift felt irreparable at the time.

A child experiencing divorce is often caught off guard, usually on a day that becomes significant for the rest of their lives. I know this was the case for my siblings and me when my parents told us they were getting a divorce. It happened on a Saturday night in the middle of July; we were playing at a park with some friends. There was nothing special about that day. It was so blissfully normal that in no way was I expecting to hear life-changing news later that evening. I still dread July 18th, knowing what that day had in store years ago. Throughout the years that followed my parents’ messy divorce, my siblings and I were put through countless hours of therapy, emotional counseling, and familial trauma. It wasn’t until I was sixteen and struggling in high school that I was finally diagnosed with general anxiety disorder, something that resulted from the residual trauma I experienced. How my younger sister and I cope with residual

trauma and how we now view our parents has been affected by an extremely traumatic divorce.



image cr., Luis Galvez

Before:

Sienna and I were only ten and thirteen years old respectively when our parents announced their divorce. Although we were young at the time, there are certainly many details that we remember vividly. When Sienna and I reminisce about our lives before our parents divorced, it's hard to remember what a regular day looked like. Sienna and I attended the same elementary school until I branched out to the local middle school in seventh grade. Something Sienna looks back on is how much she missed having an older sibling there to look out for her. There was a sense of closeness between the two of us at school that was unrivaled by any relationship we had at home. I remember that any time our parents weren't around, Sienna and I would become best friends. One of our favorite things to do was play school at home. It seems funny now, looking back at how we so badly wanted to emulate a classroom environment at home. Our parents would always laugh and go along with whatever "field trip" we had planned for the day. Some weekends, it would be a trip to Home Depot

with dad for sprinkler parts. We always told him that he owed us a treat if he took longer than ten minutes (spoiler alert: he always did).

Our relationships with our parents weren't lacking, by any means. I considered myself closer to my dad, although my mom and I had a great relationship too. Sienna was the exact opposite. She was buddy-buddy with my mom but would have the best time with my dad and me when we invited her to come outside with us and help with yard work or a ride around the neighborhood on the four-wheeler. One of the fondest memories that Sienna and I have of spending time with our dad is when my mom would go out for dinner and a late movie with her close friends. My dad would rent a Redbox movie of our choosing, order pizza, and let us stay up as late as we wanted, or until we heard the garage door opening. From there, it was a race to get into bed as quickly as possible, in the pitch black. Sienna doesn't remember these memories as vividly as I do, but she remembers how fun they were. Sometimes, when we look back on memories like this, we miss how life was before the divorce. It's hard to imagine anything ever feeling like that again, when we've been deprived of that normalcy that we craved for so long after our family broke.

During:

I remember when my dad told me he was divorcing my mom. He had decided that because I was older than my siblings, I got to know more details. I hated that my dad made this decision. It made me feel so isolated from my siblings, like I had nobody there to relate to how I felt. Above all else, I felt traumatized and lost. After he broke the news to me, I ran to the swings, put my head in my hands, and cried. I wondered what was wrong with my family and why we couldn't just be normal. I thought, in the back of my mind, that things were too good to be true, so of course, something had to come along and ruin it.

Once my parents had finished talking with my younger siblings, it was time to leave. We packed up with Mom and went home without Dad. That was a strange and heartbreaking day. Listening to my entire family sob throughout the thirty-minute-long car ride is still gut-wrenching today. It's easy to remember how betrayed and alone Sienna and I both felt in the following few weeks immediately after our parents' separation. Although nobody but our close family members knew any details, it was hard not to immediately feel ostracized among our peers and neighbors. I struggled with feeling out of place at home. Suddenly, the house felt too big for the four of us. Every echo, creak, and bump in the night made me feel on edge. My mom renewed her work license after splitting from my dad, so we were often left home alone after school. I didn't visit my dad for months, but when I did, I felt out of place there as well. I was constantly locking doors and staying in bed all day. More homes felt less homely.

Because my dad lived far away from my mom at the start of their divorce, it was hard to facilitate play-dates with any neighborhood friends. My dad simply couldn't transport us back and forth so frequently, so we often sat at home doing nothing. Sienna and I found many ways to entertain ourselves, though. We would often host cooking competitions or walk to the closest gas station. My relationship with my siblings has changed throughout the years, but it's never been negatively impacted. We grew much closer throughout the divorce, and I like to think that it's one of the reasons that we're so close now. While we experienced something that was out of our control, we turned to each other in our darkest times.

When I asked Sienna what she struggled most with, she had to stop and think about her response for a few minutes before determining that it was the change in everyday routine. When we first went between our mom's house and dad's house, it felt like

we had uprooted ourselves and couldn't find a place to settle. Amy Morin of *Verywell Family* explains that for younger children, it is often hard to find some normalcy in splitting custody between parents (Morin). This shouldn't come as much of a surprise; if you had to take half of your belongings back and forth from each parent's house, you wouldn't be thrilled either. I told Sienna that the hardest part immediately after the divorce was that if we forgot a belonging, Dad would take us to the store and get us the equivalent to keep at his house. But we always took them back to our mom's because those things were new, and we wanted to always have them. Although I was thirteen and therefore three years older than my sister, I was just as forgetful. My dad, who had less custody than my mom, was happy to supply us with things to make his kids as comfortable as possible at his new house. But my sister and I kept running into the same problem: We would get to pick our clothes, shoes, make-up, and accessories, which meant we didn't want to part with them. This led to the cycle repeating itself until we finally grew out of it. This was extremely difficult for me and my siblings. There was already so much unknown, and now we were caught in the dead middle. It never seemed to stop.

After:

Another thing that my sister and I remember feeling was the anxiety and constant uneasiness around my dad that sometimes made us physically sick. From an outside perspective, I can very clearly remember one instance that made me sympathize with my sister. My family and I were watching Sienna at a diving meet, and my dad showed up right before she started her dives. She got so distressed seeing him there (as he had told her he couldn't make it) that she was unable to perform two of her five total dives. At first, she chalked it up to nerves. However, after dissecting this memory with a therapist later, we learned that it was

more of a fight-or-flight response due to overwhelming anxiety and stress.



image cr., Priscilla Du Preez

The American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry states that “while parents may be devastated or relieved by the divorce, children are invariably frightened and confused by the threat to their security” (AACAP). I remember having a panic attack in the middle of a psychology class during high school. I started to get what I can only describe as a “tunnel vision” of sorts: it felt hard to breathe, and my thoughts spiraled into stressful what-ifs. Thankfully, I had an understanding teacher who recognized what was happening immediately. I was able to get through the panic attack in a safe place, and after it was over, I was given some resources through my school counselor for if something similar happened again. This was one of my first larger-scale panic attacks, which happened before I was diagnosed with GAD. In both situations, neither I nor my sister were able to work through our trauma in a positive, long-lasting way. There were no coping mechanisms that we knew to use. We would always brush it off until the next episode occurred.

Eventually, my parents proposed we see a counselor. There was a lot of disagreement and arguing about whom we should see, which certainly wasn’t conducive to improving our mental health. However, after we found a suitable match, we were able to open up about our varying levels of trauma and residual stress. Many of my therapy sessions worked through my tumultuous relationship with my dad. Most of the trauma I was experiencing was from the details that he had only shared with me about my parent’s divorce and not my siblings. About a year in, I had finally made enough progress that I agreed to have a therapy session with my dad in the room. It felt, at the time, like the worst decision I had ever made. However, in the long run, I’d like to think that it helped facilitate my communication strategies with my dad. I’ve been able to open up to my dad about a lot of repressed childhood trauma that I may not have been able to express otherwise. I never would have thought that a decision my dad made to isolate me would affect me as much as it has. However, this just goes to show that with the right tools, you can work through the root of many problems that come about because of trauma.

After our therapist began to work with us through these traumatic responses that my sister and I experienced, it was not only easier to recognize them but also to prevent and cope with any flare-ups. Had my sister and I not gotten the help that we needed in such a safe space, we might not have been able to process the extreme trauma caused by divorce that we were completely unaware of. It is easy for adults and other children to expect an affected child to bounce back and brush trauma off immediately when it’s much harder to do so than one might think. Those who don’t have that judgmental mindset can be extremely valuable as support systems and resources for those who are actively working through stress and trauma. It is for this reason that I’ve always made a great effort to be so open-minded and not assume

that I know anyone's familial situation. Speaking from experience, I know that I would appreciate if others did the same for me, so I try to uphold that respect.



image cr., Dan Meyers

Conclusion:

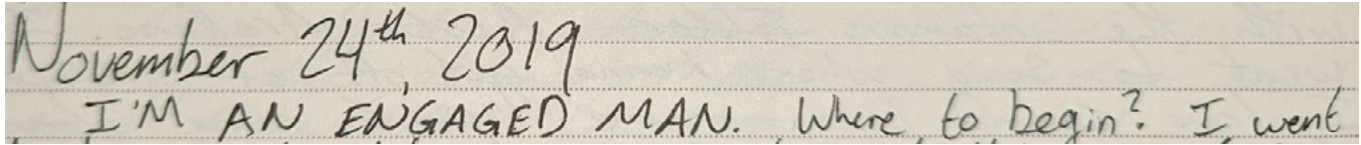
In the end, perhaps my sister and I can be considered a success story in the grand scheme of divorce victims. Since divorce can have different long-lasting consequences on children if they don't have access

to the proper resources, we were quite fortunate. Yes, my parents' divorce was an extremely traumatizing event for my entire family, but it did not break us. With divorce becoming more prevalent every year, leading to more children experiencing their families breaking apart, this should be a wake-up call to society: We need to be better about informing ourselves about the mental distress that takes place before, during, and after a divorce. One of the first ways that we can do that is to be empathetic. I grew up with a few friends whose parents were divorced, but it wasn't until I had lived through it myself that I could adequately empathize with or even respect the boundaries of those who didn't want to disclose their situation. I never assumed that their situation was anything aside from what they chose to share with me. Another way is to simply talk about experiences. Is it my favorite thing in the world to speak about my trauma with divorce? Certainly not. However, I do it because it deserves to be talked about in an inclusive, educated way. I believe that divorce deserves much more recognition because it is so commonly experienced, so why shouldn't I be the person to kickstart the change I want to see?

ADDISON MENDENHALL is a Writing and Rhetoric major at the University of Utah. She currently interns with *The Daily Utah Chronicle* as an opinion writer, and can usually be found writing op-ed's surrounding the mental health crisis. She currently works in medical administration, but aims to combine her passion for mental health and knowledge of literature in the near future. In her spare time, Addison enjoys spending time traveling anywhere outside of Salt Lake City.

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Why Should I Keep a Journal?

I have written in my journal every day for the last four years—this has allowed me to collect stories and experiences that I will be able to treasure forever. I have found journaling to be beneficial in innumerable ways, and I have also discovered a few tips to make a journal more effective and efficient.

Keeping a journal has drastically improved my ability to think critically about my everyday lifestyle and make adjustments to be more productive. I have also noticed a significant improvement in my memory, my ability to perceive myself, and to rethink the day in a constructive way. Journaling allows a person to record moments, flush out unwanted feelings, or find lessons through reflection. That knowledge can be used to improve one's understanding of their place in the world, and ultimately, live a more meaningful life.

Here we are! I decided that I want to type my journal instead of writing it and figured that the New Year was a good time to start. I am not going to establish a quota for how much I am going to write, but I do want to focus on making my writing more meaningful. I want to think more about how I feel about a given event and how it may change me for the future. I am not saying that every day is particularly life-changing, but I simply want to start thinking deeper about, well, everything. – January 1st, 2021

I am a young adult, attending University, and this is perhaps the busiest and most confusing time in my entire life. Young adulthood is a time in life where people often feel lost and are looking for meaning or purpose in their lives. In my experience, a cognitive journal has been a helpful tool for navigating such a confusing time. Young adults who do not keep a journal should start as soon as possible to allow for introspection and reflection. I believe that everyone can improve the way that they write and, more importantly, think critically about their belief system and the way they live.

Thoughtful journal entries help all types of people develop a better, healthier understanding of themselves. Although some people may believe too many feelings are involved when keeping a diary, Delaura Hubbs, M.A., and Charles Brand, Ph.D., explain that they allow “for inner dialogue that connects thoughts, feelings, and actions” (62) in their article “The Paper Mirror: Understanding Reflective Journaling.” This implies that not only are feelings healthy, but they lead to action or change in everyday life. This happens when one records an event or thought from their life, reflects on it, and tries to connect it to the rest of the world through thought and action.

What Does it Mean to Reflect?

Take a moment to pause and think about the word

reflection. What does it mean to reflect on your day? I would argue reflection implies you think about the day's events and seek a deeper meaning. Reflection also empowers the individual to set goals and make plans for the future. In my experience, journaling has allowed me to recognize and create original thoughts. It has helped me understand my own beliefs, and if they seem to contradict my other ideals, I can write about them until I make sense of it.



My First "Volume" of Journals

Reflective, meaningful journaling boosts mental, emotional, and spiritual health. My grandmother, a natural born historian and creative thinker, wrote a brief letter to the Deseret News shortly after the COVID-19 pandemic caused a nationwide shutdown. It is an excellent example of how reflection turns seemingly unconnected events into a meaningful narrative. In her own words:

A few weeks ago, my 40-year-old, treasured, chiming grandfather clock stopped chiming, but continued to keep time.

Alone at home, at age 86, I missed the sound. Global concerns were descending as a coronavirus pandemic was being declared. Devastating problems, worldwide, prevailed. Billions of people would suffer. The future looked bleak, indeed.

The silence of my clock reminded me of the role the

gigantic Big Ben clock had played 80 years ago from the tower of Westminster Palace in London during the Second World War. It soon became apparent that the sound of its chimes sustained the British during the horror of the bombing raids. It was so reassuring that it was even recorded and broadcast throughout the entire United Kingdom during the war years. As long as the clock chimed, there was hope.

With this memory in mind, I made a note to have my clock repaired as soon as the COVID-19 crisis passed. Then early in the morning of March 18, a 5.7 earthquake shook my house on the east side of Salt Lake City, and my clock chimed. It's remarkable! It continues to do so, four times each hour. The sound gives me hope.

This story is the perfect example of how an everyday person can have meaningful thoughts that are worth sharing with others. Her letter would not have been possible without her taking the time to ponder her day and her past experiences. She then formed a creative opinion on what had happened and gave hopeful meaning to a situation that seemed hopeless. In my experience, people like to look for meanings and for good in the world. Taking the time to find lessons learned in every day events help improve mental health and give life purpose.

How do I get started?

I wrote my first journal entry at about eight years old and, if I remember correctly, it was only one sentence long. I wrote another sentence or two when I went to Disneyland at the age of eleven. Finally, I started keeping a daily journal a few months after I graduated high school. I wanted to make journaling a habit, so I set a goal to write at least one page in a small journal each night before I went to bed. I followed a similar pattern for about two years, and before I knew it, I had six of those small journals.

I often complain in my journal, which is somewhat

helpful for me to clear my head, but it is difficult to reread (I suppose no one likes hearing someone complain, not even if it is their past self). At one point, I began keeping a separate “trash” journal—I called it my “trash” journal because I threw it away after about a year of filing complaints in it. I kept my “real” journal at the same time, and it started to become more meaningful and reflective. Venting in a journal, at least for me, is often the fastest way to get words on the page.



Blurred out journal entries, love letter from wife

And others agree, too. In one study, Philip Ullrich, M.A. and Susan Lutgendorf, Ph.D. found that “journaling about a personally experienced stressful or traumatic event may facilitate positive growth from the event (249).” It is important to note that journaling with a positive outlook—i.e., looking to learn something rather than just complain—is extremely helpful in creating growth. The first step to creating a healthy habit is very intuitive – just start. There is no better day than today to begin doing something for yourself.

Don't Be Afraid to Experiment

“I decided to get a new journal now that I’m home and I plan to keep the habit of writing every day. Today was a pretty busy day and we got a lot done, but in a lot of ways I feel overwhelmed by the craziness of life.” – August 9th, 2019



My journals from August of 2019 through June of 2021

When journaling, one needs to experiment—try new methods, reflect on them, and make changes. By doing so, the writer will recognize the positive effects of journaling, even if they feel a bit silly when they first start. Try different formats such as; drawing, audio journals, text-to-speech for e-journals, journaling apps, blogs, social media, photography, and even rap (Miranda). Even a journal with just bullet points of events and thoughts from the day will increase memory and prompt introspection. All of these creative outlets are a form of journaling, and with reflection, can lead to powerful change over time.

In my experience, I typically write for less than 15 minutes a day. I bullet point events or thoughts on my phone throughout the day, then, at the end of the evening, I reflect on the day for a few minutes and then write in my journal. Sometimes, I write only a few sentences per day and other times I write a few pages. I try to make it meaningful—and it is not always profound—but it is all part of the process. Before I began journaling, I would often have trouble falling asleep because I would be thinking of the “to-do list” for the next day. Now, I write every night before bed, and that has helped immensely. So, decide when and how often to write, set a timer for 15 minutes, and start writing.

And now keep going!

“My laptop broke about ten days ago due to an unfortunate accident involving a half glass of water. As a result, I have not written in my journal for at least that long, but I did manage to note down a few things on my phone every day, so I am going to try to fill in the gaps.” – July 29, 2021



My Broken Laptop

On many occasions, I have not wanted to continue writing because I felt my life was uninteresting, too stressful, or I did not have the time. But I decided to write anyway, even if it was just a little. Journaling became a habit and I know that if I were to stop, I would regret it. If I write only a paragraph each day for a week, I can tell the week was rough. If I reflect on that when I am feeling better the next week, I gain perspective and resilience for the next disappointing or difficult week.

I often get a few days or even weeks behind in my journal, but I always manage to catch up. Sometimes, I have to summarize whole weeks or even a semester of school and it is always worth it. At times, getting behind can be helpful because I cannot remember all the things I did, so I write *what I thought*.

The world is a fast-paced place full of confusing messages. This is especially the case for young adults

because these years are a time of metamorphosis. They are expected to decide who they are and what their place in the world really is. Journaling methodically can help young adults sort out conflicting ideas and come to their own conclusions. Journaling improves mental health because it allows a person to process all the different emotions of daily life. Journaling has allowed me to become comfortable with who I am as I document my experiences, my perspectives, and most importantly, finding my place. And it will do the same for you if they are willing to try it. So, start recording experiences now before they are only distant memories. Take the time to reflect on those experiences, ideas, and thoughts. Interpret their meanings personally and keep on writing.



My Current “e-journal”

AUTHOR’S NOTE ON COVID-19

“Today was St. Patty’s Day, but it didn’t feel like it - I didn’t see anyone in green, just people in blue hygiene masks.” – March 17th 2020

When I wrote this piece in Summer of 2021, I didn’t want to write too much about COVID-19 because I thought everyone was pretty sick of it—including me. However, looking back on this paper I feel it is worth showing some perspective that I’ve gained through the pandemic, my marriage, and writing.

I find it very instructive to reflect on journal entries from the beginning of the pandemic and from part-way through it. I believe that I have a responsibility to record what I thought because it is a unique perspective on something that has affected nearly every person on the globe. I encourage the reader to do the same. Write your own short passage about your experience with COVID-19 and then reflect on it in a year (or longer—show it to your kids! Or nieces and nephews, I don't care!).

2020 was a really cruddy year for most people, but I actually had a great year. I got married to the girl of

my dreams, I started a Roth IRA for our retirement, I got LASIK, and I even bought a new car. I did well academically, and we survived financially. McKenna now has a pretty good job and I have some good future career plans. The whole COVID thing has been frustrating for me, but I have been very blessed. I never got it and my loved ones all were relatively unscathed. I have a lot of goals for this next year (and in general), so I think I will list a few of them here, right on the first page, so I can reflect on them easily.
– January 1st, 2021

TANNER HOOLE is a Senior at the University of Utah. In Spring of 2023, he will be graduating with a Bachelor of Arts in Biomedical Physics, minor in Chemistry—with hopeful plans to matriculate into medical school soon after. In his free time, Tanner loves to hang out with his wife, McKenna, play sudoku, journal, and snowmobile.

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THE UNDERGRADUATE JOURNAL OF CONTEMPORARY ISSUES AND MEDIA

Call for Proposals
Deadline: January 15, 2023

The Undergraduate Journal of Contemporary Issues and Media examines issues that are relevant across global contexts, through they may be uniquely identified and experienced by individuals and groups. The online journal publishes a wide range of media/texts showcasing different perspectives and ideas. Both traditional and nontraditional media will be represented:

Essays, opinion and nonfiction texts, including research	Short and flash fiction, poetry, zines
Podcasts, music, soundscapes	Art, film, infographics, photography

Our goal is to provide a forum for creative and informative perspectives that educate, compel, and move. We request submissions that are mindful and provocative. They do not have to be completed drafts but can be drafts that could use an editorial eye. In other words, we are happy to work with those who submit to bring their contribution to fruition. Should your submission be selected to be included in the journal, please be prepared to engage in the editing process with our editors. The journal is open to all undergraduates in any field.

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Environmental Progress	Social Justice Realities
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Letters to the Future: Open choice to whomever about whatever issues move you	

Our deadline is flexible in that submissions are accepted on a rolling basis, with a final deadline of January 15th of every year. MP3 for sound; MP4 for filmic; JPG for photography; and we have no required fonts/sizes for creative texts, but please use Arial 12-pt for traditional texts. Submissions should be sent to: undergraduatejournal@utah.edu. Submissions will be blind peer-reviewed. The journal is annually published the following January on WorldCat.

Note: Please make sure to complete the Institutional Review Board Process at your institution or receive signed permission from your participants if doing research with people. Also, be mindful of copyright when using photographs or other work from the internet or social media.

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