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Work title: Exploiting Vulnerability: How the Junk Food Industry Targets Impoverished Communities

Category: Critical Essay

Award: Silver Key

As health in the U.S. rapidly declines, it becomes even more critical to expose the predatory tactics the junk food industry utilizes to target vulnerable communities. According to Hayley Janssen et al., of the School of Sports Studies, Leisure, and Nutrition at John Moores University, “Fast foods have become increasingly popular in recent decades and are thought to be a key driver in increasing levels of overweight and obesity due to their unfavorable nutritional content” (Janssen et al.). These foods have been proven to adversely impact consumers' health in a significant way; additionally troublesome is that people from lower socioeconomic demographics in particular are more likely to consume these foods. According to researchers, there is a direct link between low income and obesity, as fast food is full of unhealthy, calorie-dense ingredients (Janssen et al.). Alarming, through touting its affordability and convenience, the junk food industry strategically targets people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, which leads to an increasing prevalence of long-term health issues among this vulnerable demographic.

Consumers of fast food acknowledge the appeal of junk food as it is more convenient and accessible, health issues notwithstanding. According to Hayley Janssen et al., “A recent report showed a strong link between deprivation and density of fast food outlets, with deprived [poorer] areas having more fast food outlets per 100,000 of the population. . . poorest areas had a higher exposure to fast food outlets” (Janssen et al.). The relatively high number of fast-food establishments in economically challenged areas makes it simple for consumers to access these foods, as costs and inconvenience are minimized. Seeking healthier options would require these consumers to spend more time traveling to reach purveyors of nutritious food, which also tends to be more expensive. Furthermore, in a survey from the Nutrition Department at Harvard School of Health, an anonymous participant states, “It is difficult for me to eat fewer fast food meals because I work two shifts, so it’s easier for me to buy them [her family] something to eat” (Sonneville et al.). Evidently, parents confirm that it is easier to feed their families fast food due to limitations on both their time and budgets. Consumer anecdotes and data provide evidence for the heightened accessibility of junk food in poorer socioeconomic demographics, which ultimately leads to increased junk food consumption.

In addition to accessibility, affordability is a key consideration, and economic researchers have identified a significant affordability gap between junk food and foods regarded as healthier. As stated by Charles L Baum and Chou Shin-Yi, at the Middle Tennessee State University Department of Economics and Finance, "Calorie-dense food has become less expensive relative to foods that are not mass produced" (Baum and Shin Yi). For instance, while a nutrition-dense, 400 calorie salad from Sweetgreen costs upward of 14 dollars, a 590 calorie Big Mac from McDonalds costs approximately \$6.49 (McDonalds Corp. and Sweetgreen Corp.). Inexpensive and readily available food options such as the Big Mac, packed with preservatives, toxins, and calories, have a direct correlation to growing health issues in society. Tahereh Alavi Hojjat of DeSales University, in the "Review of Business and Finance Study", explains that "Fruits and vegetables were not a priority among low-income families and that they chose to spend their limited resources on items that were perceived as more essential" (Hojjat). With restricted financial resources, people with less money at their disposal are therefore more likely to consume cheaper foods, which often lack necessary nutrients. Data indicates that "Healthy foods were three times more expensive than unhealthy food.... rise in price over 10 years was steeper for healthy foods... highest for fruits and vegetables" (Janssen et al.). These research studies provide support that junk food is more affordable than healthier food and thus more appealing to lower-income people.

Ultimately, concern about junk food's dominance in lower socioeconomic neighborhoods is driven by the neighborhoods' relatively higher obesity rates, according to health researchers. There is a strong link between fast food and poor health, and lower-income people with limited budgets often resort to purchasing these unhealthy meals. Studies have determined that obesity rates are higher for poorer people. According to Wenes Reis et al., of the School of Public Health at Loma Linda University, "Children of low-income parents were twice as likely to have increased BMI scores compared to children from higher-income families. Some studies suggest that this could be due to low-income families not having access to affordable healthy foods" (Reis et al.). Furthermore, as Matthew Patetta et al., of the Department of Nutrition at the University of North Carolina explains, "Low-income individuals are more likely to consume processed, energy-dense foods than high-income individuals. This is directly linked to the relatively cheap prices of unhealthy foods and low-income individuals' limited access to healthy food sources" (Patteta et al.). People with less wealth at their disposal are more inclined to consume junk foods, which clearly have severe impacts on health, causing health issues to be more prevalent within lower-income families.

The increased junk food consumption and ensuing increased health issues among the economically disadvantaged is not a surprise or coincidence; from a structural perspective, the junk food industry designs itself to appeal to and target lower-income consumers. As stated by Adrian Cameron et al., of the School of Exercise and Nutrition Science at Deakin University,

“Exposure to energy-dense snack foods and soft drinks in supermarkets were greater in socio-economically disadvantaged neighborhoods... the total aisle length of energy-dense foods and soft drinks remained 12.5% greater in stores from the most disadvantaged neighborhoods” (Cameron et al.). Snack foods with poor nutritional quality are strategically more available in supermarkets in lower-income areas, indicating that the fast food industry intentionally preys upon the economically disadvantaged. Furthermore, schools that have fast food establishments near them tend to be schools with more minority/low-income students. Heather D’Angelo et al., of the Department of Health and Nutrition at the University of North Carolina writes, “Low-income and Hispanic students are disproportionately exposed to... fast food restaurants near their schools.” In fact, the relationship between student demographic and number of fast food restaurants can be quantified:

Nearly 53% of schools comprising the highest quartile of Hispanic students, 41% of schools comprising the highest quartile of Black students, and 46% of schools comprising the highest quartile of students receiving free or reduced-price lunches . . . had a fast food restaurant within 800 meters compared with . . . only 21% of schools within the highest white student population quartile (D’Angelo et al.).

The junk food industry understands the vulnerability of lower-income people, and so industry players deliberately position themselves to have a large presence in these communities.

The junk food industry appeals to people with limited economic resources, providing easily accessible and affordable calorie-dense, nutrient-deficient foods. This results in increased adverse weight gain among this demographic, as well as added risks of heart attacks and strokes. Consumers of fast food attest to the appeal of the affordability of junk food when working with a limited budget. Furthermore, with limited time, economically challenged consumers find the convenience enticing. Economic researchers identify a large affordability gap between junk foods and organic foods, providing a rationale for why individuals from lower-income backgrounds are drawn to purchasing and consuming these less expensive foods. Health researchers connect the direct impact of junk food to obesity, underscoring how lower-income people who consume more junk food are at a higher health risk. Finally, the junk food industry, seeking enhanced profitability, deliberately positions itself more frequently in poorer neighborhoods to tempt lower-income people. More fast food locations and more poor-quality foods in supermarkets can be found in poorer areas. The consequences of junk food industry strategies rest upon impoverished communities in the form of health issues; therefore, consumers should challenge the industry to provide healthy food choices across all demographics so that economically challenged people do not have to sacrifice their health.

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Name: Gabriella Silverstein

Work title: Children Adapting to Life After Displacement

Category: Critical Essay

Award: Gold Key

Introduction

As per the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which provides aid and assistance to refugees globally, “at the end of 2021, of the 89.3 million forcibly displaced people, an estimated 36.5 million (41%) are children below 18 years of age” (UNHCR, 2022). A displaced person is defined, by the Merriam Webster Dictionary, as “a person expelled, deported, or impelled to flee from his or her country of nationality or habitual residence by the forces or consequences of war or oppression” (Merriam-Webster, 2019). Displaced individuals often seek resettlement in displaced persons camps that are either run by the UNHCR, specific countries, or non-governmental organizations leading to no current standard of operation (UNHCR, 2013). These camps are intended to “offer a safe haven for [displaced persons] and meet their most basic needs such as food, water, shelter, [and] medical treatment” (UNHCR, 2013). These are the everyday basic needs for individuals to survive, but the needs of the displaced children are far greater and more specific. This is because “at the most basic biological level, the stress from a crisis can be ‘toxic’ and can have an impact on how the brain in children develops” (Madfis et al., 2010). Thus, in order for displaced children to adapt to their changed life circumstances after displacement, supportive parent-child relationships, mental health care, and education are essential to continuing their mental and emotional development without a lasting impact from their trauma.

Supportive Parent-Child Relationships

While a portion of the children living in displaced persons camps are orphans, a large majority are with their parental figures. A relationship with parental figures can allow a child to adapt to their changing environment, if that relationship is stable and supportive. In “The impact of resettlement on Karen refugee family relationships: A qualitative exploration”, Jennifer Simmelink McCleary, the Assistant Professor at Tulane University School of Social Work, analyzes, “strong family relationships have been cited... as one of the most significant protective factors for combatting stress and enhancing successful resettlement” (McCleary, 2017). Parents remain resilient for their children in order to support them and in turn are able to survive themselves. As depicted in “Migrant Mother”, a photograph taken in 1936 by

Dorothea Lange in Nipomo, California, the women in the image, covered in dust with an exhausted and anxious expression on her face is pictured as the rock, metaphorically and physically, for the two children leaning on her, and the baby wrapped up in her arms (Lange, 1936). The image symbolized hope for many internally displaced persons during the Dust Bowl, a time of great migration in the United States (Pruitt, 2020). The woman, Florence Owens Thompson, came forward years after the photo was taken and explained that after moving from Oklahoma to California to find work, her husband “died of tuberculosis... [Florence] was left to support six children by picking... 450-500 pounds of cotton a day, leaving home before daylight and coming home after dark. ‘We just existed,’ she said. ‘We survived, let’s put it that way’” (Pruitt, 2020). Not only were her children dependent on her for food and money, but also for their own emotional resilience through their hardships. This can drain parents emotionally and lead to a strain on their relationships with their children. Furthermore, in “Emergency Safe Spaces in Haiti and the Solomon Islands”, Josh Madfis, the Deputy Program Director at Save the Children International, a non-governmental organization that aids in constructing displacement camps world wide with a focus on care for children, explains that “for children, the need for a caring parent or adult is paramount [but] when they are with their parents, children often do not get the necessary support. Parents are often too busy re-establishing their lives or are traumatized themselves” (Madfis et al., 2010). This is evident when analyzing, “In their Own Words: Resilience among Haitian Survivors of the 2010 Earthquake”, written by Guitele J. Rahill, PhD, LCSW the Associate Professor at the College of Behavioral and Community Sciences at the University of South Florida. Rahill and fellow researchers looked into the many different ways in which the internally displaced survivors, as well as those who remained in their hometowns, stayed resilient after the devastating 2010 earthquake in Haiti (Rahill et al., 2016). When interviewing a survivor in one of the town halls, she explained “everybody’s head is spinning, because everybody has problems, and so that’s what has happened. You come to not have a mind anymore; problems have ravaged us—you can even forget your own children” (Rahill et al., 2016). The woman explains the terrifying event of losing oneself in worry and becoming so completely overwhelmed that one no longer pays any mind to their own children (Rahill et al., 2016). This presents an issue in children’s adaptation because these parental relationships play a key role in allowing them to feel safe and have a sense of normalcy. There are ways in which parents can be aided in their parenting methods and the issues that their own mental health presents to their ability to parent. In “Parenting Interventions for Refugees and Forcibly Displaced Families: A Systematic Review” by Sarah Gillespie of the Institute of Child Development at the University of Minnesota, Gillespie illustrates, “effective parenting skills may be important targets for interventions that could strengthen children’s outcomes and... [parents] experience psychosocial benefits from parent training interventions, including reductions in PTSD and depression symptoms” (Gillespie et al., 2022). Focused intervention that aids parents in their parenting efforts would allow for the strengthening of parent-child

relationships and in doing so will allow both the parents and children to adapt to their life circumstances.

Mental Health Care

in very high rates among war-affected children” (Betancourt et al., 2009). Due to the highly specific nature of the traumatic experiences of displaced children, it is difficult to predict the exact mental health care necessities of all children, but having resources available for these children to use allows for the first steps in adapting to their new lives. The effects of utilizing mental health care to aid children in adapting to life in displacement camps is described in “Emergency Safe Spaces in Haiti and the Solomon Islands” by Josh Madfis. A displacement camp was set up in Haiti, following severe hurricane related floods, that specifically monitored and evaluated 95 children for six weeks, and “initially, children showed signs of particularly unhealthy psychosocial behaviour... the children were lonely, dependent, shy, anxious[,] demonstrated anti-social behaviour... were withdrawn, sad and lacked energy” (Madfis et al., 2010). The variety of mental health problems demonstrated in these children in the beginning of treatment drastically changed once the allotted time for treatment was over. This is shown through the testimony of a 13-year-old female participant, who illustrates that her participation “kill[ed her] sadness and sorrow [. . .] allowed a sense of sharing... [and she] even spoke to the Safe Spaces social workers about [her] problems” (Madfis et al., 2010). While, as demonstrated, mental health care allows for displaced children to treat their mental health problems, and is an essential aspect in adapting to their changed life circumstances, care is not always available. Catherine Lee, of the Department of International Health at Johns Hopkins University School of Public Health, in “Mental Health and Psychosocial Problems Among Conflict-Affected Children in Kachin State, Myanmar: a Qualitative Study” further analyzes this issue. Lee explains, the “availability of mental health interventions for conflict-affected children is lacking, with treatment gaps for children even higher than those for adults in low resource settings” (Lee et al., 2018). This inability to access adequate care hinders displaced children’s ability to care for and treat their mental health problems, which makes it even less likely these children will adjust successfully to life after displacement even if they have a supportive parent-child relationship.

Education

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights written by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948 declares, “Everyone has the right to education” (United Nations, 1948). Not only does access to education serve as one of the basic human rights, but for displaced children it allows for a sense of normalcy that will bring them closer to living a “normal” life. Through his research in “Inclusive education in a refugee camp for children with disabilities: How are school setting and children’s behavioral functioning related?” Thomas M. Crea, of Boston College School of

Social Work, found that “schools allow for closer supervision, [and] opportunities for safeguarding... Education can help provide a sense of normalcy for children whose lives have been disrupted by violence” (Crea et al., 2022) While access to education would allow for great steps in the path towards complete adaptation to their changed reality, there are barriers. Crea explains that “children in refugee camps have much lower educational attainment levels than children worldwide. Only 68% of children in refugee camps attend primary school, compared to 91% worldwide. This number drops to only 34% attendance for secondary schools in refugee camps compared to 84% worldwide” (Crea et al., 2022). The drastic drop in secondary school levels evidence a lack of continued education and in turn the benefits of education do not persist into displaced children’s teenage years. There are multiple factors that result in the lower percentage of displaced children in school compared to the worldwide average. Sarah Khasalamwa-Mwandha, the Associate Professor in the Department of Welfare and Participation at Western Norway University of Applied Sciences identifies some of these contributing factors. Khasalamwa-Mwandha describes, “overcrowding [in schools in the camp] was a key challenge... Access to secondary... education was limited due to poverty and distance from schools” (Khasalamwa-Mwandha, 2018). While these issues impair access to the schools, there are additional factors that affect the education received in these schools. In “Beyond poverty fixation: interrogating the experiences of internally displaced persons in Nigeria”, Dr. Philomina Okeke-Ihejirika, a Professor at the University of Alberta Department of Women’s and Gender Studies, finds that one of the displacement camps in Nigeria “had nearly 20 [displaced persons] who were certified teachers before displacement. These individuals volunteered to teach... Consequently, while [displaced persons] have made efforts to assist themselves, there needs to be more institutionalized support” (Okeke-Ihejirika et al., 2020). As presented by Dr. Okeke-Ihejirika, many displacement camps attempt to provide for themselves by utilizing residents of the camps as teachers, but this does not provide the adequate staffing for these schools to be run properly (Okeke-Ihejirika et al., 2020). UNICEF, the United Nations Children's Fund, which works to provide education for all children globally, presents six key recommendations for displacement camps and countries around the world to provide quality education for displaced children: facilitate social integration, remove working barriers, collaborate and coordinate with partners, support government education interventions for host, migrant, and displaced communities, create data platforms that document education services for the forcibly displaced, and, lastly, create international systems of academic recognition (UNICEF, n.d.). In addition to further preventing any developmental delays by continuing their education, children will not have to rely exclusively on the education, if any, they may have received before their displacement. They hope that by implementing these six recommendations, children will be able to access education and utilize it as a key component in their adaptation to their new lives, along with the additional aspects of supportive parent-child relationships, and mental health care.

Conclusion

Supportive parent-child relationships, mental health care, and an adequate education are essential to allow displaced children to continue to develop physically and emotionally when adapting to their lives in displaced persons camps. The mental health problems resulting from the traumatic experiences that landed children and their families in the displacement camps must be addressed through adequate treatment, though currently lacking. In contrast to non-displaced children, displaced children do not have the benefit of a structured environment in primary and secondary education. By implementing UNICEF's recommendations on education, displaced children can experience these benefits to the same degree as non-displaced children. Lastly, strengthening the parent-child relationship, regardless of the challenges of life in displaced person camps, can dramatically increase the chance of successful adaptation. It is important to acknowledge that every displaced child is different, and so the ways in which they adapt will always comprise slightly different paths, but these steps are necessary as a beginning. Aiding these children today will give them the opportunity to lead happier lives as adults, and become contributing members of society.

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Name: Gabriella Silverstein

Work title: Design of Violent Video Games Affect on Behavior of Young Adults

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Award: Gold Key

Introduction-

In 2018, 19-year-old Nikolas Cruz fatally shot seventeen members of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School community, and three months later 17-year-old Dimitrios Pagourtzis killed ten at Santa Fe High School (Ye 2020). Both shooters spent a multitude of hours, daily, playing violent video games which affected their decisions to commit these mass tragedies (Ye 2020). Over the past few decades, technological advancements have resulted in companies evolving the design of their video games (Ivory and Kalyanaraman 2007). These technological changes, mainly, the use of virtual reality systems, modify the implications of videogames on adolescent and young adults' behavior (Ivory and Kalyanaraman 2007). As the field of animation progresses, the sense of realism and immersion players experience during violent video game play increases, creating an additional area that affects adolescent and young adult players' behavior (Barlett and Rodeheffer 2009). Through a social lens, this paper will analyze the range of negative and positive conclusions regarding the behavioral effects of design in violent video games. Although many of these studies show the link between violent video games and aggressive behavior, it is imperative to acknowledge they are unable to ensure the inclusion of all other important variables (e.g., family violence, abuse, and psychological history) (Exelmans et al. 2015).

Virtual Reality Systems-

The use of virtual reality systems in violent video games creates a highly immersive virtual environment that exacerbates the effect of violent video games on players' aggressive behavior. Susan Persky, who has her M.A. and Ph.D. in social psychology, in collaboration with Jim Blascovich, created experiments using intentionally simplistic violent video games to compare virtual reality with desktop video game applications. Persky and Blascovich demonstrate a higher degree of presence, defined as the feeling of immersion experienced by participants when using "immersive virtual environment technology platforms" (IVETP) a term that encompasses virtual reality systems, compared to using "desktop computer platforms" (Persky and Blascovich 2008). Persky and Blascovich further explain their findings, supporting the belief that "playing violent video games using an IVETP would lead to increased aggressive

feelings and behavior... [and] suspect that it is due to the immersive and novel nature of this medium” (Persky and Blascovich 2008). Proven here, playing violent video games in virtual reality intensifies aggressive thoughts and behavior due to the heightened sense of immersion. However, a portion of researchers have failed to prove an intensified feeling of immersion is at all felt in virtual reality systems. This issue is demonstrated in the findings of the Assistant Professor of Psychology at the University Institute of Lisbon, Practica Arriaga, et al., as it explains results “suggest that the [virtual reality] device failed to provide the intended feeling of ‘being in’ the game environment” (Arriaga et al. 2008). While these researchers were unable to adequately prove the heightened sense of immersion in players they did not use presence as a factor. As a result, this limits the legitimacy of their findings unlike the research conducted by Persky and Blascovich. While a portion of researchers are unable to find a correlation, as proven here because their findings are limited and non-encompassing, a stronger argument can be made that a correlation exists between virtual reality systems, immersion, and aggressive behavior.

Personalized Avatars-

Along with the advances in technology, the progression in animation has resulted in the ability to customize highly realistic avatars to appear to resemble the game player. In collaboration with Tobias Greitemeyer, Jack Hollingdale, a clinical psychologist at Compass Psychology Services Ltd, showed that when playing a video game using personalized avatars, the variable used to assess aggressive behavior had considerably increased (Hollingdale and Greitemeyer 2013). Hollingdale and Greitemeyer suggest this to be due to heightened identification with personalized avatars (Hollingdale and Greitemeyer 2013). As shown here, due to the ability to identify with an avatar that resembles oneself the aggressive behavior resulting from the video game is heightened and further affects the players' behavior. An additional aspect of avatar identification involves the stereotype of a typically “more aggressive” person. In an analysis conducted by Grace S. Yang, a postdoctoral research fellow at the University of Michigan, and fellow researchers it is explained that “playing a video game as a violent male avatar increased aggression relative to playing as a violent female avatar for both men and women” (Yang et al. 2014). In this instance, the stereotype of a male aggressor is used as an example to demonstrate the increased aggression caused by playing with specific avatars. While taking into account the use of a perceivably “more aggressive” avatar, along with identification with these avatars, players' aggressive behavior is further affected as a direct result of playing a violent video game.

Game Play Design-

In addition to the personalization of avatars, video games have been evolving to differ in game play experiences; these changes among video games elicit differing behavioral consequences

from players. In a study conducted by Nicholas L. Carnagey, who earned his Ph.D. in social psychology, and Craig A. Anderson it was found that, “rewarding violence in video games can increase aggressive affect, aggressive cognition, and aggressive behavior” (Carnagey and Anderson 2005). While this reward perpetuated violent behavior it was found that punishment of violent behavior caused aggression comparable with that of nonviolent video games (Carnagey and Anderson 2005). In addition to violent game play reward and punishment a differentiation between aggression levels also appears when violence is not directed towards virtual human beings. Luca Chittaro, professor of Human-Computer Interaction at the University of Udine, along with Riccardo Sioni explain the emotional destigmatization of violence against insects does not parallel that of violence against human beings (Chittaro and Sioni 2012). They attribute this to the lack of emotional connection and moral stigma towards violence against insects (Chittaro and Sioni 2012). Overall this study serves to prove that violence in video games impacts players differently based on who or what that violence is targeting. Proven here, game play design overall can drastically change the implications on players behavior, specifically an aggressive response, based on the target of violence and the reward and punishment systems of the game.

Conclusion-

As proven in this paper, the adverse effects of violent video games perpetuated by a multitude of factors, greatly affect the aggressive behavior of adolescents and young adults. The constant technological advancements of virtual reality and the improvements in animation and personalization of avatars act as some of the key implications that have and will continue to change violent video games’ effects on game players. While violence in general appears to only produce a negative implication when directed towards human beings, additional factors, such as reward and punishment systems, in these games affect players’ behavior. All in all, when playing a violent video game, the behavioral effects are exacerbated by the inclusion of not only violence, but also of specific factors that augment behavioral change. While in extreme cases these effects can lead to mass tragedies, all violent game players are affected and should be cautious.

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Name: Noah Elmalich

Work title: How Assimilation Hinders Cultural Presence of Latino Immigrants

Category: Critical Essay

Award: Silver Key

According to Customs and Border Protection data, “The number of undocumented immigrant crossings at the southwest border for fiscal year 2022 topped 2.76 million, breaking the previous annual record by more than 1 million” (Ainsley). Throughout its history, one of the key elements of the United States has been its acceptance of immigrants and their cultures. The nation is shaped by its diversity and blend of cultures, and each year, this “melting pot” culture grows exponentially. However, the impact of immigrating to the United States on the immigrants themselves is not talked about enough. Assimilation causes Latino immigrants in the United States to lose their cultural presence, which negatively impacts their development and destroys the generational transfer of values.

The assimilation of adolescent migrants into the American school system negatively affects their development. In a journal of community psychology on academic achievement among immigrant and U.S.-born adolescents, psychological expert Catherine DeCarlo Santiago et al., argues that migrant Latino high school students are at a higher risk of psychological distress and low academic achievement as a result of the increased stress of immigrating, assimilating, and poverty, oftentimes forcing them to dropout. Santiago states, “There are clear disparities in educational attainment when looking at Latinos and the general population in the United States, with Latinos being at increased risk of dropping out of high school and having academic achievement that falls below that of their non-Latino White peers” (Santiago et al.). The difference in dropout rates demonstrates how the burden of assimilating into American society hinders Latino adolescents' academic potential. Santiago et al. then establish that some Latino students face family responsibilities that further hinder their academic potential. The authors state, “some Latino students face additional stress due to family obligations and responsibilities that can interfere with academic functioning” (Santiago et al). The added stress of family responsibilities, which can include “babysitting” or doing chores to support their working parents, interferes with Latino adolescent's ability to succeed academically as they have less time to study and focus their efforts on school. Research professors of social work, Martica L. Bacallao at the University of New York and Paul R. Smokowski at the University of North Carolina, claim that migrant Latino students immensely struggle with learning as a result of unsupportive school environments. The authors include the testimony of Maria Dolores, a Mexican adolescent immigrant who describes her perspective on the American school system.

Maria states in her testimony, “I cannot communicate with the children or the teachers at school. I cannot do my work. I am alone, and I’m crying because I can’t read, and I can’t talk to them, and I need to learn. In Mexico, I liked to do my [school] work. I liked to do all of it” (Bacallao and Smokowski). Dolores’ experience demonstrates how the stress of integrating into American culture and learning English causes young children like Maria to become discouraged; thus proving detrimental to their development. In short, the cultural challenges that adolescent Latino immigrants face in American schools create roadblocks to their future development as participants in society.

Latino immigrants face an additional cultural challenge in preserving their original language. According to Lynet Uttal, a Professor of Human Development and Family Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, “The providers are acutely aware that Latino children are being raised in a culture that is different from their own. They are very concerned that certain forms of cultural knowledge are becoming lost. Most obviously, they see that their children lose the ability to speak in Spanish and to be able to communicate with their parents and extended families” (Uttal). Thus, the cultural presence of Latino children is diminishing in the United States as they begin to abandon Spanish, especially at home. Additionally, in a journal on the caveats of the US model of cultural integration, Professor of Sociology Nancy Fonder at Hunter College, City University of New York argues that while the United States recognizes and celebrates the diversity of its inhabitants, it also has a history of expecting children to assimilate and become more American. Fonder even goes as far as to state, “The public schools, it was widely believed at the time, should force ‘hyphenated Americans’ to become ‘Americans pure and simple’ and to shed their old customs and cultures” (Fonder). Fonder reinforces the argument that the U.S. school system has a history of forcing Latino children to adopt English as their new language, thereby becoming out of touch with their cultural heritage. As a result, the generational transfer of values is disrupted as Latino children lose the ability to communicate with their parents and extended families in Spanish.

As Latino immigrants slowly integrate into American culture, the process of “ethnic attrition” grows exponentially. Francisca M. Antman, an expert in international immigration at the University of Colorado Boulder, explains that the increasing issue of ethnic attrition is resulting in many Mexican immigrants fully abandoning their culture. Antman defines this process as “a US-born descendent of a Mexican immigrant fail[ing] to self-identify as Mexican” (Antman et al). Moreover, Brian Duncan, from the University of Colorado at Denver, and Stephen J. Trejo, from the University of Texas at Austin, experts in the intergenerational progress of immigration, comment, “Virtually all (99 percent) first-generation immigrants born in a Spanish-speaking country identified as Hispanic in the Census, but the rate of Hispanic identification dropped to 83 percent for the second generation, 73 percent for the third

generation, 44 percent for the fourth generation, and all the way down to 6 percent for higher generations of Hispanics” (Duncan and Trejo). The 1970 U.S. government Census proves that as time progresses, the rate of Mexican-Americans abandoning their heritage skyrockets. Although the census was surveyed over 50 years ago, Latino immigrants are still abandoning their culture to this day. Duncan and Trejo support this notion as they further argue that the exponential growth of ethnic attrition can be attributed to the rising intermarriage rates: “As of 2000, more than a third of married, U.S.-born Mexicans have non-Mexican spouses, with the overwhelming majority of these non-Mexican spouses being U.S.-born, non-Hispanic whites” (Duncan and Trejo). Therefore, the increase in intermarriage rates further accelerates the rate of “ethnic attrition” with each generation. Over time, Latino youth stop speaking Spanish, losing their culture and sense of themselves as they are more exposed to the American school system. In the end, they stop identifying as Hispanic entirely as the pressures of conforming to American culture become overwhelming. Consequently, the multigenerational process of “ethnic attrition” disrupts the sharing of values from one generation to the next.

As seen by the range of sources above, millions of Latino families immigrate to the United States annually in search of a home where they can preserve their cultures. A Latina childcare provider speaking on the increase in immigration states, “please let’s not lose our identity. Let’s not change for anything who we are. Let us be ourselves at all times” (Uttal). As migrant youths adapt to the American school system, they are left out and unable to develop academically. From the moment they arrive in the United States, these children are being taught to abandon their Spanish language and values. All of these issues culminate into a Latino culture that gradually disappears with each generation. The influence of Latino culture in the United States is diminishing, and if action is not taken immediately, it could disappear forever.

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Name: Shayna Soroka

Work title: Modern Diet Culture and Its Effects on Female Adolescents

Category: Critical Essay

Award: Silver Key

Introduction

In a 2009 *Women's Wear Daily* interview, British supermodel Kate Moss remarked, "Nothing tastes as good as skinny feels" (Costello 2009). This motto is one that encapsulates the harmful ideas pushed by diet culture then and now, 13 years later. Many criticized Kate Moss for this statement, saying that she was promoting eating disorders, and although she claims she wasn't, this quote, according to Valerie Loftus, journalist for *Stellar Magazine*, "became the unofficial slogan of pro-anorexia websites" (Loftus 2018). Evidently, this pervasive ideal of thinness over anything else has become a harmful ideal that affects adolescents, especially females, severely. According to a study in the *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* by Shannon Micheal, PhD, Health Scientist for the Center of Disease Control and Kathryn Wentzel, PhD, a Professor of Human Development, states that "young adolescents are dissatisfied with their body weight and shape, with about 40% of girls and 23% of boys dissatisfied with their bodies" (Micheal et al. 2014). The perpetuation of a skinny ideal leads to body dissatisfaction, desire for thinness, objectification, bad mental health, and a high probability for the development of eating disorders (Rounsefell et al. 2020). Limitations to this research include the fact that the current diet culture is promoted considerably differently than how it was just a decade prior, and as such the long term effects of the current diet culture are not able to be effectively discussed. This paper will examine the effects of modern day diet culture through a social and psychological lens.

Body Dissatisfaction, the Desire for Thinness, and Objectification

Modern diet culture is promoted largely through the idea that thin bodies are the epitome of beauty, and this idea is shown throughout many facets of society, especially traditional and social media (Butkowski et al. 2019). According to an article on body surveillance by Chelsea Butkowski, PhD, many consequences of diet culture "only stand to become more prevalent with the growing ubiquity and inescapability of smartphone technology and photo-sharing" (Butkowski et al. 2019). Professor Richard Perloff, PhD, provides a similar statement stating that "Social media [is] filled with pictures of an individual, her online friends, and multitudes of thin-idealized images... Social networking sites are available for viewing, content-creating, and

editing 24/7, on mobile devices, anywhere, anytime” (Perloff 2014). As such, this allows for constant access, via media, to the thin ideals of diet culture. In the media, thin and beautiful women are often objectified, and thus valued for their physical appearance over their other qualities (Butkowski et al. 2019). As a consequence of the objectification of thin women in media, many female adolescents experience self objectification where they view themselves from an outsider's perspective and place immense focus on their physical appearance, including thinness and attractiveness (Butkowski et al. 2019). According to Perloff, “[Through] appearance-focused Facebook conversations, picture-sharing, and fashion-focused tweets, contemporary mass and social media exert a potent impact on the development of thinness ideals and body dissatisfaction” (Perloff 2014). This correlates to Butkowski’s statement of how girls self objectify due to “consistent exposure to objectification of female bodies in media and interpersonal interaction” (Butkowski et al. 2019). This self objectification then leads to body surveillance which is the “preoccupation with monitoring one's physical appearance and attractiveness” (Butkowski et al. 2019). Consequently, body surveillance often leads to body dissatisfaction and an increase in the desire to be thin. Kim Rounsefell, a dietetic technician with a Bachelors in nutrition and dietetics states that “The more dissatisfied a person feels about their body, the higher their risk of experiencing low self-esteem, depression, and poor quality of life” (Rounsefell et al. 2020). Correspondingly, Butkowski writes, “body surveillance can result in body shame and anxiety, among other outcomes, which then can manifest as disordered eating, depression, and sexual dysfunction” (Butkowski et al. 2019). All considered, the perpetuation of a thin ideal leads to objectification, body surveillance and dissatisfaction, and a desire to be thinner which can manifest in harmful ways.

Development of Eating Disorders and Poor Mental Health

As previously mentioned, body dissatisfaction can have numerous negative consequences, which often involve poor mental health and the development of eating disorders (Rounsefell et al. 2020). Alexandra Lonergan, a PhD candidate in the Department of Psychology at the Macquarie University, states, “Eating disorders are a group of mental health conditions characterized by maladaptive eating behaviors and body image concerns” (Lonergan et al. 2020). As such, body dissatisfaction brought on by thin ideals pushed by diet culture can have severe effects. Often, girls who fall prey to diet culture have a negative body image view which, according to Rounsefell, “increases the likelihood of engaging in disordered eating behaviors including dieting, binge eating, fasting, calorie counting, and self induced vomiting with numerous serious long-term health consequences” (Rounsefell et al. 2020). Not only can negative self image be derived from simply consuming media that portrays thinness as the beauty standard, but it can also stem from sites and social media accounts that aim to promote

eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia (Perloff 2014). Perloff states that “there has been a proliferation of pro-anorexia (pro-ana) and pro-bulimia (pro-mia) websites (approximately 400) that unabashedly promote anorexic and bulimic lifestyles” (Perloff 2014). The format of these sites is often what draws adolescent girls in, as they are often expressed as narratives where the “resolution” or “victory” is thinness. Stated by Perloff, “the more eating disorder sites and related social media content (a) promote identification, (b) are perceived as realistic, (c) contain rich imagery, and (d) elicit perceptions of receiver-source similarity, the greater likelihood they will increase body dissatisfaction and subsequent negative affects” (Perloff 2014). Correspondingly, Perloff also states that “exposure to these sites exerts a number of short-term negative influences, such as lower self esteem, negative affect, and decreased perceived attractiveness” (Perloff 2014). Evidently, the promotion of thin ideals and media that pushes disordered eating can have immense negative effects on girls, an example of such being a personal story from Leslie Corona, who shares her struggle with disordered eating and the pursuit of thinness in a *Shape Magazine* article. Corona states, “I feared food. I was consuming 1,200 calories a day but was afraid to eat even the slightest bit more, because I was terrified of putting on pounds” (Corona 2022). She then tells of how her obsession with staying thin caused her to stay in a constant cycle of starvation and bingeing, putting a strain on not only her mind and body, but also her relationship with her fiancé (Corona 2022). Eventually, she got help and a diagnosis of binge eating disorder and anxiety, however this was not without mental and emotional hardship. Corona states, “I still feel the emotional ramifications of all my broken relationships” (Corona 2018). Overall, the amount of media that promotes thin ideals and disordered eating has vast effects on mental health and on the development of disordered eating.

Conclusion

As this paper has demonstrated, the promotion of thin as the desired standard leads to numerous negative effects. The constant viewing of thin equating to beautiful and worthy, often leads girls to self-objectification, and the subsequent belief that their worth is based on how thin or beautiful they are. This leads to body surveillance, and the constant monitoring of their bodies to make sure they are skinny enough, which if they are not, leads to body dissatisfaction and a great increase in the desire to be thin. All of these aforementioned effects can lead to poor mental health, such as anxiety and depression, and can lead to the development of eating disorders, which pose their own bodily threat. Simply stated, the current promotion of diet culture via media has numerous effects on adolescent girls that can affect them for a lifetime.

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Name: Shayna Soroka

Work title: The Effects of Religion on Happiness

Category: Critical Essay

Award: Silver Key

Introduction

In his work *Pensées*, Blaise Pascal states, “Happiness is neither without us nor within us. It is in God, both without us and within us” (Blaise Pascal, 1972). Written in 1669, *Pensées*, is a collection of Pascal’s philosophical writings that explore the contradictions of human nature. Pascal, and numerous other minds throughout all of history, have searched for the sources of happiness, and how to harness those sources to achieve everlasting happiness. Often, people believe that happiness will come in the form of more wealth, power, or physical pleasures. However, the people who are usually the happiest are those who seek internal pleasure and satisfaction through religion and who consistently practice their religion (Rizvi & Hossain, 2016). This begs the question, is religion the key to happiness? According to the late Melvin Pollner, who was an ethnomethodologist at the UCLA Department of Sociology, “[religion] may be a source of empowerment: individuals may come to feel that with the support or consent of a divine other they can control or manage life events” (Pollner, 1989). When one has a reliable and constant source of empowerment, one consequently feels empowered and happy with their life. Similarly, Anne Berthold, a senior researcher and lecturer at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology states that “people who practice their religion, seem to have an advantage regarding their feeling for the meaning of life – and thus regarding their happiness” (Berthold & Ruch, 2014). As such, religion provides an essential element of happiness that can not be found elsewhere. Thus, this leads to the presumption that religious people, specifically those who practice their religion, are happier than their non-religious counterparts. This paper will examine the effects of religion on happiness through a social and psychological lens.

Why Community Makes Religious People Happier

Modh Ahsan Kabir Rizvi, a PhD candidate at the University of Technology Sydney, states in his literature review of the relationship between religiosity and happiness that “there is a clear consensus in the literature of happiness that people who have religious or spiritual beliefs are

happier than those who do not” (Rizvi & Hossain, 2016). Religious people are often happier than non-religious people due to the fact that they have a community of like-minded individuals, a source of empowerment and reason, and a source of comfort against the harshness of the world (Rizvi & Hossain, 2016). Having a community of people who have similar values, beliefs, and morals as you gives a “social support network that fulfills human desires” which is incredibly essential to maintaining human happiness (Rizvi & Hossain, 2016). This social support network is an important aspect that increases happiness for a simple reason: humans are social creatures. Not enough socialization and human interaction can lead to lower mood levels and lower levels of happiness, which is why it is so important. In accordance with the finding of Rizvi, Scott Desmond PhD, an assistant professor in the sociology department at Indiana University, states that “the social networks and support individuals find through participation in organized religion enhances life satisfaction” (Desmond et al., 2018). As such it is evident that the communal support and community received from religion aids in lifting the overall happiness levels of religious individuals.

How Religion Provides Reason for the Mind

Not only does religion provide a community for an individual, but it also provides a sense of reason and encouragement. Religious people often have a strict set of morals that influence the lens in which they view life. Bert Garssen PhD, a senior researcher at the Helen Dowling Institute for Psycho-oncology, states that “a religious or spiritual belief system enables individuals to find meaning in stressful life events that are otherwise difficult to explain” (Garssen et al., 2020). When there is no logical explanation, people turn to God and religion in search of answers and when they feel as though they are lost, they look to God to set them back on the right path. This faith in God and his supposed plan for an individual gives them hope, which gives happiness. Desmond elaborates on this concept by stating that “if people believe God has a purpose and specific plan for them, they might interpret events in their lives as God’s answers to their prayers... trusting God to answer prayers at the right time in the right way is significantly related to life satisfaction” (Desmond et al. 2018). Ergo, religious people who have faith are bound to be happier than those who do not have faith, and who go through life with more doubt on what will happen because they do not have a source of reason to look up to.

How Religion Provides Comfort and Joy

Religion provides its believers with a source of comfort and joy (Rizvi & Hossain, 2016). Religiosity also provides the mind with an internal source of satisfaction and happiness that is not dependent on materialistic items. The Dalai Lama states that “when joy arises at the level of your mind and not just your senses, you can maintain a deep sense of satisfaction for a much longer period of time” (Lama & Tutu 2016). He also affirms that religion pushes this value due

to the fact that “most religions have a strong conviction that we cannot discover lasting happiness through our senses. So while temporary enjoyment can come through our senses, it is inevitably fleeting and not the source of enduring satisfaction” (Lama & Tutu, 2016). Religion is something that feeds the mind, it provides joy, satisfaction, and happiness, and is a source of non-materialistic comfort for a large number of people world wide. David Yaden, a Postdoctoral Fellow in the Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences department at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, asserts in his meta-analysis that “religion can provide comfort when one is *in extremis*. Religion is associated with more resilient coping with grief and trauma” (Yaden et al., 2022). Yaden also states that “Around 68% of the world's population view religion as important in their lives... over 50% of the US believes that religion is ‘very important’ in their lives” (Yaden et al., 2022). As such, this demonstrates that religion has a profound effect on a greater scale than just personal experience, and is an important aspect and tool in the lives of millions. As such, religious people often use religion as a coping mechanism for the stress and harshness of life. Although a controversial figure, Karl Marx makes an excellent statement on how religion soothes those who are in pain. In his *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, Marx states, “*Die Religion ... ist das Opium des Volkes*” which translates to “Religion is the opium of the people” (Marx & O’Malley, 1978). Although this statement is often taken with a negative connotation, it can have a positive one when looked through the right lens. People want happiness and comfort in today's ever changing world, and so, they look towards religion, which is the ultimate source of comfort. Daniel Kahneman, professor emeritus of Psychology and Public Affairs at Princeton University, states in his paper on aspects that influence emotional well being that “religion has a substantial influence on improving positive affect and reducing reports of stress” (Kahneman & Deaton, 2010). As such, religion provides a constant, and not fleeting, source of comfort and reduces stress for people, which in turn increases happiness. Due to this, religious people tend to be happier because they have religion as a guideline and source of reason and comfort in their lives, while non-religious people do not have that source and might turn to materialistic and physical experiences, such as food, drugs, or alcohol, to achieve this same level of happiness (Yaden et al., 2022).

Increases in Happiness Across Religions

and demonstrated that religiosity had a significant positive effect on happiness, physical health, and mental health” (Rizvi & Hossain, 2016). To conclusively show the effects of monotheistic religions on happiness Rizvi asserts that “Israel, the only country with a majority population following Judaism, has shown positive relationship between religion and happiness in every

instance that it was studied” (Rizvi & Hossain, 2016). Evidently, this shows how religion increasing happiness is not restricted to a single one and is apparent across major religions.

The Impacts of Spirituality in Religion

Although religious people do experience a profounder sense of happiness compared to those who are non-religious, people who are spiritual as well may experience an even greater sense of happiness (Yaden et al., 2022). Jens Rowold, professor of human resource development at TU Dortmund University, asserts that “spirituality can be explicit in the form of a certain religion, or more implicit, in the form of an inner attitude towards God, the divine, higher reasons, or principles” (Rowold, 2010). Although spirituality covers a broad range of beliefs, “spirituality as an inner attitude is different from religiosity” (Rowold, 2010). Since spirituality differs from religiosity, one is able to be both simultaneously, meaning that those who practice both are able to, to an even greater extent, positively influence their lives. As previously mentioned, religion asserts that lasting happiness can not be found through the senses, but rather through internal sources, and values of spirituality are in agreement with this notion (Lama & Tutu, 2016). Buddhism, one of the largest religions and spiritualities, holds the belief that “happiness is achieved when a person can perceive the true nature of reality, unmodified by the mental constructs we superimpose upon it” (Ricard, 2014). The Dalai Lama states that “while the joy of the senses is brief, the joy at the deeper level [of the mind] is much longer lasting. It is true joy” (Lama & Tutu, 2016). This is in alignment with similar notions across different religions that disapprove of seeking happiness through physical and material pleasures, and advocate for experiencing happiness mentally and internally. It is evident that spirituality is extremely beneficial towards true happiness, however, people who are more spiritual than religious often participate less in religious communities and as such being only spiritual, and not religious “provide[s] no benefit to life satisfaction from an increase in social ties or social support” which is one of the key factors in how religion positively influences happiness (Desmond et al., 2018). Evidently, being both religious and spiritual poses the most benefits towards happiness.

Conclusion

Religious people, as a whole, are happier than non-religious people. The reasoning behind this statement comes from a variety of different aspects, specifically the community that religion provides and the mental reasoning and comfort that religion provides. Religious individuals are more likely to be surrounded by a community of like-minded individuals who provide a social network, which is essential to human happiness. Religion also provides reasoning for the aspects of life which are unexplainable or difficult, as well as a source of comfort. When people are going through tough times, they need a source to turn to, and for religious people there is a constant and always available source for them. Due to this, religious people are often able to

cope with grief and trauma in a better manner than those who are not religious. Furthermore, spirituality, such as practicing internal gratification and satisfaction, only boosts the levels of happiness received from religion by making sure that the sources of happiness received are not from fleeting physical senses, but rather from mental and internal sources. However, it is important to note that there are limitations to this notion that religious people are happier than non-religious people. These limitations include the fact that happiness is often subjective, so while on a large scale religious people tend to be happier, it may differ on an individual scale. Another important factor to note is that there are other sources which may influence one's happiness more than religion, but those sources could be mistaken for being religious sources by religious people. Conclusively, religion provides multiple aspects that positively influence happiness, thus making religious people happier than non-religious. Due to these facts, religion is important to take into consideration when one is looking for excellent sources of happiness.

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Name: Jonathan Levin

Work title: The impacts of the socioeconomic elite

Category: Critical Essay

Award: Silver Key

In October of 2022, Elon Musk acquired Twitter, Inc., a forum with over 238 million daily users, for \$44 billion (Conger and Hirsch 2022). Within a few days, Musk made irreversible changes to the social media platform and stunned the world by firing head officials, executive chairpersons, and over 3,700 employees (Picchi 2022). With the title of the world's wealthiest man set by a net worth of over 208 billion dollars, Musk's socioeconomic strength is unmatched. This begs the question: how do the socioeconomic elite, both positively and negatively, impact society? As our world continues to recover from the COVID-19 recession, stranded Americans are being manipulated in broad daylight. After analyzing the effects of elite social influencers as well as the financial top 1%, there is undoubtedly a correlation between one's socioeconomic status and their ability to impact modern society. What is done with their power is for them to decide.

In today's society, celebrities are considered to be some of the most influential people in the world. While most celebrities utilize social media platforms to spread their information, the financially affluent take a different approach. As aforementioned, Elon Musk recently purchased Twitter, Inc. and has already begun manipulating the platform. These changes expand beyond the realm of altering chairmen and employees, but also removing the permanent ban on former United States president Donald Trump in an effort to restore the platform's original purpose. New York Times article written by Kate Conger, a technology news reporter from San Francisco, and Lauren Hirsch, who studied comparative literature at Cornell University and has an M.B.A. from the Tuck School of Business at Dartmouth, backs his decisions by explaining that, "Mr. Musk, a self-described 'free speech absolutist,'" has said that he wants to make the social media platform, "a more freewheeling place for all types of commentary" (Conger and Hirsch 2022). Musk has been able to use his power, which is driven by his wealth, to influence society with plans to restore a monitored social media platform back into a forum for free speech. This level of lawlessness, however, allows celebrities like Kanye West (officially 'Ye') to take advantage of their overwhelmingly large followings. With Ye's recent anti-semitic tweets, there has been a rise in anti-semitic actions across the country. Rabbi Taylor from Brooklyn, after being subjected to severe hatred by a man at a local gas station, is quoted saying, "I've never had anything like this in New York, and it definitely felt to me like this whole Kanye West thing had something to do with it...All it takes is a couple of

influential people to say things, and suddenly it becomes very tense”(Paulson and Ruth 2022). This incident occurred on November 3rd, and Ye’s first antisemitic tweet was posted exactly three weeks prior. Similarly, in Jacksonville, Florida, antisemitic signs displaying, “Kanye is right about the Jews” have taken the city’s news sites and highway overpasses by storm and have gotten the attention of government representatives. Florida Representative John Rutherford spoke about the actions and said, “The kind of anti-Semitic hate speech being circulated online purportedly from the Florida-Georgia game is despicable and extremely disappointing. There is absolutely no room for this sort of hate in Northeast Florida. I continue to stand in support of the Jewish community in Jacksonville and across this nation”(Staff 2022). Many Floridians witnessed firsthand how one major influencer can spark a trend in society. Despite Ye’s socioeconomic status, being known as one of the most influential people on the planet, he should not be excluded from suffering repercussions for his harmful actions. It is important to keep in mind that Ye is just one example of an influencer who chose to use their following in a negative way, but there are many more who mirror his actions, as well as those who speak up against them.

When analyzing the positive impacts of socioeconomically elite Americans, the Gates family provides a multitude of benefits to society. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, founded in the year 2000, has helped many American residents around the country; not only through their charitable donations but also through work opportunities for the unemployed(Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation). One of their main focuses is to help and support the K-12 education system. One of their mottos is, “Our goal. To support schools in improving K-12 teaching and learning, with a focus on math as the cornerstone skill for academic success and greater opportunities in the workforce”(Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation). The foundation has helped countless students, specifically black and Latino students from low-income communities, receive a proper American education. In early 2022, the foundation declared a four-step plan to support the education system, funded by 350 million dollars. An article from the foundation explains that the “Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation Commits \$350 Million nationally, starting in Washington State, To Help Students Succeed in the Classroom”(Rava 2022). Their four steps include a grant for leadership development, teacher leadership grants, school grants, and district grants. Aside from charity work, the foundation employs over 1,600 residents across the country (Rava 2022). Their employees come from varying academic, scientific, private, government, and nonprofit backgrounds, which helps them provide job opportunities to a diverse range of people. Once again, the Gates family is just one example of socioeconomically elite Americans who choose to use their wealth in a positive way, to improve the future and transform the lives of society.

It is clearly proven that the socioeconomically elite have an extremely impactful role in society, both positively and negatively. With this, it becomes crucial to analyze how influencers

strive to affect society, often to promote their personal agendas. Ye has been using his influential power in order to spread antisemitic comments via social media has started a trend of antisemitism across America. Due to Musk's plan to turn Twitter back into an unregulated media forum, society has no control over any celebrity hoping to do the same. However, not all members of the socioeconomic elite use their power negatively. Bill and Melinda Gates, famously known for founding Microsoft Corp., also founded a charity that is geared towards improving the lives of millions. By raising, donating, and allocating, large amounts of money, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation provides a proper American education to hundreds of underprivileged students. Ultimately, it has been proven that the socioeconomic elite have major influence across all realms of American society, from manipulating the minds of the people as well as the potential to improving the future.

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Name: Julia Sher

Work title: The Troubled Teen Industry

Category: Critical Essay

Award: Silver Key

Introduction

Cathay Krebs, director of the United States Children's Rights Litigation Committee, reported that between 120,000 and 200,000 teens are subject to the abuse of the troubled teen industry (Krebs 2021). According to Catherine Kushan in her master's thesis, the troubled teen industry can be defined as an industry consisting of wilderness programs, residential treatment centers, and reform schools, which incarcerate thousands of minors for issues their parents deem as atypical or abnormal (Kushan 2017). The qualities that define a troubled teen include disabilities, such as mental illness, substance abuse and dependence, eating disorders, and cognitive difference. Even teenagers who simply exhibit traits a parent deems negative, such as LGBT status or problematic behaviors that make them difficult to parent, are viewed as troubled (Kushan 2017). The troubled teen industry has coined the term "tough love" to justify the abuse, isolation, and restriction of freedoms that teenagers experience in these therapies and camps (Stull 2020). Despite this abuse, the troubled teen industry has few government regulations and oversight, in turn successfully manipulating and luring thousands of parents into sending their teenagers to the aforementioned camps and therapies (Mohr 2009; Younis 2021). Evidently, the troubled teen industry is detrimental to teenagers. This paper will prove how the troubled teen industry is detrimental to teenagers by researching the manipulation of parents, involuntary youth transport, abuse within the industry, and the psychological trauma present in teens after leaving the industry.

The Manipulation of Parents

The troubled teen industry is notorious for the manipulation of parents in order to convince them that the industry will actually benefit their children, even though that is not the case. Catherine Kushan writes, "Troubled Teen treatment centers cater to parents' desire for radically life-altering treatment that will change their teenage child's behavior" (Kushan 2017). The troubled teen industry preys on a parent's desperation to fix their child's atypical behaviors and advertises itself as behavior modification centers that will fix any issues a parent finds wrong with their child (Younis 2021). Wanda Mohr, professor of psychiatric mental health nursing at Rutgers University, elaborates on this by mentioning that when "Hearing glowing

testimonials suggesting effectiveness on Web Sites that make it simple to sign up their children, it should come as no surprise that parents are attracted to these programs” (Mohr 2009). Mohr thus demonstrates another way the troubled teen industry is able to manipulate parents. When looking at the websites of various Troubled Teen programs, negative reviews are censored, and solely positive comments that make the programs sound appealing are shown. The troubled teen industry manipulates parents because of the large economic incentive when enrolling teenagers in their programs. Breaking Code Silence (BCS) is a nonprofit that represents children, youth, and adults who are/were incarcerated in the U.S. troubled teen industry. BCS found that the tuition of Discovery Ranch, a residential treatment center for troubled teens, “is reported to be anywhere between \$6,500 to \$12,000 per month” (Magill 2022). With high tuition prices, the troubled teen industry is economically motivated to manipulate parents. Additionally, CRC Health Group, Inc., owns and operates 27 of the largest institutions for troubled teens. Kushan writes that “In the first six months of 2011, CRC Health reported revenue from youth residential programs of \$27.6 million, and from youth outdoor behavioral programs of \$13.5 million—total revenue of \$41.1 million” (Kushan 2017). In total, the industry is valued at around \$23 billion dollars (Eastgate 2022). Clearly, with, high tuition prices, high revenues, and a high evaluation, the troubled teen industry greatly profits from the manipulation of desperate parents. In fact, the manipulation continues once teens are already enrolled in the industry. Kushan writes, “The advertising of such programs usually begins with marketing a short-stay intensive wilderness program that lasts up to 6 weeks; however, about 40-45% of children enrolled in short-stay wilderness programs end up in long-term residential treatment centers of therapeutic boarding schools” (Kushan 2017). The troubled teen industry does not only persuade and lie to parents to get their teens to join the program but also manipulates them to extend their treatment. This is a direct result of the institution’s pitch that if children do not continue their stay, they will die or relapse into old behaviors (Kushan 2017). The troubled teen industry is inclined to get as many teens as possible to sign up, not because they care about helping them, but due to the economic incentive. Thus, the troubled teen industry negatively affects teenagers because of how easily parents are manipulated by the lies and false advertisements of these programs.

Involuntary Youth Transport

Even before entering the therapies and rehabilitation centers, the practice of involuntary youth transport (IYT) is unethical and traumatizing for teens. IYT occurs when parents hire transporters to take their teens to the various therapeutic centers in the troubled teen industry (Gass 2021). Michael Gass, Professor in the Outdoor Education Program at the University of New Hampshire, published testimonies of teenagers who suffered IYT. One sixteen-year-old girl accounts that “It really felt like I was being kidnapped. While never outwardly stated, it felt as if I could be raped at any time these two men wanted. Since that time, I can’t fall asleep in a bedroom if the lights or a bright night light are not left on” (Gass 2021). Up to 83% of the

troubled teen industry uses IYT to transport teenagers, meaning there are thousands of other teens experiencing similar trauma (Gass 2021). Not only is IYT traumatizing as shown by the teenage girl's account, but it is also abusive. Nevin Harper, associate Professor at the School of Child and Youth Care at the University of Victoria, writes that "if an 'adolescent physically resists, the transport staff may use physical force (i.e., therapeutic holds or physical restraints) to maintain the safety and completion of the transport'" (Harper 2021). Teenagers, if not compliant with what some might call kidnapping, are restrained and taken against their will. The practice of involuntary youth transport is detrimental to the lives of teenagers because of a statement Guitele J. Rahill Ph.D. makes in his report, "In their Own Words: Resilience among Haitian Survivors of the 2010 Earthquake." He writes that "Trauma may cause adverse physiological changes such as the release of stress hormones that can actually weaken health and resilience. However, the outcomes of trauma, regardless of its source, are not limited to adverse, irreversible health or social outcomes" (Rahill et al. 2016). This means that teenagers are subject to health issues and weakened resilience before even entering troubled teen institutions. This is harmful to teenagers as their health will only get worse once they enter these institutions where they are subject to extreme abuse and unethical practices. Moreover, the practice of IYT completely violates Principle E of the Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct as written by the American Psychological Association (APA). Principle E states that psychologists must respect the dignity and worth of all people, and the rights of individuals to privacy and self-determination (American Psychological Association 2017). The said goal of the troubled teen industry is to better the mental health of teenagers. Despite this, IYT, a key component in the industry, counteracts what is written in the APA code of ethics by abusing and traumatizing teenagers. Hence, proving that the troubled teen industry has no benefit to teenagers, but rather harms them instead.

Abuse in the Industry

Besides manipulating parents and kidnapping teenagers, the troubled teen industry uses abusive tactics in an attempt to change the behavior of teenagers. The troubled teen industry attempts to better teens by using an approach whose origin stems from a cult known as Synanon. Maia Szalavitz, a reporter who focuses on addiction treatment writes, "Synanon sold itself as a cure for hardcore heroin addicts who could help each other by 'breaking' new initiates with isolation, humiliation, hard labor, and sleep deprivation" (Strazlovitz 2007). This approach has the same goal as the prison in "Long Walk to Freedom, Excerpt from Ch. 60," where Nelson Mandela describes his time as a political prisoner. Mandela writes, "Prison and the authorities conspire to rob each man of his dignity. In and of itself, that assured that I would survive, for any man or institution that tries to rob me of my dignity will lose because I will not part with it at any price or under any pressure" (Mandela 1994). The troubled teen industry seeks to strip teens of their dignity through their Synanon-like methods, however, unlike Nelson

Mandela, many teens do not survive the abuse. The living conditions make it extremely hard to persevere, and staff members are even trained to employ abusive measures when teens are not compliant (Mohr 2009). Mohr writes, "In 2000, two children died proximal to a restraint procedure in a therapeutic wilderness program. In 2006, a 14-year-old child died in a Florida boot camp after having been beaten and restrained by camp guards" (Mohr 2009). Even with the deaths of multiple teenagers, the troubled teen industry is still running and profiting off the mistreatment of teens (Kopsick 2022). Lesley Kopsick, a survivor of the troubled teen industry, notes that most therapies and treatments require teens to be strip searched. Other unethical practices include the use of isolation rooms in which teens are sent to a windowless room for an indefinite period of time as a punishment and the monitoring of teens while they are in the shower or bathroom (Kopsick 2022). The practices of the troubled teen industry are certainly detrimental to teenagers as they are being abused and mistreated.

Consequences

The trauma caused by the abuse of teenagers in the troubled teen industry leads to numerous side effects on teenagers' lives and mental health. In a report by Olivia Stull Ph.D., one survivor of the troubled teen industry said, "It was severely traumatizing and did more harm than good" (Stull 2020). The reason the troubled teen industry ended up doing more harm than good was because of the effects of trauma on one's health. Jamie Mater, a researcher in psychology and survivor of the troubled teen industry, conducted a study on the effects of the troubled teen industry on survivors. She found that "Many participants reported that they currently experienced symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), such as nightmares, panic attacks, dissociation, memory issues, flashbacks, and hypervigilance" (Mater 2022). The survivor's account of the troubled teen industry as traumatizing and Mater's study finding numerous survivors with PTSD correlates with Guitele J. Rahill's Ph.D. explanation of what trauma can lead to. As aforementioned in this paper, trauma can negatively impact one's health and resilience (Rahill et al. 2016). PTSD is a significant issue among survivors of the troubled teen industry, yet several survivors fear turning to therapists because of their negative experiences with them in the industry (Mater 2022). This is detrimental to teenagers because the American Journal of Preventative Medicine reported that people with high levels of childhood trauma die almost twenty years earlier than those without childhood trauma (Brown et al. 2009). This also ties to Guitele Rahill's finding that trauma affects health because this study found that trauma caused shortened lifespans. Clearly, the troubled teen industry has significant and lasting negative impacts on the lives of teenagers even after they are released and the abuse is stopped.

Conclusion

Overall, the troubled teen industry has no benefit for teenagers, and instead harms and instills trauma in them. The troubled teen therapies and centers certainly do not have any regard for the well-being of teenagers and are overcome by corruption and greed. Parents are manipulated due to false claims and lies, therefore unknowingly sending their own children to undergo misery. Additionally, the use of involuntary youth transport is extremely unethical and traumatizes teenagers prior to their arrival at these organizations. Once in the programs, teenagers endure abuse and mistreatment, sometimes leading to death. Finally, even after being released from the industry, the trauma they experienced has a lasting impact on them for the rest of their lives; severely affecting their mental health. A limitation of this research is that every teenager has a different experience in the industry, so the aforementioned statements in this paper do not apply to every teen who was enrolled in the troubled teen industry. The impacts of these abusive institutions leave detrimental effects on teenagers for the rest of their lives.

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Name: Shayna Soroka

Work title: To What Extent are Sweatshops in the Fashion Industry Ethical?

Category: Critical Essay

Award: Gold Key

Introduction

Amber Valletta, former *Vogue* model and sustainable fashion advocate, has been involved in the fashion industry since she was fifteen, becoming well versed in the industry's lack of ethics. Valletta states, in regard to the manufacturing process of clothing, that "No one wants to wear clothes that were made from someone's blood" (Nast 2015). Yet that is often the price paid for fashion, especially "fast fashion," which the Cambridge Dictionary defines as, "clothes that are made and sold cheaply" (Cambridge Dictionary). The issue with fast fashion is that it requires extremely cheap, or sweatshop labor, resulting in fashion companies sacrificing worker's safety and rights. Piera Centobelli PhD, Associate Professor of Business Economics and Organization at the University of Naples, states that "due to outsourcing production [to] underdeveloped nations, fashion companies take advantage of a significant absence of strict legislation and procedures governing worker safety and health protection" (Centobelli et al. 2022). The consequences of outsourcing and sweatshop labor, according to Silviya Dimitrova PhD, Chief Assistant Professor at Varna University of Economics, is that workers are "exploited by means of low wages, excessive working hours, under-age employment ... modern slavery, migrant exploitation, gender discrimination and inequality, verbal, sexual, and physical abuse, [and] forced overtime" (Dimitrova 2020). Along with these issues, the environmental impacts should also be considered. According to Professor Walter Leal, holder of the Chairs of Climate Change Management at the Hamburg University of Applied Sciences, the fashion industry creates "8–10% of global carbon emissions, superseding emissions from the aviation and shipping industries combined" as well as "up to 20% of industrial wastewater pollution" (Leal Filho et al. 2022). Evidently, the fashion industry is a major contributor to negative effects on the environment, and while consuming it is unavoidable, it is imperative to bring awareness to the ethical violations. This begs the question of what extent the use of sweatshop labor in the fashion industry, with its multiple breaches of human rights and negative impacts on the environment, is ethical.

The Violations of Workers Rights in Sweatshops

According to Zeenath Khan PhD, Assistant Professor of Cyber Ethics at Wollongong University, the fashion industry's "attempts at driving down costs have put excessive pressures on manufacturing factories in lesser developed nations to further cut costs either by using harmful chemicals or reducing wages, invariably [giving] rise to *sweatshops*" (Khan et al. 2016). Sweatshops are a major issue in the fashion industry as companies drive to manufacture at the lowest cost, negatively affecting workers conditions including below living wages, forced overtime, and safety hazards (Dimitrova 2020). The Human Rights Watch (HRW), a non-governmental organization, is focused on researching and advocating for human rights, including workers in the fashion industry. The HRW's report, "'No Room to Bargain': Unfair and Abusive Labor Practices in Pakistan," depicts the ethical violations in Pakistan's fashion sweatshops. The report found that garment workers work daily 12 hour shifts with overtime, while only making a monthly salary of "7,000 rupees," which is less than half of Pakistan's minimum wage of "17,500 rupees" (Human Rights Watch 2019; Gossman 2022). Dimitrova draws similar conclusions asserting that many in sweatshops are "forced to work 14-16 hours a day, seven days a week" as well as hourly wages being as low as "23 cents for workers in Pakistan" (Dimitrova 2020). Not only are workers subjected to long hours with extremely low pay, but are also subject to unsafe working conditions, including buildings not up to code and lack of equipment to handle toxic, and often carcinogenic, chemicals. The most infamous example of buildings not being up to standard, is the 2013 Rana Plaza Collapse in Dhaka, Bangladesh. According to the International Labour Organization, the Collapse "killed at least 1,132 people and injured more than 2,500" (International Labour Organization 2017). According to Ben Vanpeperstraete, senior legal advisor for the European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights, the reason for the collapse of the Plaza, which housed 5 garment factories, was due to the fact that the building of garment factories is often "done as quickly and cheaply as possible, resulting in widespread safety problems including faulty electrical circuits, unstable buildings, inadequate escape routes, and unsafe equipment" (Saage-Maaß et al. 137–69). Along with structural safety hazards being rampant in sweatshops, hazards via the chemicals used in sweatshops also threatens the safety of workers. Zorawar Singh, Associate Professor of Genotoxicology and Occupational Health at the Khalsa College, has found that many dyes, solvents, and finishing agents used in the fashion industry are "mutagenic and carcinogenic" and "result in a major carcinogenic effect by direct contact" (Singh and Chadha 2016). This pairs with the findings of Dimitrova, who states that fashion sweatshops have "high use of chemicals, pesticides, toxins etc. in the process... Such substances result in respiratory hazards due to poor ventilation, cotton dust, [and] synthetic particles in air" (Dimitrova 2020). Evidently, the mistreatment of workers poses great threat to the ethicality of sweatshop labor in the fashion industry.

The Environmental Impact of Sweatshops

Similarly to how the chemicals used in sweatshops negatively affect workers, they also negatively impact the environment. Kirsi Niinimäki PhD, Associate Professor of Design and leader of the Fashion/Textiles Futures research group at Aalto University, states that “2,450 chemicals related to textile manufacturing were investigated for their hazardous properties. 10% of these chemicals were identified to be of high potential concern” (Niinimäki et al. 2020). These harmful chemicals pollute local water sources near sweatshops, and according to Maiko Sakamoto, Associate Professor of Environmental Studies at the University of Tokyo, “industrial wastes and effluents containing heavy metals... are being released in the vicinity of the industrial areas and this polluted river water is being used for irrigation purposes in vegetable cultivation fields” (Sakamoto et al. 2019). Similarly to chemical runoff polluting water, microplastic particles that shed from washing clothing, which is often made from plastic-based polyester, release “close to half a million tonnes of plastic microfibers into the ocean every year. These fabrics are ingested by fish and other marine animals, entering the food chain” (Dimitrova 2020). So not only is the sweatshop produced fast fashion harming the environment, but it is also affecting people. Along with chemical and microfiber pollution, the fashion industry is responsible for about 10% of global carbon emissions (Leal Filho et al. 2022). The reason being that garment factories generally rely on “coal-based energy,” and as such, garments made in countries like China have a “40% larger carbon footprint than textiles made in Turkey or Europe” (Niinimäki et al. 2020). Centobelli, in accordance with the findings of Niinimäki and Leal, has found that the carbon emissions from the fashion industry effect global warming and “as a result, natural disasters and effects such as floods, droughts, storms, and sea-level rise are becoming increasingly regular” (Centobelli et al. 2022). Evidently, the effects of sweatshop labor on the environment are felt worldwide, by everyone, and lowers the ethicality of its use in the fashion industry.

Conclusion

As a whole, the use of sweatshop labor severely impacts the extent to which its use is ethical in the fashion industry. From the lack of fair treatment and rights for workers, to the negative environmental effects, sweatshops pose a great threat worldwide. The lack of fair pay, just treatment, and adequate safety for workers constitute just a small amount of ethical violations regarding the treatment of people in the industry. Similarly, the pollution of the water and land, as well as the copious amounts of carbon emissions, hinder the degree of how ethical sweatshop use is on the environment. However, there are limitations to this conclusion, which include the fact that there are factories which treat their workers ethically and which take strides to be more environmentally friendly, as well as the argument that people working in sweatshops choose this as their form of employment, knowing the negative aspects. Overall, the use of sweatshops in the fashion industry is neither ethical nor just, as far as humanity and the environment is concerned.

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Name: Jonathan Levin

Work title: Using Money To Influence Emotional Well-Being

Category: Critical Essay

Award: Gold Key

"When I grow up I want to be rich", is a phrase commonly said by youth across the world, but why? At a young age, many Americans aspire to be successful, drawn to the idea of living their dream lives. This dream is accompanied by the feeling of satisfaction which is expected to be achieved through earning a lot of money. However, this leads to a question that is constantly being asked, does money buy happiness, and if so, to what extent? This research focus is brought about in supplement article B written by John Stuart Mill, a British philosopher and former member of the British Parliament, discussing the connection between virtue and happiness. Alongside supplement article C written by Daniel Kahneman and Angus Deaton, researchers from Princeton University, explain how money may not affect one's emotional well-being, but rather their quality of life. An analysis of a maximum threshold of satisfaction that can be reached by attaining wealth, followed by a comparison of the quality of life for Americans living in poverty versus the financially affluent, and how virtue may or may not lead to happiness. This paper will effectively lead to a conclusion regarding whether money can be used as a tool to maximize one's emotional well-being.

A common misconception that persists as society develops is that wealth is the ultimate cause of overall happiness due to its seemingly infinite ability to create an 'easier' life. However, this statement was proven wrong in a 2010 study from Princeton University referenced in Chis Gaetona's research report. In the report, researchers discovered a threshold of 75,000 dollars where satisfaction ceases to increase. The report claims, "Princeton University researchers, found that people's day-to-day happiness increases with income up to about \$75,000 at which point it tops out. So, according to this study, someone who makes \$100,000 a year is not happier on a day-to-day level than someone making \$75,000" (Gaetano, 2021). This threshold was found to be valid at the time, because people at this income point no longer endure many of the financial stresses the average person would. This, nonetheless, was proven wrong 11 years later by a study done at the Wharton School of Business. Michele Berger, the author of the Wharton research study writes, "In a paper in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, Killingsworth confirms that money does influence happiness and, contrary to previous influential research on the subject suggesting that this plateaus above \$75,000, there was no dollar value at which it stopped mattering to an individual's well-being" (Berger, 2021). Mathew Killingsworth, an alumnus from Wharton, used a research

tequinqe called “experience sampling”. Experience sampling asks respondents to fill out a short questionnaire via an app at random moments during their day. Killingsworth says, “It tells us what’s actually happening in people’s real lives as they live them, in millions of moments as they work and chat and eat and watch TV”(Berger, 2021). As commonly known, one's emotional status constantly fluctuates throughout various points in their day, and the only way to truly understand one's status is to find data from random points in their daily lives. An additional source written by Joni Sweet, an experienced writer who focuses on health and finance, also used Killingsworth’s study to prove that in modern society money is a vital tool, necessary in all walks of life. Her analysis is based on a study conducted by Jeffery Ditzel, an adult psychiatrist. She finds that “The correlation might well be explained that wealth, up to a point, allows one to meet the basic needs of survival”(Sweet, 2021). The study used in Sweet’s article explained that it is near impossible to maintain happiness when one’s family is in danger. Sweet’s article compares money and wealth to nutritional items such as food or water, as they are the most common basic necessities for survival which are infinitely expandable. Through the study done by Mathew Killingsworth, one sees how money indefinitely increases one's happiness in their daily lives similar to the nutritional items from Sweet’s article. Yet, at a certain point the marginal utility of making money begins to decrease which creates an effect that makes it seem as through there is a maximum threshold.

When analyzing the true impacts of wealth on one's well-being, one must compare living in wealth versus living in poverty. It is evident that living in wealth leads to a better life and a more positive emotional status. A CNBC article backs this claim by saying, “At an individual level, as people advance in their careers and their incomes rise, [money] has the potential to make their life genuinely better”(Steig, 2021). However, in order to truly understand how money affects one's emotional well-being, one must analyze not only the rich, but also the poor. According to a 2012 study by Gallup-Healthways written by associate, Alyssa Davis, the chances of impoverished Americans suffering from depression and other mental illnesses is substantially higher than their wealthy counterparts. The study directly states, “About 31% of Americans in poverty say they have at some point been diagnosed with depression compared with 15.8% of those not in poverty”(Davis, 2012). Depression is not the sole illness that is more present within the lower class, the study adds, “Impoverished Americans are also more likely to report asthma, diabetes, high blood pressure, and heart attacks -- which are likely related to the higher level of obesity found for this group -- 31.8% vs. 26% for adults not in poverty”(Davis, 2012). As of 2020, 41.9% of Americans suffer from obesity rendering it the most prevalent disease in our country; however when these numbers are compared solely to the wealthier population of Americans the statistical differences are significant. Over 5% more impoverished Americans suffer from obesity when compared to wealthier Americans, which translates to approximately 17 million more Americans (Davis, 2012). Nonetheless, when directly analyzing how income directly affects well-being, similar

results are found in stimulus article C written by the Center for Health and Well-being at Princeton University after conducting a survey with over 450,000 respondents. When analyzing the results of these tests, the authors write, "Because higher incomes are always associated with better outcomes, positive ratios indicate that the predictor is associated with better outcomes, and negative ratios indicate the opposite" (Kahneman & Deaton, 2010). The ratios mentioned in the source are the ratios of high income to positive outcomes in one's evaluation of life, and lower-income (<\$4,000 a month) with negative outcomes in one's evaluation of life. Evidently, not only are higher levels of illness associated with poverty, but also a negative outlook and evaluation for one's life and future therefore money without a doubt plays a significant role in ensuring a positive emotional well-being.

As quoted from *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle said, "The greatest virtues are those which are most useful to other persons"(Aristotle, 2011). Aristotle, one of the most famous philosophers of the greek era, created the term Eudemonia. Eudemonia is directly translated to flourishing, however, is more commonly associated with virtue. A Ted Talk transcribed into an article says, "For Aristotle, eudaimonia was achieved through living virtuously – or what you might describe as being good"(Kannaiyan, 2016). This allows the listeners of the Ted Talk and readers of the article to wonder - about the true ways of achieving a virtuous lifestyle in modern society, and whether it genuinely correlates to improved emotional well-being. The most common acts of virtue in today's world are donations to charity and helping the less fortunate. A source written by Angela Levy discussing the science behind why virtue makes one feel good, claims, "Neuroscience studies consistently show that donations to charitable organizations can have a lasting positive impact on your mood"(Levy, 2018). The source also describes that two main parts of the brain are activated when a donation is made. The first is the mesolimbic pathway, which is responsible for distributing dopamine, one of the five hormones released due to happiness. The second is the subgenual area of the brain, which is responsible for social participation and social attachment. This supports the claims made by Aristotle as he believed that Eudemonia is connected to virtue and moral excellence. In the Stimulus article written by John Stuart Mill called "On Virtue and Happiness," he, in detail, explains the deeper connection between virtuous acts and happiness. Mill creates the idea of the principle of utility. The principle states that virtue, along with many other things, is required to obtain happiness; virtue must not only be desired but desired disinterestedly. This is because John Mill believed, "actions and dispositions are only virtuous because they promote another end than virtue"(Mill, 1863). We can interpret Mill's statement by using the example of donating to charity. When one donates, their goal is not to complete a virtuous act but rather to help someone in need through the donation. This corresponds with the neuroscience studies as indirect virtue causes the long-lasting impact on our moods and overall happiness. While it must be noted that there are countless virtuous acts that can be performed without being wealthy, those most common in modern society involve charitable donations which inherently

give affluent citizens an advantage. With this, the ability to perform an act of kindness with the intention of helping others is increasingly available as wealth increases.

Wealth plays an integral role in modern society and is the single most important thing for the majority of the population. Money seemingly creates infinite happiness, however, there is one major limitation to the idea that money indefinitely satisfies man: the law of diminishing marginal utility. The law of diminishing marginal utility states, “as we consume more of an item, the amount of satisfaction produced by each additional unit of that good declines”(Berkman, 2016). From this, it can be understood that no matter how much money one makes, the level of happiness felt by the individual as their income continues to rise will decrease. When a millionaire finds ten dollars, he does not value its presence near that of an unemployed American. This example is further proven by the Princeton University students who conclude that, “In the context of income, a \$100 raise does not have the same significance for a financial services executive as for an individual earning the minimum wage”(Kahneman & Deaton 2010). While the dollar amount is stagnant, the level of satisfaction is subjective to the individual. This directly leads to the argument that a satisfaction threshold on income does not truly exist and has differing affects on different economic classes. These economic classes prove to affect the emotional well-being of people, based on statistics that prove the probability of mental illness to be much higher in non-financially affluent Americans. Additionally, the availability of money for an individual allows them to maximize their happiness through virtue. With the capital necessary to perform acts of charity with intentions of genuinely improving the lives of others, the brain is triggered into releasing hormones that increase happiness and therefore increase overall emotional well-being. The research done in these categories reveals that while wealth on its own may improve certain aspects of one’s life, true happiness is achieved only when wealth combines with a good heart and is used to improve the lives of others.

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Name: RACHEL SARELI

Work title: Physiological Mirrors in O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*

Category: Critical Essay

Award: Silver Key

Articulated through a complexly layered writing style, O'Brien's *The Things They Carried* earns itself a pristine dwelling within the minds of his readers and forces a true dedication to the unveiling of the profound undertone that lies beneath what appears to amount to a series of war stories. The essence of his work purposefully guides readers not through a series of characters and events strung together, but through a mental journey that challenges readers in a manner that sparks a major reconsideration of typical war-related ideologies. Suggesting that perhaps all soldiers do not experience the same collective predetermined truth, he delves through the depths of each character's strife while altogether honoring their individual legacies. Throughout *The Things They Carried*, O'Brien develops consistent physiological mirrors while combining elements of the natural and internal worlds as a conceptual representation of the stark polarity between the soldiers' independent internal transformations during their duration of war experiences.

Elements of Vietnam's natural environment are developed through an overshadowing lens prominent throughout O'Brien's war experiences and subsequently alter his personal lens of reality. Illustrating the land of Vietnam through personification, O'Brien journeys alongside his readers through his own internal fixations and their interconnected conflicts. O'Brien evokes an out-of-worldly tone when describing the natural terrain of Vietnam, highlighting, "...it seemed that all of Vietnam was alive and shimmering," (O'Brien 129). As the atrocities he witnesses in war begin to transform him into an unrecognizable self, he clings to the morally righteous piece of himself that is still "alive". He believes that it is the land itself that conceals the one aspect he hoped most to maintain, his innocence. As he loses his grasp on morality, he attempts to ground himself through the only element his mind is able to reframe in a light of positivity, that of land that processes no possibility of moral corruption. The result, however, leaves him lost further in the depths of humanity as one can not see the blatant brokenness behind what was once a "shimmering" exterior. As he emphasizes the usage of past tense, the reader is exposed to the true substance beneath what is seemingly a blissful description of the country. O'Brien further demonstrates his desire to conform to the purity of the ground through the consistent reference to "Nam", the inversion of man. By personifying the land, even through its name, he stretches the boundaries of truth and challenges readers to reimagine the typical manner of storytelling. O'Brien expounds, "I was invisible; I had no shape,

no substance; I weighed less than nothing. I just drifted,” (O’Brien 133). While O’Brien exemplifies a *feeling* of invisibility, the more accurate physical portrayal of his *mental state* is represented through two forms, split from one. A piece of himself embraces the natural survival instinct and urges him to act accordingly while another pulls at his rationality and moral compass, reminding him that he does not believe in the war. As he struggles to identify solely with a single version of himself, he begins “drifting” between the two and is grounded by neither. Consequently, he becomes frozen in the illusion of choice and switches between the two forms throughout his war experiences. O’Brien again poses a challenge to truth and the inaccuracy of having a single “true self”.

O’Brien encapsulates the way in which war experiences have the potential to create severe mental implications, including those shielded behind a layer of defense and trauma, although they arise in variations for individual soldiers. As the soldiers experience horrifying events that become normalities in war, they are mentally forced beyond human limits and relinquish a part of their humanity in an effort to cope. O’Brien recounts his personal experience of conformity to war expounding, “It’s a hard thing to admit, even to myself, but I was capable of evil,” (O’Brien 128). When faced with the decision to follow through on his malicious intentions, he internalizes the realization and utilizes it as a lesson for both himself and what would become his future readers. Azar reflected precisely the opposite reaction as when O’Brien attempted to limit Azar’s destruction, he refuted, “Don’t take this personal, it’s my own character flaw. I just like to finish things,” (O’Brien 136). Although these two soldiers were trained in the same manner and have undergone the same brutality, when they are faced with this single situation, the line between what is “truly” right and “truly” wrong fades into oblivion as it becomes irrelevant in both minds. Each soldier has their personal belief in what must be done, yet O’Brien does not provide readers with a definitive solution. Rather, he examines the reality behind each character’s unique motivations and allows the readers themselves to evaluate their own version of “right” and how it would be appropriate in such a situation. By renouncing his power as a storyteller and placing that power in the grasp of his readers, O’Brien creates an extensive paradoxical universe in which the author, the characters, the readers, and the *truth* cohesively coexist. The ramification of this creation becomes ingrained in the minds of readers as psychological mirrors no longer exist independently but instead infiltrate into the reader’s own sense of truth and external self-portrayal.

O’Brien’s development of physiological mirrors through the personification of the natural world and soldier’s internal strife allows for the revelation of the significant disparity between the mental mindsets between the soldiers as they grapple to understand their independent manifestation of perceived truth. An author possesses the potential to create their own individual representation of an internal ideology and override it utilizing readers’ own minds. In the face of adversity, one can become lost within their own animus or misconceptions

of truth, or they can make the conscious decision to see beyond the societal image reflected onto them and create their own path in the direction toward self-discovery. Only when one confronts the reality of their psychological conflict, can they symbolically smash the mirror that entraps their potential and validate their own humanity.

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Name: Avery Redlich

Work title: A Racially Charged Race From Labs to Law: Understanding the Relationship Between Forensic DNA Phenotyping and Racial Biases Within the Criminal Justice System

Category: Critical Essay

Award: Silver Key

In a world with nanotechnology embedded in the stark red and gold suits of superhero-CEOs, vibranium shields used by patriotic super soldiers, space lasers that can shoot at alien robots, and genetic devices that can scan and analyze DNA to create projections of people, today's technologies are seeming more like works of science-fiction than of the real world. Maybe that's because those technologies are no more than figments of imagination in dystopian, superhero worlds. Well, all except for the DNA reading.

Forensic DNA phenotyping (FDP), or molecular photofitting, is an exciting genetic technology that allows for predictive models and images to be created based upon the scans of a DNA sample.^[1] The results propose an individual's phenotypic makeup, or physical characteristics and visual traits, for usage in criminal investigations. However, while the implementation of this technology seems exciting and revolutionary, it raises major ethical concerns. Implicit racial biases allow phenotypic projections, which are developed from racially skewed databases and are frequently inaccurate, to be mistranslated and presented as hard evidence. This continues a cycle of racial injustice that furthers the same implicit biases that cause concern over the implementation of FDP, disproportionately affecting people of color.

Forensic DNA phenotyping tests millions of single-nucleotide polymorphisms to identify the genetic variants of target traits and create predictive models^[1], matching the single DNA sample of the subject to similar content from a large database pool. However, DNA databases are skewed, offering pools that are disproportionately filled with samples from minorities and making genetic testing for FDP racially biased from the earliest stages. The usage of these already-biased projections in court cases contributes to the perpetuation of social stigmas and racial otherness, as well as to the collectivization of who commits certain crimes.

Within the past three decades, a large DNA database collection known as the Combined DNA Index System (CODIS) has been compiled by agencies within the United States. Data accumulated in a 2020 California Law Review study by Jun H. Tong, professor and researcher with expertise in technology-related litigation, and Erin Murphy affirms that "DNA profiles from Black persons are collected and stored in the state database at two to three times the rate of

Black persons in the population” and “at two to three times the rate of white persons.”^[2] Not only are Black people disproportionately present in CODIS as compared to white people, but the ratio of samples collected in respect to the population of Black people in the United States is disproportionate, as well. More specifically, it was determined that white people make up 49% of the disclosed DNA database, despite being 62% of the total U.S. population. On the other hand, Black people make up 34% of the disclosed DNA database, despite only being 13% of the total U.S. population. This elucidates that, in addition to the percentage of DNA samples from Black people being off-ratio from the population-percentage of the racial group, the percentage of DNA samples from white people is also off-ratio; white suspects have less DNA to match with in CODIS than their population-percentage would presume, resulting in a lower likelihood of their FDP projection being accurately presented as white and aiding in the disproportionate release of white people in criminal cases. However, as white criminals are absolved of their crimes on the basis of proposed scientific data, non-white people continue to make up large portions of the DNA databases, leading to increased projections of Black, indigenous, and other people of color (BIPOC).

Murphy and Tong of California Law Review iterate that “although people of color bear a disproportionate burden of DNA collection and storage, the burden is particularly concentrated on the Black population. [They] estimate that 2.26% of Black people have their DNA collected per year, whereas only 0.69% of the Hispanic population and 0.12% of the Asian population are subjected to DNA collection annually.”^[2] CODIS’s racial ratio of samples promotes FDP to disproportionately target people of color and a variety of minorities over white persons. However, the system has a clear emphasis on Black people, placing them most at risk for the ethical implications of the usage of FDP, which is based directly on the sample comparisons of suspects’ DNA to those of this racially skewed database.

Additionally, according to a 2021 journal study from *Frontiers in Genetics* and led by Lauren Atwood, one of FDP’s services is allowing law enforcement officers to “[re-prioritize] an existing pool of suspects or [generate] a new pool of suspects”.^[3] If that general database-pool already consists heavily of BIPOC, it’s as if these databases are already prioritized. CODIS’s heavy concentration of Black people’s DNA samples leads to suspects of many races being projected as Black for having similar DNA features to the samples; purely considering probability, there is a greater chance for a suspect’s DNA to have a matching aspect to the sample of a Black person if that DNA is most common in the collection. This results in a higher rate of projections of Black suspects than white suspects, aided by there simply being fewer white DNA samples in CODIS to compare traits to during FDP. That “re-prioritization” of the database lends itself to more suspects being presented to courts as BIPOC, especially as Black people, increasing potentially false convictions. The technology and the already-skewed databases FDP draws from then allow law enforcement officers to fabricate new pools of

suspects and perpetuate ideas of racial otherness in courtrooms, all under a seemingly scientific lens.

A 2019 *Journal of Forensic and Legal Medicine* article by Filipa Queirós, a sociologist focused on forensic techno-scientific innovations and the judicial system, emphasizes potential ethical concerns about using forensics in criminal law, highlighting racial implications.^[4] One of many racially-focused concerns of FDP's integration into courts is the biases it would allow into courtrooms, or the collectivization of suspicion: "Collectivization processes potentially exacerbate the stigmatization of already racialized and disadvantaged groups." For example, FDP projections offer more Black suspects as a result of the disproportionate databases, causing more Black people to be tried for violent crimes and feeding racial biases; social stigmas increase as people proceed to associate Black people with more dangerous crimes. Additionally, "since features predicted by FDP relate to common traits shared by different population groups, ... this technology may (re)create dynamics of collectivization of suspect populations. ... By clustering population groups sharing the same, but variable, biological features...FDP might increase the visibility of racial or ethnic difference, thus working as a technology of collectivization of suspicion," Queirós elaborates. The skewed projections presented have the ability to condone internal prejudices of people who may end up within a jury or the larger legal system. Views regarding what races of people are commonly committing particular crimes leads to subconscious prejudices against already racialized groups. This furthers materializations of race in and out of courtrooms.

With increasing media-focus and awareness of public-trials, FDP data—data based on the samples of skewed databases—acts as 'proof' that particular races of people are more likely to commit crimes. The collectivization of entire races of people seeps from social spheres back into courtrooms, as jury members may carry subconscious and/or implicit biases that affect the verdict. As numbers of suspected persons turn into numbers of accused persons, those larger racial stigmas continue in an inherently systemic cycle, affecting not only the legal justice system, but society at large. That cycle is only exacerbated by the relatively prominent lack of accuracy in current FDP technologies.

FDP technology's frequent errors in accuracy create faulty projections whilst offering a sense of proof in courtrooms that creates unjust trials backed in mistranslated scientific data. In the 2021 journal study from *Frontier in Genetics*, Atwood and her team of researchers report that "FDP is a new and developing technology to be embedded in operational use."^[3] This emphasizes how relatively recent the technology is; while it is understandable that FDP has not yet been perfected, that also proves why it is not intended to be used as the only evidence in a courtroom. It is meant to be "embedded" into trials, for it is still "developing." However, as the information is not translated by geneticists but by lawyers, the images developed with FDP are

often presented more as fact and hard data than a projection. Queirós asserts in the 2019 *Journal of Forensic and Legal Medicine* that “forensic DNA phenotyping technology infers information about the racial or ethnic characteristics of suspects” by “attempting to predict phenotype information from genotypes.”^[4] Phrases like “attempting to predict” and “infers information” further validate how dangerous it would be to rely solely on this data or use it in courtrooms without providing necessary analysis of the data, especially considering that the data is often inaccurate.

One reason for problems in projection accuracy as emphasized by Jay Stanley, Senior Policy Analyst of the ACLU Speech, Privacy, and Technology Project, is that “one’s looks are not purely a result of one’s DNA. You can dye your hair or shave it off, grow a beard, lose or gain weight, become a drug addict, get disfigured in an accident, get too much sun, smoke, lighten or darken your skin, have plastic surgery, change gender, and do many other things that can affect your appearance but which have zero tie to your facial DNA,” meaning that, even if a projection was completed with high accuracy to a person’s DNA, it may still not be an accurate picture of a suspect due to environmental factors.^[5] In other cases, the issues of accuracy are a direct result of the technology. A study from the National Library of Medicine’s National Center for Biotechnology Information reports, “FDP can already identify a source’s gender with 100% accuracy, and likely hair color, iris color, [and] adult height with accuracy rates approaching 70%.”^[6] The accuracy in gender is an impressive feat, illustrating the incredible potential of this technology. However, while 70% is not a particularly low number, it is concerning in this context. That means that there is a 30% chance that the eye color presented in an FDP model is incorrect. As this technology is already in use with these levels of accuracy, it also opens up doors for more prejudice within the legal system; if there are two suspects—one who is white and one who is Native American, each with a different eye color—a projection with only 70% accuracy in eye color could provide inaccurate evidence that would point to the Native American suspect being convicted on the basis of scientific fact. However, the projections could very well be incorrect, allowing for racial prejudices to be fueled by “facts” that are not truly factual.

The 2021 study from *Frontiers in Genetics* assessed the accuracy of six different FDP service providers to determine their suitability for usage in law enforcement casework.^[3] The highest-achieved prediction accuracy was by Provider B, which obtained 90% accuracy for eye color. However, it was concluded that hazel eye color, despite having an expected prediction accuracy of 74%, was incorrectly read as blue by all of the providers. Atwood and the accompanying researchers also added that these large discrepancies were not clearly presented as such: “Provider A commonly reported prediction errors of < 1%. Whilst this may be correct from the service provider’s perspective, without explanation of how this error rate was determined, there is potential for an investigator to incorrectly assume that the eye color

predictions from Provider A have a > 99% accuracy.” The potential solution of noting calculated percentage errors in courtrooms still comes with flaws, for that data can be offered in a way that misinforms juries and manipulates the projections to seem like hard evidence. Regarding age range projections, “the overall prediction accuracy was 25%.” Those odds are shockingly low; for a predictive model to label a suspect as within a particular age range and allow that to be a determining factor in shaping pools of suspects, an accuracy of 25% is concerning. Similar to the issues of eye color, while age may not directly correlate to race, the sense of scientific proof as to which suspect has that projected eye color allows for other prejudices to be supported within the legal system. Furthermore, FDP can also predict race, specifically. Provider C was the only provider able to determine skin color and did so for all samples in the study. Provider C obtained a prediction accuracy of 50% for race.

While FDP technologies are constantly in development and these percentages may have increased slightly within the past two years^[6], this technology was still being used in courtrooms with a 50% accuracy in racial projections. Fifty percent accuracy for race, while higher than that of age range, is arguably the most startling of these statistics. That essentially equates to the projected race of a suspect being determined by the flip of a coin. If a lawyer told a jury that there was a 50/50 percent chance that the suspect was a Black person, it would carry a lot less influence than presenting a predictive model or image of a Black suspect as evidence. Repetition of data presented as fact begins to sound true to audiences over time as subconscious beliefs of the accuracies form. As illustrated by Atwood and her team, “given that this is a form of intelligence used to generate investigative leads, this is also potential for inadequate or expert review of the results to misdirect an investigation.”^[3] With commonly inaccurate data, the ability to “misdirect an investigation” is a serious concern. Mistranslation of information provides lawyers the ability to present data with high rates of percent error as pure fact, allowing for racial prejudices to be internally confirmed within juries and society. Atwood and her fellow researchers asserted, “The study highlighted the need for standardization of terminology...and the requirement for interpretation by biologists with special expertise to translate the scientific data to intelligence for police investigations.” The data requires proper explanation to make it clear that FDP projections are not perfect photographic evidence, but rather aptly named: projections. The misrepresentation of potentially inaccurate FDP data in a courtroom creates miscommunication from the legal counsels (who may lack the scientific background to properly relay the results) to the juries, and even to the public, furthering the cycle of implicit racial bias. The implementation of these results in a court of law leads to a false sense of proof under the misconception of hard scientific data, which in turn perpetuates racial stigmas and allows for more disproportionate convictions of people of color.

Forensic DNA phenotyping technology proposes incredible opportunities for the future of forensic analysis; however, between the inaccurate projections being offered as proof, the previously skewed data affecting the creation of said projections, and other inherent racial biases in the courtroom, the threat posed to BIPOC within the legal system is too grave of a concern to ignore. And that threat is predominantly towards Black people. While Black people make up only 13.4% of the United States population, “they make up 22% of fatal police shootings, 47% of wrongful conviction exonerations, and 35% of individuals executed by the death penalty,” according to data from the American Bar Association and the NAACP.^{[7][8]} The United States is the only country in the world that allows thirteen-year-old children to be sentenced to die in prison, and “in urban communities across [the] country, 50-60% of all young men of color are in jail or prison or on probation or parole.”^[9] For every nine people executed on death row, one innocent person has been identified and exonerated; as renowned lawyer and social justice advocate representing people on death row Bryan Stevenson challenges, “We would never let people fly on airplanes if for every nine planes that took off, one would crash.” BIPOC already have targets on their backs within the American criminal justice system; while FDP has enormous potential to improve forensics, it is currently aiding in making those targets easier to shoot. With more projections of racial minorities in courtrooms and more biases against those racial minorities as suspects, they will be more commonly convicted of crimes—especially through wrongful convictions—and more wrongful executions. This is a dangerous cycle that will only deepen systemic issues within our legal system and our society at large.

We live in a country where police brutality and racially-motivated mass shootings are relatively commonplace. We live in a country where the system put in place to provide justice is often unjust. We live in a country where, when introduced to a revolutionary, new technology, we must be extraordinarily wary of its ethical ramifications as a result of systemic racial biases. However, we also live in a country where citizens constantly reproach these states of affairs, advocate for one another, and speak up seeking societal change. The near future will hopefully bring along more developed FDP technology, more racially balanced databases, and better translations of the data to prevent additional courtroom biases. In this future, we can hopefully look forward to a justice system that is less unjust, supported by science and a less prejudiced world. We need to continue taking steps towards this future to bring it from fiction to reality.

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Name: RACHEL SARELI

Work title: Abolishing the Patriarchal Reinforcement of Male Dominance in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*

Category: Critical Essay

Award: Silver Key

Utilizing the conceptual analysis of patriarchal reinforcement of male dominance through her characters, Adichie creates a fictional world in representation of a societal conflict. While drawing on situations' presence in reality, *Purple Hibiscus* is elevated to a position capable of instilling dramatic change in the way society treats and perceives women. Subsequently, Adichie evolves her female characters as well as their voices consistently. Throughout *Purple Hibiscus*, the developing Nigeria is examined through a lens of widely accepted androcentrism and an oriented society prone to male domination; Between Kambili's young eyes and her Aunt Ifeoma's underestimated understanding of tolerance, an aspect of femininity is morphed into a new light, one sparking the flame of change.

Adichie intertwines the forces of powerful male figures not only on the family scale but into the male domination effects on society as a whole. Adichie utilizes animal imagery as she narrates, "Mama was slung over his shoulder... there was blood on the floor (33)." While men are seen as the predators dominating, the women appear as the meek and submissive prey. The dynamic illustration in this way suggests an ancient way of thinking as if civilization still needed to be hunters in order to survive. The health of the "prey" is not a concern of the "predator". Instead, the "predator" forces the submission of the prey by having the prey "slung" and within immediate control. "Blood" is spilled by the domination, despite the common blood shared between a husband and the child his "prey" carries. As argued by Stobie, "Eugene's hubris is that he is unconsciously conflating his powers with God's (Stobie, 426)." Problematic behavior stems from being given small amounts of control and evolves into demanding the control that only God has over people. A human attempting to gain that power hurts others in the process. By the belief that he, as a God, must instill order, Eugene continuously abuses and suppresses those around him. The blinding power the patriarchy allows him to feel becomes consequential to the surrounding society. Women living amongst males who are dominant are "supposed" to allow the consequences of the dominance-inflation of the patriarchy, silencing them to a damaging degree.

Although female figures behave submissively toward male domination, Adichie evolves her characters, allowing them to develop a strong voice to speak out against the oppression they

face. As remarked by Ifeoma, “When a house is on fire, you run out before the roof collapses on your head (Adichie 213).” Presenting a defiant tone, “run” is stressed as a means of female resistance to the patriarchy. Without women, society as one knows it would cease to exist. As the backbone of the house and raising the children are jobs tasked to mothers, the “collapse” of the house would end the dominance of a husband and father, leaving them in the rubble. Adichie’s specific placement of “before” is emphasized as there is only so much time one has to create a change in the patriarchy before people conform to it forever. While Ifeoma’s voice has been strengthened after the death of her husband and her newfound independence, she urges and inspires the same spark of defiance against the patriarchy in another woman, Beatrice. Presented by Stobie, “[One] can not stand for empty Big Manism, something people do too well (Stobie, 425).” Although fear has significant merit in one’s decision-making process, bravery has the opportunity to outshine it and produce a change in the chain of domination. Subjugated by a combination of abusive behavior and patriarchal ideologies, fear is constantly reinforced and instilled into women in Nigerian society. Without exposure to a society in which women are not controlled by fear, fear is a dictating factor that controls their actions. While overthrowing the male dominance is not suggested, the underlying emphasis lies in the word “empty”. If women gain a voice, erasing the “emptiness”, balance will be asserted as opposed to dominance. “Do”, in the present tense, suggests the possibility for a future of gender equality. While “Big-Manism” may not be erased immediately, one who breaks the dominance chain will spark hope into the next woman and her into the next. “People” reflects the responsibility of every individual aware of the societal conflict. Without accountability, Adichie understands that there will be no changing “Big Manism”. When united, society has the combined power to allow equality to flourish when voices are raised to demand a change in a patriarchal system.

Balancing incidents of male domination in the home in addition to the rise of the female voice, Adichie connects the end of patriarchy to a more balanced society. Without diminishing the male voice, the female voice becomes “louder” and more urgent in the face of oppression. The power-hungry male characters conflating their domination with God’s is proved by Adichie to be extremely consequential long term. As expressed throughout her piece through the utilization of the strong female characters, Kambili and Ifeoma, gender equality is necessary and a substantial aspect of ending the patriarchy, thus changing the male and female struggle for dominance in Nigeria into a society of balanced equality.

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Name: Zoe Antonio

Work title: An Analysis of Leaving Home

Category: Critical Essay

Award: Silver Key

Identity is often associated with a place- a place that is typically well-worn, familiar, and agreeable. It is considered normal for stretches of life to be analogous with the place where that portion of life had been lived, which serves as benchmarks of time from which have since been outgrown. Thomas Hardy's narrator explores the journey of Tess Durbeyfield navigating the newfound wonder and unfamiliar terrain of her new stretch of life at a dairy farm, a stark contrast to her parent's home. The narrating voice of Tess Durbeyfield employs the extensive use of vivid imagery and syntactically descriptive, comparative sentences to allude to Tess's perception of the unwelcoming valley of the dairy farm, contributing to the idea that Tess feels small and unsure in the vast and seemingly endless unknown of this new domain.

The initial direction of this excerpt makes use of a descriptive introduction of the setting, tying words of emotion to Tess's perception of the dairy farm and its surroundings that clarify her feelings of inferiority and unwelcomeness. Tess's journey to the farm consisted of a long trek over the Egdon slopes, leading her to her final destination where "the marked difference, in the final particular, between the rival vales now showed itself. (Hardy, 5)". This sentence implies a daunting narrative that characterizes the slopes that surround the valley as 'rivals', indicating that Tess already perceives an unpleasant presence in this environment, complicating the developing relationship that is forming between Tess and the dairy farm. Furthering the evolution of this connection, the narrative utilizes a second comparative sentence that strongly elucidates Tess's feelings of inferiority. "Not quite sure of her direction Tess stood still upon the hemmed expanse of verdant flatness, like a fly on a billiard-table of indefinite length, and of no more consequence to the surroundings than that fly. (Hardy 17)." The evident contrast of Tess's presence and a fly's serves to show a similarity between the two life forms- a seemingly small and solitary existence residing in such a vast land.

As Tess begins to explore her role in this new land, the narrative explains how she perceives the farm and the life of the cows with language of time, alluding to the concept of the endless and expansive nature of this region that intimidates Tess. The job of the dairy farm is to milk the

herd, and the physical wear that that has on the gates and sheds of the farm show the long stretches of time that is associated with the valley. “Long thatched sheds stretched round the enclosure, their slopes encrusted with vivid green moss, and their eaves supported by wooden posts rubbed to a glassy smoothness by the flanks of infinite cows and calves of bygone years, now passed to an oblivion almost inconceivable in its profundity. (Hardy, 40).” The addition of this long, comparative sentence also serves as a concept that elaborates on Tess’s relationship with her new environment, classifying even its purpose as an evergreen and never-ending place that knows well the wear of time and seems yet to retain its intimidating magnitude.

The narrative that is consistently elaborated upon as the excerpt progresses allows Tess’s relationship with the environment of the valley to complexly build upon itself, constantly evolving her perception of the area with vivid settings complete with purposefully descriptive sentences; Tess’s lonesome presence is evident in her journey to the new land, a land that is believed to extend beyond the horizon forever, nestled between the warding presence of two rival mountains, and blissfully aware of its continuity and defiance of finality.

Name: Ofri Ezra

Work title: Conformities Detrimental Impact On Adolescent Morality

Category: Critical Essay

Award: Gold Key

Introduction

The premise of conformity, defined as the "reflection of successful influence," remains a prominent area of discussion, as the need to be a part of a group has held the test of time and is rooted within one's evolutionary processes (Tirsoreanu 2017). Conformity, a multifaceted concept, can lead to a break from a previous identity and a compromise of morals, specifically in adolescents. Dr. John H Bishop, a professor at Cornell University, states, "The propensity of humans to altruistically punish those who violate norms may be hard-wired. A study monitoring neural activity using positron emission tomography found that punishing people who violate social norms activate the same reward circuitry of the brain that is stimulated by sniffing cocaine or seeing a beautiful face" (Bishop 2007). The associated social rewards that come with conformity explain why one may prioritize societal standards rather than one's morals. In "The Namesake," Jhumpa Lahiri, a Pulitzer Prize-winning author, portrays one's need for acceptance through the anecdote of Golgol, and his break away from cultural norms to better assimilate into society (Lahiri 2019). Golgol's story poses the question: to what extent will people go in order to conform to societal norms? Additionally, Kathy T Do, who works in UNC's Department of Psychology and Neuroscience, provides a neurological basis for the "increased susceptibility of adolescents to conformity" (Do 2020). Cooperatively, these perspectives elucidate the receptiveness of adolescents to conformity, hinting at how the need to fit in overpowers one's moral compass. Through the innate social need to be accepted, the heightened sensitivity of the adolescent brain, and the dark power of conformity, as evidenced by history, this paper will delve into the detrimental effects of conformity and how the need for acceptance forces adolescents to break their sense of morality.

Conformities Social Effects

The pressure to fulfill societal norms looms over adolescents and can lead to impulsive and immoral decisions. According to Dr. John H Bishop, William, a previous outcast at a middle school in Ithaca, New York, decided to transform socially at the beginning of 8th grade due to his disdain of "being the little kid that was pushed around" (Bishop 2007). William exemplifies

the alienation many students feel daily, and the need to feel accepted which arises from this isolation. The degree to which he underwent this transformation, however, draws concerns, as he neglects his education in the process: "I've been taking a lot of people's punishments, to get them out of trouble. Or say they flunk a test. I grade it 100%. It's how everybody does it. Everybody fits in better" (Bishop 2007). Williams' lack of awareness in realizing the severity of his actions mirrors the priorities of many, as social rewards that stem from conformity are put on a pedestal, leaving factors such as education behind. The most concerning aspect of William's story is his contentment with his current situation: "Now everybody likes me... I would say I'm in the top 10... I know it's the best I've ever felt in my life" (Bishop 2007). The fact is that today, many compromise their morals, specifically in the context of education, in hopes of better fitting in. Furthermore, the intrinsic desire to assimilate is embodied by the story written by Jhumpa Lahiri, a Pulitzer Prize-winning author, who uses the narrative of Golgol to exemplify the need to conform to norms: "His own friends from school were invited the previous day, for pizzas that his father picked up on his way home from work, a basketball game watched together on television, some Ping-Pong in the den" (Lahiri 2019). Golgol's birthday celebration with his American friends a day early displays his fear of blending his Bengali culture with his newfound American identity, maintaining the consistent theme of the adolescent need to fit in. He continues this transition to American norms: "Lately he's been lazy, addressing his parents in English" (Lahiri 2019). Golgol's pattern of distancing from his previous self demonstrates the grasp that conformity can have on a person. He even goes as far as describing how his name constrains him, describing it as "an entity shapeless and weightless," while explaining how it "distresses him physically, like the scratchy tag on a shirt he has been forced to permanently wear" (Lahiri 2019). As aforementioned, Golgol's new identity arises from his burning desire to assimilate better with his friends from school, displaying the innate desire that students have to be accepted socially. As a result of this need to fit in, Osly Usman, an acclaimed author with nearly 60 publications and 400 scholarly papers written, asserts:

A survey conducted by Dr. Donald McCabe and the International Center for Academic Integrity with 70,000 students from 24 high schools in the United States stated that 64% of students claimed to have cheated on exams...and 95% of them claimed to have taken part in academic cheating activities conducted during exams, or copying a friend's homework (Usman et al. 2020).

Similar to William's situation, a priority for many adolescents is to remain in their peer's good graces, as demonstrated by the significant percentage of students who cheated with peers in McCabes' study. Concurrently, peer pressure significantly prompts academic dishonesty: "Peer conformity has a coefficient of .916, a near perfect correlation in regards to student cheating behavior" (Usman et al. 2020). The near-perfect statistical association between cheating and peer conformity furthers the argument that peer influence plays a significant factor in immoral

actions. In addition, Pete Spurrier, owner of the publishing company, Black Smith books, and 3-time best-selling author, interviews Vanessa Wu, a former student who recounts a time when she cheated in school: "When I told my friends of my endeavor, they were ecstatic, telling me that they were proud, that I was 'badass' for not getting caught" (Spurrier 2016). The encouragement that Wu received from her peers in committing immoral acts indicates that peer influence acts as a catalyst for academic dishonesty. Overall, students face enormous pressure over social acceptance, as displayed by stories such as Golgol and William, and these social rewards that result from conformity lead to compromises of integrity, exemplified by Wu's account.

Scientific Perspective on Conformity

Adolescence is a significant period of growth that is accompanied by a plethora of neurological changes. Lydia Denworth, an award-winning science writer, defines adolescence as "a time of rapid brain growth and neuronal fine-tuning," but this sensitivity can prove to have consequences (Denworth 2021). Furthermore, during maturity, the limbic system, an area of the brain sensitive to emotion and rewards, develops significantly, explaining how adolescents may be more prone to conformity. Denworth asserts that the "resulting imbalance in the developmental forces helps to explain adolescent impulsivity, risk taking, and sensitivity to social reward and learning" (Denworth 2021). Adolescent brains are programmed to be especially sensitive to social cues, making the idea of conformity irresistible. In the stimulus material, Kathy T Do also highlights how adolescents are more prone to conform to negative behaviors. Do analyzes a sample of adolescents ages 12-14, concluding "that higher scores reflect greater conformity to negative influence" (Do 2020). In her study, she concluded that positive peer influence had a correlation coefficient of .14, compared to unconstructive behaviors' coefficient of -.39, displaying how adolescents' loss of morality is a result of their increased adoption of unconstructive behaviors. Similarly, Charlene Smith, a multi-award-winning author, asserts: "When teenagers looked at photographs of high-risk behaviors, they showed less activation in areas associated with cognitive control, including the brain's dorsal anterior cingulate cortex, bilateral prefrontal cortices, and lateral parietal cortices — parts of the brain that inhibit self-destructive conduct" (Smith 2021). The lack of cognitive control can be extended to an academic scope, leading to an increased adoption of unconstructive behaviors, such as cheating. Finally, the Australian Institute of Cognitive and Clinical Neurosciences conducted brain imaging studies, revealing that some adolescents experience "mental distress when they contradict their peers" (Smith 2021). Like Golgol and his distress from the embarrassment of his name, the pressure to conform to social standards is enormous, which provides a basis for why adolescents will compromise their morals in hopes of better fitting in. In essence, the heightened sensitivity of the adolescent brain and the numerous

neurological changes during this period connect to the social aspect of conformity as it explains adolescents' urge to conform and the poor moral choices that stem from this conformity.

Historical Background of Conformity

The 1900s was a significant century on the topic of conformity. Andrew Fox, acclaimed author for the award-winning magazine *Tablet*, dubs the 1900s as the "Paradigmatic Age of Conformity," consisting of Stanley Milgram's obedience experiment (1963) and the Nazi regime during World War II (Fox 2021). Fox's depiction of the 1900's illustrates the impact that conformity had on this historical period. Additionally, The University of Central Florida's Department of Psychology, known as Lumen Learning, analyzes Stanley Milgram's experiment, which sought to study destructive obedience: "The volunteer participants were led to believe that they were participating in a study to improve learning and memory...by delivering electric shocks of different intensities to the learners... told to shock the learners if they gave a wrong answer to a test item—that the shock would help them to learn" (Lumen Learning). The goal of the experiment was to see how the pressures of obedience and conformity would affect morality. Milgram, the authority figure, "told the participant-teachers to continue the shock; 65% of the participants continued the shock to the maximum voltage, to the point that the learner became unresponsive (Lumen Learning). The experiment symbolizes the powerful effect of obedience and how conformity can overpower moral choices. Moreover, Facing History and Ourselves, a research organization established in 1976 that consists of thousands of educators, provides an anecdote about Hede von Nagel and her childhood in Nazi Germany: "Our parents taught us to raise our arms and say 'Heil Hitler' before we said 'Mama.' This type of indoctrination was universal. Children experienced it in kindergarten, at home—everywhere. We grew up believing that Hitler was a super-god" (Facing History and Ourselves). Hitler utilized the power of conformity to his advantage in order to manipulate the children of Germany to be his loyal soldiers, illuminating the dark power conformity can have. As a result of the increased susceptibility of the adolescent brain, as explored in the scientific lens, Hitler was able to successfully indoctrinate Germany's youth and showcase the destruction of morality as a result of conformity. While not as severe, Golgol's story and his need for social acceptance parallel these significant historical events, as Milgram's experiment conveyed the theme of wanting to assimilate into a group while demonstrating a loss of morality due to conformity. At the same time, the Nazi Regime represented a darker side of conformity and its obliteration of morality, but still maintained the same principle of not wanting to be an outcast. Overall, history supports the claim of the detrimental effects of conformity on morality, as evidenced by the obedience of Milgrams' participants and the Nazi regime.

Limitations

It is important to note that there are limitations to this research, including one's temperament and the type of friends one associates themselves with. Kathryn Wentzel, who received her Ph.D. at Stanford University and worked in the Department of Human Development, asserts: "Analyses of the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health data show that students with friends who like and do well in school are less likely to display off-track behaviors" (Wentzel 2016). Logically, if one has friends with high achievement motivation, they will likely develop that persona, demonstrating how peers can also be beneficial and lead to an adoption of constructive behaviors. Also, an individual's temperament can determine if they give in to ridiculous consensus norms. For instance, Rebecca, a transfer student at Lakeside High School, had a goal to be valedictorian but was constantly ridiculed by her classmates for trying too hard. Rather than conforming to norms and attempting to fit in, Rebecca said, "I don't like it here, but the only good thing is that Lakeside is so small, you have a better chance at being higher in the class. So maybe, hopefully I'll be valedictorian, and be at the top" (Bishop 2007). Her resilience and pursuit of her goal, regardless of external opinions, demonstrate that it genuinely depends on the personality of the student and the people they surround themselves with, in determining their resistance to conformity. In short, the people one associates with, and the nature of the person themselves prove to be barriers to conformity, demonstrating that not all adolescents are conformists, and some prioritize their morals and beliefs over external opinion.

Conclusion

Despite conflicting claims that adolescents can resist conformity, morality being overlooked because of adherence to social norms remains significant, portraying the adverse effects of obedience. The anecdotes of William, Golgol, and Wu illustrate the social aspect of conformity and how morality is sacrificed due to peer pressure. Meanwhile, neurology provides a basis for why adolescents are more prone to damaging influences, due to their brain's ongoing development. As history shows, conformity is a powerful tool that could have disastrous consequences on morality if used with ill intent. Consequently, as conformity increases, previous identities and morals of adolescents ultimately decrease.

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Name: Noa Robbins

Work title: Fast Food Advertising Seizing the Nation: Generation by Generation

Category: Critical Essay

Award: Gold Key

According to Christine Driessen et al., School of Health & Society of the University of Wollongong, "Globally 13% of adults and over 124 million children and adolescents (6% of girls, 8% of boys) presented with obesity in 2016" (Driessen et al.). This statistic is only a portion of the food industry's harmful effects on the public. The consumption of junk food is a detrimental issue across American society. Currently, children are becoming major victims of fast food advertising. From billboards to television, the advertising industry has lured the population into normalizing unhealthy food. Advertising is rapidly manipulating every aspect of society, and its prevalence is contributing to the rise of the fast food pandemic among adolescents.

Television is a consistent factor in children's lives, and fast food companies purposely position themselves in this industry to take advantage of adolescent audiences. Presently, advertisements account for more than half of what is viewed on television. Carmen Stitt and Dale Kunkel, Department of Communication Studies at California State University, state, "Food advertising accounts for nearly half of all the commercial messages on children's programs...an average hour includes 11 food ads" (Stitt and Kunkel). Advertising has removed the pleasure children receive from watching television as it bombards them with commercials that urge them to eat unhealthy foods. Additionally, Boyland et al., Department of Psychology Sciences at the University of Liverpool, argue, "fast food advertising has been shown to be highly prevalent on television and...associated with normalizing and increasing fast food consumption" (Boyland et al.). The nation has incorporated television into adolescent's lives, developing junk food consumption into a societal norm. By creating a new standard through the adverse utilization of television, fast food advertisements are harming future generations.

Furthermore, junk food companies use social media to increase their popularity among teenagers. Yara Quttenia et al., Institute for Social Studies at the University of Antwerp admit that, "there seems to be a strong presence of non-core and branded food products on social media. It is estimated that adolescents see over 9000 food marketing posts on social media every year" (Quttenia et al.). This absurd amount of advertisements has replaced social media's intended use, convincing teenagers to eat more junk food now and in the future. Prevention Research Collaborator, Amy Jo Vassallo et al. present that, "Brands are using social media platforms such as Instagram to market their products to a growing number of consumers, using

a high frequency of targeted and curated posts that manipulate consumers' emotions rather than present information about their products" (Vassallo et al.). By tailoring itself to the wants of particular audiences, social media advertises junk food as likable in any way needed to gain the attention of young consumers. Through the lens of Instagram, it can be inferred that the content of online sources are factors behind the manipulation tactics of fast food advertisements. Collaboratively, social media and television work to create a stifling environment for children still developing a diet routine. Charli D'Amelio is a popular TikTok influencer and dancer who collaborates with fast food brand Dunkin Donuts. Charli D'Amelio has advertised Dunkin drinks to the point where she had a drink named after her, showing the extent of the advertisement. According to Journalist Lauren Steussy, of *New York Post*, "One of Tiktok's biggest stars is getting a custom drink named after her...D'Amelio...is often filmed with her trademark drink in hand, sometimes taking a swig of the good stuff before unveiling her latest viral vid on the app" (Steussy). This form of advertising through influencers and social media will not only make this unhealthy drink more popular among teenagers, but persuade them to believe they should drink it too. Additionally, information is purposely being hidden about the contents of what Charli is drinking. Journalist Dakota Kim reveals, "D'Amelio projects health and energy as she dances and sips but nutrition facts for her eponymous beverages are stunning...a large contains 340 calories and 68 grams of sugar...the American Heart Association recommends that children...intake less than 25 grams of sugar a day for a healthy heart" (Kim). Influencers use fake perceptions on social media to disguise the truth about junk food, allowing the food to be seen as normal. Just as television persuades children to eat more unhealthy food through the overwhelming use of commercials, social media implores smart tactics to imprint these commercial images into the minds of the youth.

With these issues, there is an abundance of ethical concerns that arise, which society chooses to ignore. Mary Story and Simon French, Division of Epidemiology of the University of Minnesota, "estimated that over \$1 billion is spent on media advertising to children, mostly on television" (Story and French). Investing billions of dollars in fast food advertising is unethical, as this money can be better spent on promoting healthy foods. This absurd spending encourages broadcast channels on television and social media apps to continue to advertise unhealthy food to children, regardless of the health consequences that it causes to the viewers. From a health perspective, Ph.D. Jennifer Harris and JD Samantha Graff observe that food advertisements have a direct impact on children's health and diet "including increased consumption of snack foods, sugar-sweetened beverages, and fast food and high body mass indexes" (Harris and Graff). Despite the concern of junk food normalization, children's lives are at stake, and issues as serious as obesity stem from this problem (Harris and Graff). Lastly, Harris and Graff indicate that "children and adolescents do not have the cognitive capacity to rationally consider advertising appeals and reject those not in their long-term interest or self-regulatory abilities to resist the immediate temptation of highly palatable foods typically

promoted” (Harris and Graff). Crossing ethical guidelines, advertisements take advantage of children who cannot fully comprehend what they view. While the social matters that arise from fast food advertising are important, ethical issues also need to be brought to the forefront to prevent junk food from becoming the standard.

Parental influence plays a large part in how adolescents respond to commercialization. Parents’ perception of unhealthy food advertisements and adults’ opinions on the junk food pandemic are important to understanding the effect that advertising of fast food has on the younger generation. The study analysis of Ariella Korn et al., Division of Cancer Control and Population Science, explores, “slightly more than half of US adults (53-9%) were either neutral towards or opposed to restricting junk food advertising to children on social media. This may indicate a lack of awareness of the issue or its importance for child health” (Korn et al.). According to Korn et al., half of US adults do not show concern about the spread of fast food through advertising and are blind to what is happening in their children’s lives. Parents act as influencers to this generation of children, and if they do not care about putting a stop to this pandemic, it will continue to become the norm. Parents need to be aware, especially due to how quickly food advertising impacts their children. Professor Louise Signal, of the University of Otago, interviews children to reveal the effects food advertising has when children don’t have someone to guide them out of this. One child says: “I like to eat (takeaways) because I find (them) yum. But (they are) also pretty fattening...I just get the temptation of eating and feeling hungry whenever I see those ads” (“What Kids Think about Junk Food Marketing”). The interview provides direct input from children who express their thoughts on junk food advertising and shows how effortlessly it affects them. Children are easily influenced by food advertisements and need their parent's help to guide them away from the manipulation of commercialization.

Young people are falling prey to the techniques of fast food advertising, contributing to the national crisis of unhealthy eating habits. Television broadcasting channels are taking the focus away from the content and overwhelming their young audiences with commercials. The current explosion of social media and food advertisements has encouraged teenagers to consume more unhealthy food. With this, ethical issues such as children’s well-being and false advertising arise. The future of adolescents is in jeopardy if the nation does not wake up and curb the effects of junk food advertising.

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Name: Gila Berlagosky

Work title: Sailing for Sustainability: An Investigation of the Environmental Impact of the Cruise Industry

Category: Critical Essay

Award: Silver Key

Amidst the 20.4 million people yearly enjoying the luxury and adventure of traveling on cruise ships, a pressing and unnoticeable issue arises regarding whether the balance between exciting oceanic journeys and environmental stability could be achieved (“Number of Cruise Passengers Worldwide 2009-2027” 2023). As hidden as it might be, cruises induce an enormous environmental impact, affecting not only the oceans but also the overall ecological balance of port regions as well as the global climate. The cruise industry negatively impacts the environment by harming marine life, damaging out-of-water ecosystems, and not creating and following the necessary regulations for cruise ships.

Cruise ships harm marine life by producing massive amounts of pollution and unconsciously spreading invasive species throughout the ocean. Pollution, as one of the most significant issues, is dispersed throughout the ocean in the form of fuel and unsanitary discharges. According to Transport & Environment, a non-profit organization focused on decarbonizing transportation to help the environment, cruise ships are equipped with a scrubber or an exhaust gas cleaning system. Correlatively, sulfur emitted by ships, which is 100 to 500 times higher than Europe’s standard, is not emitted into the air but rather back into the ocean, which is a predicament for future complications (*Transport & Environment* 2023). Another type of pollution, as stated by Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary, a government-administered marine research organization, is discharges, including sewage, graywater, oily bilge water, hazardous wastes, and solid wastes (“MBNMS Resource Issues: Cruise Ships” 2023). Daniel Moscovici, a college professor of environmental studies and sustainability with a Ph.D. from Stockton University, states that:

Passengers aboard a typical cruise ship will generate 21,000 gallons of sewage; one ton of garbage; 170,000 gallons of wastewater; more than 25 pounds of batteries, fluorescent lights, medical wastes, and expired chemicals; up to 6,400 gallons of oily bilge water from engines; and four plastic bottles per passenger- all in a single day. (Moscovici 2017)

As Moscovici states this, he is trying to emphasize the amount of waste produced by a cruise ship over the course of a single day as a reminder of the importance of sustainable practices

while displaying a cruise ship's environmental impact. Beachapedia, a non-profit organization of environmental scientists and experts, claims that even though some discharges are legal, cruise ships still dump pollution illegally at sea, not following regulations, and causing a tremendous impact as their per capita pollution is worse than a city of the same population (*Beachapedia* 2022). Likewise, invasive species are another detrimental aspect that cruises contribute to further endangering underwater ecosystems and marine life. The Journal of Coastal Research, a nonprofit scientific society overseen by two college professors, Deidun and Vella, states that “63% of the fish and 60% of the mammals listed in the Protocol concerning Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity (SPABIM) have endangered status from ... invasive species,” and those numbers just keep on increasing (Deidun and Vella 2011). Cruise ships unwittingly eased the transfer of species between habitats during their voyages, thereby fostering the idea of invasive species that actuate the extinction of native organisms and minimize biodiversity. Further, American Oceans, a non-profit organization focusing on educating the public on marine species, ecosystems, and their dangers, claims that the waste generated by ships disrupts the nutrient balance in the ocean, leading to the growth of harmful algae that suffocates coral reefs (*6 Ways Cruise Ships Are Destroying the Oceans - American Oceans* 2023). Thus, cruise ships pose a significant threat to the environment as they harm marine life through extensive pollution and the dissemination of invasive species. Hence, powerful cruise corporations disregard the regulations set in place to prevent ships from damaging the environment and have not taken the necessary steps to do so.

Furthermore, cruises damage out-of-water ecosystems through various means, including coastal tourism and port expansion, while diminishing the pristine terrestrial environment. The cruise industry is a quickly growing industry that is not only increasing “in the number of port calls, but more specifically ... in the size of cruise ships in conjunction with a longer annual season” (Deidun and Vella 2011). While that might benefit small island nations that rely heavily on cruises to maintain their economies, using neocolonialism, these nations prioritize short-term gain over long-run environmental stability (Moscovici 2017). Moscovici, claims that “with this economic gain, however, comes greater negative environmental impact such as expanded impervious surfaces, extensive native vegetation removal, or even construction of large waste facilities” (Moscovici 2017). As nations embrace the islands as non-renewable resources rather than symbiotic relationships, more harm is being done to the environment as they grab only the goods they came for and leave little more than just waste behind (Moscovici 2017). According to Seychelles Rescue, a blog specializing in cruise ships, in 2023, there are currently 455 cruise ships and more than 31.5 million tourists having cruise vacations (*Seychelles Rescue* 2023). Aside from islands relying on the cruise industry, tourists themselves have an extensive environmental footprint. Shoreside excursions on islands rarely focus on sustainable ecotourism and put pressure on the carrying capacity of the islands (Moscovici 2017). It is clear that cruise ships are not the only problem but also tourists, who

promote overfishing, overcrowding of natural sites, water pollution, vehicular congestion, human waste, and litter (Moscovici 2017). For instance, due to increased coastal tourism and visitation, there has been so much degradation of nature and land use changes that islands have started to widen roads, develop a new welcome arrival facility at their ports, and improve their airports (Moscovici 2017). Subsequently, as cruise industries expand their ports and increase the depth of dredge projects, cruise ships are eradicating their remaining nature from their coastlines just to accommodate larger vessels, a necessity driven by their economic needs (Beachapedia 2022). Consequently, with the given evidence, the cruise industry is unmistakably disrupting a healthy environment by diminishing the remaining nature through expanding ports and not enforcing sustainable ecotourism.

Moreover, despite existing laws and regulations designed to oversee the cruise industry's effect on the environment, large cruise corporations have consistently been observed not abiding by these laws and continue contributing to adverse environmental consequences. Even with legal dumping to facilitate the cruise industry's operations, depending on the ship's distance from the shore, companies continue to persist in discharging illegally in the ocean (*6 Ways Cruise Ships Are Destroying the Oceans - American Oceans* 2023). Additionally, Angelique K. Howard, a graduate of the Florida State University College of Law specializing in Environmental Law, and the Journal of Land Use and Environmental Law editor, states, "Although the Clean Water Act tightly regulated the disposal of raw untreated sewage, there is no stopping a cruise ship from dumping untreated sewage 12 miles offshore" ("The Impacts of Cruises on the Ocean: What Has COVID-19 Changed?" 2022). Howard reveals that existing regulations are weak, allowing cruise ship companies to operate as they please without enforcement and no intent of improvement. In fact, Friends of the Earth, an international organization in 73 countries focused on the environment, elaborates on the subject and states that "most governments have refused to take actions to actually regulate the cruise industry and buried their heads in the sand to ignore the ongoing damage to the environment and communities" (Friends of the Earth 2022). As a result of governments ignoring the issue, cruise companies have begun to greenwash and complicate their marketing instead of making actual commitments and steps in the right direction (Friends of the Earth 2022). Hence, when people book their "green vacations," thinking it will not affect the environment, their relaxing voyage is camouflaged and still hurting the planet. Equally important to note is that even famous cruise corporations including, the Carnival Corporation, Disney Cruise Lines, and the Royal Caribbean, have been violating these regulations and not attempting to make an impact to change the outcome of their environmental detriment (Friends of the Earth 2022). As these cruise lines are not registered in the United States, they continue to bypass such regulations and continue their adverse effects on the environment.

Ultimately, the cruise industry's negative impact on the environment is an undeniably complex problem that varies from harm inflicted upon marine life, degradation of terrestrial ecosystems, and the cruise industry's failure to create fully functional laws and regulations to oversee its industry's impact on the environment. Ergo, the mark left by the cruise industry's devastating impact serves as a harsh reminder that urgent efforts and resolute steps must be taken to protect the fragile environment and planet Earth from relentless, untenable practices.

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Name: Netta Dobzinski

Work title: Intangible Ownership's Contributions to Sense of Self

Category: Critical Essay

Award: Silver Key

Moral development in itself is difficult to explain or understand, and many grasp at anything they can find to explain their identities and moral compasses. Aristotle, a student of the Ancient Greek philosopher Plato, contrasts his teacher's idea that ownership of goods improves one's moral character and identity. To continue a psychological viewpoint, Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development lists six non-sequential stages that attribute all acts to reasons such as ethical principles, conforming to society, and the operant conditioners of reward and punishment. As pertaining to sense of self, moral development is the reasoning behind what is right and wrong for an individual. Tangibility may be a secondhand reason, but the main logic behind actions are ones of intangibility. Many other philosophers, including Sartre, take a more modern view and attribute a sense of self to concepts and skills. Intangible ownership forces an understanding and rationale because one has to not only understand the intangible concept but also explain its importance to oneself. Therefore, intangible ownership contributes to self of sense more than tangible ownership due to its permanency and how it forces unwavering introspection in one's mind.

In Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, materialism is highlighted upon a backdrop of glittering misery and labor. Seen as a highly determined and intelligent man, Jay Gatsby superficially comes off as a regular of West Egg: a product of new money and the bravery that comes with it. His physical belongings are compared to that of other East Eggers, who live lavish lifestyles in excessive amounts of money and condescension. However, Gatsby's personality—and in fact his name itself—was slowly and slowly built off of an obsession with Daisy Buchanan, the picture-perfect woman, and obtaining her as a trophy. In a way, Gatsby is convinced that he wants Daisy to live out his desperate dream of young love and perfection. Gatsby owns his own idea of her, a romanticized and falsified image of her, which digs him into a hole that never ends: he even he dedicates his entire life to acquiring wealth to obtain the unreachable treasure that is Daisy. Daisy is literally the object of all his desires, but with a twist: his perception of Daisy isn't Daisy herself. Therefore, even if his fascination with her was of tangible reason, such as parading her around, his own perception of her is intangible and unreachable and contributes the most to his sick obsession with her. Even the narrator of *The Great Gatsby* is aware that the way the readers build a perception of him is through his own pride in—or ownership of—his morality. The narrator of this novel, Nick, details his own most

vulnerable characteristics and moralities while taking an ironic point of view. For one, the readers are told very little about his current circumstances, save for his modest house, and Nick prides himself—from the very first page— on his unbiased viewpoint. In addition, his own acknowledgment or ownership of his cleverness and unbiased personality contributes to the way this work is read: filtered through Nick's carefully curated lens. Nick's ownership of his morality forces his recollection to be read with hesitancy, as his confidence of his own personality can sometimes blind himself and consequently the reader. Both Nick and Gatsby's perceptions of their ownership, intangible in itself, are extremely important in the creation of their personalities and readers' interpretations of them.

Despite the work of fiction that *Gatsby* is, its descriptions of the Jazz Age remain consistent with reality. The Jazz Age was marked by its iconic flapper culture, lavishness, and booming businesses and careers. However, the over-excessiveness of wealth led to a known era of fake consumerism and eventually the Great Depression. A recent development in car production led thousands to purchase cars and the same was done with homes, but when the Great Depression hit, many were forced to approach banks to take out their cash to support themselves. However, the banks didn't have sufficient money to distribute back to citizens, causing one of the most globally detrimental economic crashes in history. False prosperity literally nulls out tangibility, voids materialism, and can leave entire countries at risk of a downturn. As tangibility is usually temporary, seen clearly in the events following the Jazz Age, a permanent grasp on such can never be achieved, and therefore its legacy is not long-lasting.

During a time when women were still seen as inferior and lacking the intellectual sense that men had, women not only lacked ownership of their rights but also autonomous ownership. In today's world, women's rights are something highly debated and valued. Ownership of oneself and therefore its contribution to identity are the pinnacle of independence and freedom, as anything less would be considered oppressive. In the United States especially, abortion is a controversial issue whose contenders often bring up the matter of a woman's rights to her own body. Putting one's body in the hands of another or the government can force a sentiment of surrender, diminishing bodily autonomy—tangible— but also one's sense of determination or humility— their personality. When considering personality development, autonomy and the ability to make choices about one's self are foundational. The restriction of these choices not only limits physical freedom but also intellectual and moral development, as women's ability to make autonomous decisions is intrinsically linked to their sense of self. Without autonomy, women are impeded from achieving their full intellectual and moral potential. In such a way, tangible autonomy forms a basis for developing character, an intangible concept, which further forms the logic for moral development.

Moral development has been hotly debated throughout history, as its psychological and environmental reasons vary so differently cross-culturally. Ownership of tangible objects isn't enough to develop such morality and in contrast, is often paired with an unconscious, intangible desire for that object. This lack of physicalness is an impetus for further thought and introspection, which in themselves are main contributors for a sense of self.

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Name: Noa Dobzinski

Work title: Linus' Identity Shift in House in the Cerulean Sea

Category: Critical Essay

Award: Silver Key

Every person ultimately goes through a plethora of different phases, friends, hobbies, and jobs. However, it takes a significant amount of effort to completely change one's moral compass, purpose, and beliefs. In TJ Klune's *House in the Cerulean Sea*, main character Linus starts off as ordinary: he has a mundane house, a normal job, and a lonely life. However, after a series of events, Linus changes himself completely from an average, compliant bystander to a prejudicial government to a caring, loving believer and warrior for equality between magical creatures and humans. In this way, Klune illuminates the necessity for fighting for one's beliefs in order to create a more just society, and escaping the mindset of blind ignorance and compliance. Using Linus as his vessel, he emphasizes the fact that even the most ordinary person with no previous activism can fight for their beliefs and make the world a better place.

Linus is introduced to the reader as an ordinary person in an average, gloomy city, but soon after he is surrounded by a diversity of opinion and people, he undergoes a self-transformation. He works at DICOMY, which is in charge of magical children, and his job is to observe different magical orphanages. It is clear in many scenes that Linus lives by his job's rulebook: he reads the rulebook before his meeting with the Extremely Upper Management, and when called into the meeting, it is revealed that Linus is chosen for a secret mission due to his ability to separate emotions from work. Linus is also chosen because he does not care to follow up on magical children he observed or the status of their homes; he does not go above his pay grade. Naively, Linus believes he cares about the wellbeing of the children that he observes, but he does not actually take any steps to confirm that same welfare. Having worked at DICOMY for 17 years, Linus does not question the role of DICOMY and its effects on magical beings, rather he is compliant to DICOMY almost to the point of blind following of authority. He is not allowed any personal effects on his desk, and is so obedient to the rules that he follows this regulation. Linus complies with every rule that his government places upon him, and believes his role in creating justice in society ends when the work day ends. Furthermore, soon after Linus visits the island Marsyas, he has a conversation with Arthur in which Linus emphasizes that rules and regulation are to be followed in order to better assimilate the magical beings. For Linus to not realize that the point of DICOMY is segregation rather than assimilation, he must believe that he is doing the right thing so much so that he is ignorant to reality. He is completely unaware of the actual goal of his government, even after the many

years of working there and not questioning authority, or the current norms. Conversely, later in his mission, he writes back to DICOMY with special focus on keeping in mind that the rules and regulations are simply suggestions. Linus completely violates multiple rules throughout the rest of the novel, especially in the protest in which the villagers shout for action against the magical creatures. Linus stands up for the children in a novel way: he defends his newfound family alone in front of a crowd of people, arguing in favor of acceptance and unconditional love. This shift in character from one who would so carefully follow rules to one who would not bat an eye at violating the rules, and even one who breaks them himself, emphasizes the effect that diversity in mind and culture had on someone who believed so much in assimilation: diversity opens one's eyes up to different experiences, mindsets, and injustices, and assimilation hurts the minorities that exist. Additionally, at the end of his journey when he is back in his office, he keeps the photo of himself, Arthur, and the magical children on his desk, even when it earns him ten demerits from Gunther. Linus shifts from a completely obedient, unquestioning person to one who makes an effort to change himself in order to change the way in which things are. He does not blindly follow laws and people in roles of authority, and instead goes directly against their preachings.

Linus undergoes a self-transformation in his belief of his role in society: instead of being a worker loyal to his government and law, he believes that any person vigilant and aware of injustices must try to better those inequalities. Klune allows for Linus' character arc by depicting the shift in his reaction to prejudice and hate: towards the beginning of the book, on his first few days on the island, Linus and Zoe travel to the beach and see a sign spewing hateful messages against the children. In a more passive form of protest, Linus simply sends the poster back saying "No, thank you." Although Linus isn't so misguided that he cannot recognize the harm of discrimination towards the magical children, he does not particularly take any further steps to inhibit this prejudice. However, towards the end of the book during Linus' meeting with the EUM post-mission, he stands up for himself, his beliefs, and the magical children in an outburst. He argues that the orphanage should remain open under Arthur, and that what DICOMY is doing is not right. He even goes so far as to quit his job, move back to the island with his newfound family, and write an anonymous whistleblower report detailing the discrimination DICOMY harbors against magical beings. He highlights that by employing segregation, DICOMY is discrimination against magical beings. It is clear that Linus has had enough of being a bystander to inequalities, and instead of passively accepting the current societal norms and roles, he actively fights for a better world. This reinvention of self reiterates the message that when one sees inequality, he should not ignore it. Instead, it is his duty to fight for justice. When Linus writes the whistleblower report, the entire EUM resigns, and the new board pledges to right their wrongs. Klune writes Linus as the most ordinary of people, blindly loyal and compliant to DICOMY, and naively ignorant of societal prejudices. Linus' character arc and thus reinvention of self & identity displays the power one person can have in creating change.

Linus undergoes a serious identity shift, from having an obedient, naive character unwilling to change for 17 years to one of a righteous, angry character with the will and strength to fight for justice. He discards his value of following rules, regulations, and authority and instead replaces it with love, care, and a sense of protection of magical children. In this way, Linus reinvents himself as an active member of the community instead of a passive one, and one who fights for his beliefs instead of assimilating into groupthink. Diversity of mind and culture allowed him to realize ubiquitous social prejudices and the necessity for him to change such discrimination. Klune therefore communicates the message that creating change begins with creating change in the mind of one average person, and that further allowing for change to happen necessitates the efforts of one to leave behind prejudice and fear and instead replace them with will to fight for others, zero tolerance against injustices, and vigilance about the world around them.

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Name: Samuel Dyer

Work title: Our Funny Bone: An American, Anatomical Analysis of Comic Accountability and Cancel Culture

Category: Critical Essay

Award: Silver Key

In the summer of 1972, the comedian George Carlin was arrested in Milwaukee after performing a now-classic set of jokes entitled “Seven Dirty Words”, which detailed and criticized the seven words banned from being said on television. Over 50 years later in January of 2023, Justin Roiland, the creator and central voice actor of the animated comedy *Rick and Morty*, was arrested on two domestic violence charges. Carlin's arrest led to protests against censorship, defending his free speech rights, while Roiland faced swift backlash, with fans shunning his work despite his innocence under a court of law. Ironically, Carlin was the person arrested for the comedy show he put on and the backlash was overwhelming, while Roiland was punished for a crime completely unrelated to *Rick and Morty* and yet his program faced metaphorical cancellation. The culprits of this backwards logic are those who practice cancel culture, a tactic of suppressing a controversial figure or their art. Though their artistic efforts were silenced for different reasons, Carlin and Roiland were judged by the quality of their character rather than for their merit in the arts. Carlin gained the support of the press not because they agreed with his comedic perspective, but because he seemingly did nothing wrong in the eyes of the law. On the other hand, Roiland was found guilty until proven innocent because of the severity of the charges, and the show was deemed taboo as a byproduct of the incident. For both comedians, the silencing of their art was unfair, yet without understanding the contrast between objective offenses and the subjective nature of art, more comedians will suffer at the hands of censorship and cancel culture, and generations of people will fail to experience life-changing perspectives in the world of comedy. When experiencing artistic and personal controversy, comedians should not be held accountable for their art and only have liability for legal and personal issues of their character because their comedy is both subjective and an imperative, opinion-forming vessel aiding future generations of people and because the tactics used by their opposition like cancel culture and censorship are illogical, cruel, and against essential American rights.

Regardless of the ebbing social and political tide of its environment, all comedy, whether superficial, satirical, or meaningful, has a level of subjectivity, meaning

stable accountability for a comedian can only be found in their personal actions outside of their craft and not in their appeal, competence, or “political correctness” when performing. An example of subjective comedy based on a changing political dynamic can be seen through Dave Chappelle and his commentary on LGBTQ+ issues. In his recent standup specials, Chappelle discusses and jokes about sexual harassment and mistreatment of the transgender community. Many critics have monitored Chappelle’s progressively right-leaning opinions over his career and have seen his perspective as ignorant and offensive, primarily because of Chappelle’s nonchalant approach to controversial topics that someone of his upbringing “would not understand.” However, Chappelle’s jokes mirror the subjectivity of opinion that any average human has, as “Chappelle’s onstage persona (and perhaps Chappelle himself) is openly confused about many aspects of the contemporary world [...] his performance then dramatizes the ways in which that persona attempts to understand the world [...] with people who see things differently from himself. In this light, Chappelle’s humor [is] part of an ongoing process rather than [a] fixed and stable ideological position” (Gillota 2-3). Because Chappelle’s political offerings reflect his own moldable frame of mind, his comedic work cannot be strictly attacked or be ostracized from artistic praise because of “offensive” jokes, since the people who are not laughing at those jokes share the same opinionated flexibility as Chappelle. In other words, philosophically, because both the viewer and Chappelle himself are flawed, there is an equal playing field, and no one opinion can rise above the other morally or politically. The subjectivity of offense found here can also be seen in past legal proceedings like the Parents Music Resource Center (PMRC) committee’s Senate hearing against “inappropriate” lyrics. After music artists like Prince and Madonna released sexually charged music dubbed as “porn-rock,” the PMRC protested their release and faced heavy backlash. One such PMRC denier, the comedic and avant-garde musician Frank Zappa, spoke at the hearing to invalidate the committee’s worries. John Ivers, an author for the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression, summarized Zappa’s core ideals about censorship, distinguishing “a key problem with art censorship: all censorship

is subject to someone’s individual tastes. To find anything offensive or objectionable is to say that you are offended by it, but that does not mean everyone is affected equally” (Ivers, par. 9). Through the lens of subjectivity, being offended by a song or joke shares the same level of subjectivity as the art itself. Zappa and the PMRC clashed over censorship, the PMRC causing an uproar of protest through silencing subjective voices. When both creating and criticizing art, understanding personalized flaws and opinions of every human is key to both validating the audience and artist. Because of this, potent creators often utilize flawed characters to portray their opinions in an interpretative way. For example, *It’s Always Sunny in Philadelphia*, the

longest-running sitcom on television to date, uses radical characters to tell its story and share the views of the writers. These character flaws aid open subjectivity, yet work as an entertaining comedic form as well, as “[character flaws] in turn create tension for the audience. Ultimately, the tension the audience feels can be released by laughing at the characters’ flawed behaviors because the character’s undesirable personalities allow the audience to easily derive a sense of superiority over them” (Ladenburg 863). *It’s Always Sunny in Philadelphia* fosters subjective criticism through entertaining satire. The characters prompt polarized opinions, their flaws causing frequent shifts in fans’ political stances. This allows viewers to reassess their perspectives without fear of backlash. This encourages open discussion on issues at the heart of their society and offers a platform for writers to express themselves candidly while also having prosperous careers. Overall, the controversial perspectives that comics provide audiences with are what pumps the valves of comedy’s heart, so allowing for a space where opinions can be shared amongst both creators, critics, and viewers is crucial to keeping the comedic blood flowing. Understanding subjectivity in the media cycle avoids clogging those valves with censorship and cancellation, as an

accepting system feeds into the principle that, when telling a controversial joke, the comedian is always at the same level of subjectivity and free expression as a critic or viewer. While a comedian can often garner praise from their audiences for dipping into flawed and satirical perspectives as a form of entertainment, critics who are offended by their material will try to disparage the artist’s platform and backpedal public opinion of them using a tactic widely known as cancel culture.

Accountability through cancel culture is ineffective because the subjective nature of art exposes the tactic’s illogicality, proving it more as a form of censorship and infringement on American rights rather than a standard for ethical responsibility for the comedians it affects. Cancel culture’s fundamental devices call for digging into the personal life, career, or commentary of the accused to search for remarks or actions that do not equate to “political correctness,” or the social code that determines what an individual is allowed to say based on their racial, sexual, or cultural background. For example, musical comedian Bo Burnham describes an inappropriate socio-ethnic blunder in the song “Problematic” from his special *Bo Burnham: Inside*, where he details “when [he] was 17, on Halloween, [he] dressed up as Aladdin [...] / [he] did not darken [his] skin, but, still, it feels weird in hindsight” (Burnham, lines 13-17). Burnham’s lyrics lampoon the efforts cancel culture utilizes when delving into an artist’s personal life to expose their wrongdoing, which are brought up ironically by Burnham in the song as the average comedian would do

their best to leave a regretful incident in the past while Burnham wears it on his chest as a tattoo. This approach, while seeming to hold individuals accountable, falls short due to artist subjectivity and moral inconsistency. Events from a comedian's life seen as problematic lack clear intent. Moreover, exposing such events yields subjective audience reactions, meaning it might not actually stain the reputation of an artist. Also exemplified through his song, "Problematic," Burnham satirizes the unexpected outcome of cancel culture on a comedian, as he monologues "I've been totally awful / My closet is chock-full of stuff that is vaguely shitty / All of it was perfectly lawful / Just not very thoughtful at all" (Burnham, lines 40-43). This perspective illustrates how comedians will view cancel culture as a small barrier to cross in their careers because they see their actions as "perfectly lawful" rather than genuinely taking the concern to heart. Similarly, Burnham recounts another outcome through the chorus when pondering "Times are changing, and I'm getting old / Are you gonna hold me accountable? / My bed is empty, and I'm getting cold / Isn't anybody gonna hold me accountable? Ugh!" (Burnham, lines 9-12). This perspective highlights the beneficial side of cancel culture where a comedian will gain more publicity through opinion pieces on their work, hence why Burnham is asking to be held accountable and being upset he isn't rather than fearing it. However, these positions often fail to effectively critique an accused comedian's actions. They lack condemnation or meaningful communication with the artist, reflecting the divergent perspectives between artist and critic. The only way an artist's opposer can truly understand what the artist was going through while experiencing or inciting a controversial event would be to live it as the artist themselves, as what one person could view as hilarious or witty at that comment another could view as "not very thoughtful at all." This difference takes a hammer right through the logistical side of cancel culture's brain, leaving its moral philosophy pulsing with irrationality.

Cancel culture lacks an effective moral principle because it suffers from ethical hypocrisy, as its efforts to protect the public from offensive material results in infringement upon the rights of American comedians. In his PMRC hearing, Frank Zappa pointed out the discombobulated ethics of cancel culture, claiming it was "an ill-conceived piece of nonsense which fails to deliver any real benefits to children' and 'infringes the civil liberties of people who are not children" (Ivers, par. 7). Failing to usefully service the children of the American public diminishes the main goal of the PMRC's tactics for censorship, which show the failings of the moral effort of cancel culture as well. Moreover, cancel culture disregards Americans' First Amendment rights, including freedom of speech and the inherent right against defamation. The tactics of cancel culture, such as exposing personal lives for public condemnation, theoretically violate the Fourth and Fifth Amendments by

breaching the right to privacy and protection of private information. Overall, cancel culture is ineffective in both its left and right brain. Its logistics easily fall through due to the subjective

intention and reception of the artist, and its moral principles prove hypocritical and ethically skewed to the personal benefit of the accuser.

Though defenders of cancel culture may believe they are protecting the children of the future, comedians are already doing that for them. Altruistically, comedians offer their vulnerability to audiences to spark dialogue and form the opinions of future generations to critique and shape the world they are growing up in.

Many professional comics are given a substantial platform through both their physical and online audiences, so their ability to sway social hiveminds of people is undeniably recognizable. However, the real importance of their platform comes with their authority of choosing how to manipulate the flow of thoughts and opinions of their respective fanbases to fit their personal beliefs. An explanation of this responsibility is from Isadora Mosch, a philosophy student at the University of Georgia. In her article for Philosophy Now entitled “The Philosophy of a Controversial Joke”, Mosch details the potency of a comedian’s approach and the vicissitude of results that can come from an audience’s interpretation, as she explains “it is the comedian’s responsibility to recognize his or her enormous power in affecting peoples’

attitudes and beliefs. To use one’s platform as a comedian to maintain oppressive advantages is reckless at best and an abuse of power at worst. On the other hand, to open a dialogue about taboo topics is a laudable, even honorable use of a comedian’s power” (Mosch, par. 13). While a misstep in presentation can cast a comedian negatively, a comedian who can intercept the audience’s mind and mold it into a form for the better acts as a benefit to their society at large, which is an action that deserves mass praise. Comedians aim for this, attracting larger audiences seeking life advice, political insights, or pure laughter. However, finding the humorous vein is not as straightforward as a mere squeeze of the fist, as a comedian must experiment to find the style of tone and delivery that best suits the material they are trying to hand over to an audience. Fortunately for new comics, one commonality can be found in the most popular comedians of recent decades: they are reckless. Despite backlash, comics like Dave Chappelle develop a philosophy of experimenting for the sake of human benefit and personal growth, allowing them to say anything they would like to onstage without fear. As explained by Chappelle in his special *The Bird Revelation*, he knows “everybody gets mad

because I say these jokes, but you understand that this is the best time to say them, more than ever. I know there’s some comedians in the back. [They] have a responsibility to speak recklessly. Otherwise, my kids may never know what reckless talk sounds like. The joys of being wrong” (Gillola 3). Regardless of the controversy an artist could face for offensive material or crossing the line of political correctness, Chappelle acts out of courage both to provide an

example to future generations and to rally other artists to be open about their beliefs instead of cloistering them away and becoming unoriginal and unfunny. Chappelle knows comedy can be the ichor of a society's commentary, so he preaches and practices the use of recklessness to easily grab the attention of audiences and float them down the stream of his views, which they can absorb and take with them as they enter the world outside of his platform. Chappelle's boldness receives commendation yet draws critique for perceived risks. However, such daring approaches are crucial for comedians, shaping influence over current and future generations. Artists bear responsibility in shaping opinions, especially for the future, as their impact extends beyond their career, molding what follows in their wake. Frank Zappa's statements accurately mirror this responsibility. In his PMRC hearing, Zappa was asked several questions about how his implications would affect the future and whether the

adults of the following decades are important to him. When asked about ratings on children's toys to determine their safety per age, Zappa responded with "In a way, I do [care about ratings] because that means that somebody in an office someplace is making a decision about how smart my child is" (Ivers, par. 13). Zappa's response exemplifies why comics like Chappelle act to be as reckless as possible; restricting children from playing with a harmful toy or viewing a piece of controversial art takes out the recklessness of their life itself. Maturity stems from facing obstacles and learning from mistakes; shielding children from adversity impedes growth. Similarly, critiquing controversial comedians hinders personal development. By letting comedians cut deep into an audience member's psyche, whether it's through provoking thought or unintentionally offending, onlookers can grow accustomed to the crucialness of utilizing controversial commentary in comedy. This system develops artistic taste and appreciation, allowing for both more comedic voices to be heard and for the opinion-forming cycle to grow monumentally. Feeding recklessness in art breeds a tamer and more peaceful environment for both people in society now and the people of centuries from now, so it is imperative that critics and audiences alike learn to take a comedian's artistic heedlessness in a humanistic way to use as food for thought and food for the future. Overall, comedy often utilizes intentionally reckless methods to spark dialogue and concern for the years that the next generation of children will assume, as they

are the lifeblood of both artistic and societal development.

Once the beast of cancel culture has been dissected and disassembled, its ineffectiveness is blatant and future generations should be able to enjoy consuming uncensored, recorded comedy specials on their favorite streaming application without needing to worry about comedians being shunned. However, despite its glaring flaws, cancel culture is still used daily by Internet users and critics in cases like Justin Roiland's. Countless comedians,

visual artists, musicians, politicians, and online personalities are slammed by irrational eschewing through cancel culture and are unfortunately affected financially, socially, and psychologically as a result. Luckily, there is a solution the average fan can utilize to protect their idols from unfair censorship: relentless support. Supporting a comedian regardless of how many

other fans are cancelling them is a way to combat the failure of the artist. Comedy relies on the passion of fanbases, so if a supporter continues to endorse their favorite work from a comic, that comic will be heard and will get paid by the end of the day. Though others may disagree, a fan has the right to support any comedian they would like because of their shared flaws with the artist, so criticism of audiences who encourage cancelled artists is essentially gratuitous and harmful to society at large. After all, for both the critics and the fans, it's just their opinion.

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Name: Rebecca Elitzur

Work title: Plant-based Diets Affect Chronic Illnesses

Category: Critical Essay

Award: Silver Key

The famous quote, “Let food be thy medicine and medicine be thy food” (Nordqvist), attributed to the Greek physician, Hippocrates, suggests that food can be medicinal. This idea has never been more relevant than it is today. For around 2.5 million years, humans have subsisted on meat and animal products, however, evidence is starting to show the negative effects of this type of diet. According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), chronic illnesses, or long-lasting health conditions, are the leading cause of death in the United States. The solution lies in plant-based diets, which can help prevent and reverse heart disease, cancer, and type 2 diabetes.

The detrimental impact of meat consumption on heart disease is examined in the following articles, which highlight significant levels of cholesterol and saturated fat found in meat products. Further, they emphasize the benefits of a whole-food plant-based (WFPB) diet. According to the American Heart Association, meat is often loaded with cholesterol and saturated fat, which negatively affects heart health (American Heart Association). In an article from the *Journal of Geriatric Cardiology*, Dr. Caldwell B. Esselstyn states:

If you, as a cardiologist or a cardiac surgeon, decided to hang your shingle in Okinawa, the Papua Highlands of New Guinea, rural China, Central Africa, or with the Tarahumara Indians of Northern Mexico, you better plan on a different profession because these countries do not have cardiovascular disease...they all thrive on whole food, plant-based nutrition with minimal intake of animal products. (Esselstyn)

Residents of the afore-mentioned countries have eliminated most animals and animal products from their diets, opting for a WFPB diet. This demonstrates a correlation between the WFPB diet and the absence of heart disease. In the US, the causes of heart disease are often overlooked, and medicine is typically prescribed. Medicine for chronic illness will provide temporary relief, but a more permanent solution is needed to solve the problem. Dr. Ken MacLeod, who suffered cardiac arrest after completing a 5K run, published his success story in *Forks Over Knives*. While in the hospital, Macleod’s friend gave him the books, *The China Study* and *Prevent and Reverse Heart Disease*. He followed the WFPB diet outlined in the books and had astonishing results. After three months, he “had lost 35 pounds,” and his “cholesterol and

triglyceride numbers were cut by well over half from what they were.” In addition, MacLeod was able to cut his “cholesterol medication by half.” A devout follower of the WFPB diet, MacLeod claims to have become a “low-fat plant-based evangelist to anyone who will listen” (MacLeod).

Not only can plant-based diets reduce heart disease, they can also reduce the risk of cancer. This is crucial as these illnesses can be toxic to our health, making them extremely important to treat. In an article from the journal, *MDPI*, author Andras Fehér et al., Clinical Informatic Solutions Leader at Aladdin Medical, states that reducing meat consumption in favor of plant-based diets can effectively reduce the likelihood of “developing some types of cancer.” Fehér further states that red meat is “probably carcinogenic,” and processed meat products are “carcinogenic to humans,” according to the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) (Fehér et al.). In an article from Harvard Medical School, Katherine McManus, Director of the Department of Nutrition at the Brigham and Women’s Hospital explains how the Mediterranean diet has been shown “to reduce risk of...certain cancers (specifically colon, breast, and prostate cancer)” (McManus). Another article, by Harvard Health Publishing, describes the Mediterranean diet as “vegetables, legumes, fruits, whole grains, nuts, seeds, poultry, fish, and olive oil” (Harvard Health Publishing). Although fish and chicken are part of this diet, there is no meat, suggesting meat is one of the main culprits of cancer. Both cancer and heart disease are major chronic illnesses that cause many deaths. According to the CDC, about 695,000 people in the US died from heart disease, and 605,213 people have died from cancer in 2021 (CDC). The risk of these illnesses can be significantly reduced by swapping out a diet of meat and animal products for one that is plant-based. In addition, Mediterranean diets can reduce the risk of cancer.

Plant-based diets can also help reverse type 2 diabetes. In the *American Journal of Lifestyle Medicine*, Dr. Gunadhar Panigrahi, et al., state that they helped 37% of type 2 diabetes patients achieve remission by having them follow a “low-fat, whole food, plant-predominant diet while receiving standard medical treatment.” In addition to helping patients diagnosed with type 2 diabetes, the group also concluded that “a vegetarian diet is associated with better glycemic control,” and the risk of type 2 diabetes “was lower among more plant-predominant diet followers (vegans, lacto-ovo, pescos, and semi-vegetarians) as compared to nonvegetarians” (Panigrahi et al.). Switching to plant-based, or primarily plant-based diets can lower the risk of type 2 diabetes. Nonvegetarians were shown to have a higher risk of diabetes than those who followed plant-based style diets. Based on this research, diabetes is another example of a chronic illness that can be reversed and prevented by plant-based diets.

As mentioned previously, meat and animal products cause inflammation, which can lead to chronic illnesses, such as cardiovascular disease (CVD), cancer, diabetes, and more.

These illnesses are the leading causes of death, and therefore society should be motivated to treat them. Diets that include mostly fruits and vegetables reduce inflammation and therefore reduce the risk of these illnesses. In an article by the University of Chicago Medicine, Dr. Edwin McDonald states that “Mediterranean and plant-based diets, which are low in red meat and processed foods, can offer some protection against chronic inflammation” (McDonald). Plant-based diets and diets with reduced amounts of meat are beneficial for reducing inflammation in the body, suggesting that inflammation is either caused or increased by meat and animal products. In an article in the *Nutrients* journal, Dr. Alexandros Tsoupras, a lecturer in food sciences at the University of Limerick, mentions that a number of studies have proven the medical benefits of the Mediterranean diet, particularly with conditions such as “heart failure, CVD, cancer, obesity, metabolic syndrome, diabetes, and other subsequent manifestations...” (Tsoupras). This proves that when eating a mostly Mediterranean diet, not only is inflammation reduced, but chronic illnesses can be effectively treated or prevented. Plant-based diets, specifically the Mediterranean diet, are nothing new. According to a *Nutrients* journal article by John Anderson, in the Department of Nutrition, at UNC Chapel Hill, the Mediterranean diet, closely resembles “the classical pattern of eating practiced by Greeks and other Mediterranean populations” (Anderson). In an article from the National Library of Medicine, Dr. Frederico Alisson-Silva, et al. state that red meat is “one of the most consistent epidemiological associations between diet and human disease risk” (Alisson-Silva et al.). The group draws a correlation between red-meat consumption and “all-cause mortality, colorectal and other carcinomas, atherosclerotic cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, and possibly other inflammatory processes” (Alisson-Silva et al.). Thus, by eliminating red meats, one can eliminate inflammation, and therefore prevent or treat chronic illness.

According to the CDC, diseases such as “heart disease, cancer, and diabetes are the leading causes of death and disability in the United States” (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention). Improved treatment and prevention of these chronic illnesses could have a profound impact on the lives of thousands of individuals. There are several negative effects of eating a meat-based diet, including high cholesterol content and the carcinogenic properties of red meat, processed meats, and animal products. Therefore, by not eating meat, the risk of cancer can be reduced, as noted by Dr. Panigrahi and his colleagues, and following a plant-based diet can reverse type 2 diabetes. Dr. Tsoupras also supports the conclusion that inflammation in the body is a leading cause of many chronic illnesses which the Mediterranean diet can be used to effectively treat. Embracing a plant-based diet is a step towards preventing and reducing the risk of these life-threatening diseases, while demonstrating the strong connection between dietary choices and a potentially longer, healthier life.

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Name: Huaijin Chen

Work title: Preserving Academic Freedom: Navigating Societal Pressures and Personal Interests

Category: Critical Essay

Award: Gold Key

In the symphony of societal discourse, the myriad voices of citizens contribute diverse notes -- treble, tenor, and base -- each varying in volume, influence, and resonance. When these voices are in harmony, they create a collective melody that enriches understanding. However, discord may arise if the choristers, for reasons ranging from social order to personal interests, fail to align. It is crucial to honor the insights of professionals, for they are closer to the truth, even though their voices may be temporarily drowned out by societal noise. As Albert Einstein eloquently asserted, academic freedom entails the pursuit of truth with an accompanying duty to disclose recognized truths. Any restriction on this freedom hinders knowledge dissemination, impairing national judgment and action. The challenge arises when societal pressures, personal interests, or disagreements overshadow professional voices, with time often revealing the painful consequences. Therefore, it is not only the duty of professionals to champion academic freedom, but collaborative efforts of government, the business sector, and all the citizens should also be involved.

Professional opinions, with their natural credibility, can influence social order, but the right to speak up truth should always be respected. Governments may impose restrictions on professionals to prevent potential disruptions to societal harmony. In late December 2019, Dr. Li, a doctor in Wuhan, noticed 7 cases that resembled SARS. Warning his colleagues in a WeChat group, he was accused of spreading rumors and disrupting social order. Recklessly claiming it as a rumor without further verification, the local government lied about the real information in exchange for social stability, claiming that only those who contact infected animals could catch the virus, dismissing Dr. Li's concerns (Hegarty, 2020). Consequently, the ignorance in fact and suppression of professional opinions contributed to detrimental outcomes in China, fostering the spread of Coronavirus. If the central government, in the earlier stage of the virus, carefully checked the reliability of Dr. Li's statements, Chinese people would suffer that much from this detestable disease. Dr. Li, as an oculist, using his medical literacy provided very professional predictions and advice to COVID-19, pointing out its similarity to SARS. In retrospect, he is respected by the public as the bell ringer of this unprecedented crisis. It is necessary for the government to find out the truth with the assistance of experts, instead of

defusing the rumor bomb and giving up verifying the possible serial bombs behind it. On the other hand, professional visions could be hijacked by the authorities due to the need for social stability. Dr. Zhong, a respected respiratory disease specialist and epidemiologist, openly discussed the contemporary hazard of COVID-19 to most of the people, saying that “‘Omicron’s fatality rate is only at 0.1%, similar to that of seasonal influenza, and hence Covid can simply be called a ‘cold,’ Zhong said at a university lecture on 2022 Dec. 15.”(Bloomberg News, 2022), telling half a story and making a false analogy in response to the government's policy of dismissing lockdown. Not basing on the facts but echoing the authorities’ need for social order, Dr. Zhong made irresponsible statements that damaged his reputation, receiving abusive comments rather than compliments a hero should have. His drifting away from the truth therefore caused many to die or suffer from illness, even some high-status people or young generations. According to a reliable estimation of the federally funded Fred Hutchinson Cancer Center in Seattle, China’s abrupt dismantling of its strict COVID-19 regime unleashed the virus onto its 1.4 billion residents and triggered an estimated 1.87 million excess deaths among people over 30 years of age within two months (Orr, 2023). Though Dr. Zhong’s decision may benefit society by calming the public, and successfully restarting the economy, the government doesn't necessarily need to cover the truth to the public and make massive sacrifices to receive the benefits above. It is more rational for the government to remind the public about the danger of the virus while gradually reopening the economy other than opening abruptly without any preparation. Striking the right balance is crucial, as the government and scholars could be cooperative and back each other up, maintaining the social order while giving respect to the facts.

The intersection of the right to free speech of professional versus personal interest introduces new conflicts, often causing professional voices to be impeded. Appealing to political standpoints conflicting with accomplished politicians could also stimulate the silence of scholars. Take J. Robert Oppenheimer, the leading figure in the development of the atomic bomb during the Manhattan Project, as an example. His creation of the atomic bomb indirectly led to the end of World War II, forcing Japan to surrender after bombardment. However, astoundingly, Oppenheimer claimed that the Hiroshima bomb was used “against an essentially defeated enemy”(Bird, 2023). Keep warning about the detrimental consequences of using nuclear weapons, he believes that the atomic bomb “is a weapon for aggressors, and the elements of surprise and terror are as intrinsic to it as are the fissionable nuclei”(Bird, 2023). His strong opposition to hydrogen bombs also counteracted the interest of the military-industrial complex, leading to his final downfall. Trying to prove himself blameless and harmless, Oppenheimer was forced to defend himself during a secret hearing against charges that he was a security risk and disloyal to the country(Borghini, 2019). Oppenheimer loved

America, as deeply as his love of science, but he was “foolishly subjecting himself to a kangaroo court in which he was soon stripped of his fecundity clearance and publicly humiliated” and faded out from the public vision (Bird, 2023). As a prestigious scientist, Oppenheimer could exert his talent beyond the realm of nuclear science. The right to free speech of experts should be guaranteed while facing conflicts with personal interests. The public should let them unrestrictedly apply their abilities, rather than putting shackles on them if personal interests are impacted. In addition, revealing inconvenient truths might collide with personal interests in the business realm, sparking disputes. 67 years ago, the first patient of Minamata disease, the worst case of Japan’s industrial pollution, was diagnosed. Tragedy visited Minamata, killing more than 900 people who ate large quantities of local seafood and leaving thousands with the nervous system permanently disabled(McCurry, 2006). Three years after the first diagnosis, doctors at Kumamoto University determined that mercury pollution was the cause of the disease, chasing its origin back to a factory called Chisso. The same year, Chisso reached the same conclusion, inducing Minamata disease in a cat. Nevertheless, when Dr. Hajime Hosokawa, Director of Chisso Hospital, reported this result to the factory, the findings were kept secret and the factory prohibited further studies(Yorifuji, 2013). It wasn’t until ten years after that the government finally acknowledged the result. Dr. Hosokawa acknowledged the authenticity of the experiment and publicly testified in the first Minamata disease lawsuit. The obstacles for professionals to speak up about the truth were even multiplied, and businesses depleted the support of the public through the capital. Ten thousand patients accepted 2.6 million yen each from Chisso and dropped their lawsuits, making the situation even worse(McCurry, 2006). Striking a balance between transparency and the safeguarding of personal interests poses a formidable challenge. In some cases, professionals may face professional consequences or even personal threats for speaking out. As we navigate this intricate terrain, it is essential to recognize the tremendous courage it takes to unveil inconvenient truths and the collective responsibility to support those who undertake this challenging endeavor.

In professional settings, where individuals bring diverse expertise and perspectives, disagreements are not only inevitable but also valuable in challenging assumptions and refining ideas. However, we should still keep the discussion pure, prohibiting misleading or fake facts due to the professional’s desire for profits or honors. For instance, there was once an opioid pain drug called OxyContin that was guaranteed to be safe for all patients(Mettler, 2018). However, Purdue Pharma, the name of the company, refers to studies that were either partially or entirely financed by the firm(Alonso, 2021). Pharmaceutical corporations are ethically responsible for ensuring product safety, but they also desire therapeutic development to help generate revenue. Financial incentives clash with professional ideals, which could significantly

impact the outcome of the study. Researchers encountered internal conflict on their moral compass as they felt urged to create data that would help Purdue Pharma. Furthermore, the desire to become an honorable scholar could also impede the truth. Sylvain Lesné conducted research published in 2006 that identified a subtype of amyloid called A β 56 as a cause of Alzheimer's disease. In this research, which was considered pathbreaking at the time, Lesné purportedly showed that A β 56 caused dementia in rats. His work became influential in the field, with the paper being cited nearly 2,300 times and serving as the foundation for many subsequent studies related to Alzheimer's disease. Lesné also received academic awards and a five-year NIH funding to pursue his studies. Based on the premise, the National Institute of Health may have supplied up to \$280 million in drug development funding. Advocacy organizations like the Alzheimer's Association actively promoted it, advocated for greater funds to progress it, and urged the FDA to approve medications that try to eliminate this material in the brain (Gleckman, 2022). However, a subsequent investigation by Charles Piller, as reported in *Science* magazine, suggests that there are issues with the data, including potential fabrication or manipulation (Piller, 2022). Worryingly, because the concept has dominated Alzheimer's research in recent years, funding for scientists exploring alternative probable origins of the illness has dried up. That implies that, for more than a decade, important research time has been sacrificed, and opportunities to identify effective therapies have been overlooked. Most importantly, his publication laid the groundwork for dozens of investigations that might have followed his research down a dead end. Professionals should be free to express dissenting views without fear of reprisal, fostering a culture that values intellectual diversity and encourages critical thinking, but academic dishonesty could have significant implications on the path of discovering truth. The right to free speech of professionals should be promoted in order to compact such desire.

In conclusion, the symphony of societal discourse requires not only the recognition of the right to free speech for professionals but a collective commitment to uphold the integrity of that speech. The significance lies in the enduring impact on societal well-being, where the lessons learned from past silences and manipulations propel us toward a future where truth, ethics, and enlightenment harmonize in a melody that resonates through the corridors of history.

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