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Nature: Exploring Surrogacy through Visual Art – Megan Kenealy

Agel; Cavanaugh; Harb-Ramero; Lane; Leger; Kenealy; LaVoie; Wells; Symynkywicz; Groot; Higgins; Juliano; Duclos
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The College of Graduate Studies
021 Maxwell Library
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Marxian Social History vs New Economic History: The “Williams Thesis” and the Debate on Slavery’s Relationship with the British Industrial Revolution

Jennifer Agel, Master Arts in Teaching (History), Department of History, Bridgewater State University, jagel@student.bridgew.edu

Abstract: In 1944, the publication of Eric Williams’ thesis Capitalism and Slavery sparked a historiographical debate that continues to rage to this day. In particular, his work’s foundational premise, in which he argues that the eighteenth-century slave plantation system of the Caribbean laid the economic foundations of the British industrial revolution in the nineteenth, has been hotly contested by historians since the year of its publication. Invariably, historical interpretations of the “Williams Thesis,” as it came to be known, are largely informed by the political and social leanings of the scholars who tackle the issue. In this article, I argue that the historical understanding of the Williams Thesis is subject to the fluctuations of economic historical theory in contemporary scholarship. In particular, cliometrics understandings of history according to the New Economic school of thought tends towards criticizing the basic economic tenets of the Williams Thesis, while socially minded Marxian schools of historical thought uphold it. The result is an unsettled debate regarding the nature of slavery and industrialism’s relationship that reveals larger historiographic tensions between economic interpretations of studying history and social ones.

Keywords: Eric Williams, Williams Thesis; slavery; historiography; industrial revolution; economy.

Introduction
The publication of Eric William’s 1944 Capitalism and Slavery shook the historiographical world of both economic and social history when it made two groundbreaking suppositions on the relationship between Caribbean slavery and the British Industrial Revolution. The first, known among historians as the “William’s Thesis,” argued that Britain’s involvement in the Atlantic slave economy was the primary driving force behind its Industrial Revolution - and as a result, the foundation of British capitalism - in the mid to late nineteenth century. The second supposed that the capitalist undercurrents of British slavery ultimately led to its demise as British interests moved toward
industrial free trade due to the accumulation of surplus capital from slavery, ironically making slavery itself obsolete in the new industrial era. Both the supposed causational relationship between Atlantic slavery and British industrialism and economically motivated abolition fit Williams’ Marxist tendencies and have been hotly debated by historians ever since. The Williams Thesis seems to be a particularly polarizing subject - since its official publication in 1944, the supposed relationship between Atlantic slavery and British industrialization has been discussed by dozens of economic historians, each of which seem to use Williams’ *Capitalism and Slavery* as a touchstone by which to either ground their own conclusions or set them up against. As a result, it has come to be that the historical question of slavery’s relationship with British industrialism is most typically understood in the world of academia in terms of the validity of the Williams Thesis.

Furthermore, a close reading of the available source material suggests patterns according to shifting historiographical trends in approaches to economic world history. The typical Williams Thesis supporters tend to latch on particularly to his theories’ deep roots in a Marxian-inspired social history of an extensive “Atlantic economy,” which suppose a global connection between surplus profits of the slave economy of the Atlantic World to the overall generation of capital that formed the basis of industrial markets in the late nineteenth century. The heyday of the pro-Williams “Atlantic Economy” scholars, such as Joseph Inikori and Barbara Solow corresponded with a growing international interest between the 1960s and the early 1990s in understanding slavery’s foundational role in the development of institutions both political and economic hitherto unconsidered.

In the opposite camp, the greatest critique of the Williams Thesis typically comes from historians invested in cliometrics historical theory, or “New Economic History.” Though first founded in 1958, and roughly contemporary with Williams’ own work in social economic history, it was generally overshadowed by the orthodoxy of the Atlantic Economy theorists for the greater part of the latter twentieth century. It was not until the late 1990s that a renewed interest in cliometrics revitalized the Williams debate, which has resulted in some of the more recent scholarship of the early 2000s on the link between slavery and British industrialism, spearheaded by David Eltis and Stanley Engerman, to actively argue against the Williams Thesis. The most recent contributions to the debate, summed up in this article with the works of Sven Beckert and Seth Rockwell, Gavin Wright, Trevor Burnard and Giorgio Riello, Stephen J. Redding, and Hans-Joachim Voth (all published in the last four years) suggest that while Williams Thesis may still yet find champions in the 2020s, true consensus has yet to be achieved.

The overall result seems to be that the actual understanding of the relationship between Atlantic slavery and the development of a British industrial economy is entirely dependent on whether current dominant historical scholarship falls into the camp of social historical theory or cliometrics historical theory. If the former, then slavery, much in line with Williams’ original thesis, formed the foundational accumulation of capital necessary for the development of an industrial system of labor based on domestic production in the
late 1700s. If the latter, then profits in plantation slavery in the Caribbean proves too relatively insignificant to have been the sole catalyst for mass industrialization (the so-called “small ratios” theory).

**Marxian Historical Theory vs. Cliometrics (New Economic) History**

Before understanding the historiographical debates over the Williams Thesis, it is first necessary to form a basic understanding of the two major undercurrents of historical thought that dominate the discourse: Marxian economic historical theories and cliometrics economic historical theories. Both marry economic theory to the processes and impacts of history but differ drastically in the theoretical models of interpretation by which economics can be applied to the study of history.

To begin with the former, it should be noted that there is no uniform “Marxian theory” that could be applied to the study of economic history. Rather, this article uses the term as a general description of the socially oriented narrative models of interpreting history inspired by several Marxian theories related to its study; primarily Marx’s “historical materialism” and “primitive accumulation” theories. Historical materialism, developed by Karl Marx in the 1850s along with his theories regarding the foundational principles of capitalism, posits that all human behavior and social institutions stem from collective economic activity; according to Marx, the wheel of history turns on the economic and material dialectics of societies. Marx further developed a branch theory of historical materialism that accounted for the accumulation of capital through the dispossession of material resources through violence in volume one of *Das Kapital*, which he in turn argued was one of the foundational catalysts of capitalist systems.

Though first published in 1867, this theory, known as the “primitive accumulation theory” came to be at the heart of the historical debate on slavery’s role in the development of British capitalist industrialism made famous by the Williams Thesis. Such theories laid the foundations for scholars like Williams to interpret economic history through a socially oriented narrative lens, with a heavy focus on the relationship between capital accumulation and systems of human inequality.

Cliometrics historical theory, also known by its original title “New Economic History,” took the interpretation of economic history in an entirely new direction. First developed in the economic boom of the post-World War II United States, cliometrics history “arose from the confluence of advances in economic theory, econometric techniques, and technology” that brought economic prosperity to the forefront of the American zeitgeist in the 1950s. According to Claude Diebolt and Michael Haupert in their 2021 article “Cliometrics: Past, Present, and Future,” the cliometrics movement was born from a burgeoning post-war interest in economic forecasting through the accumulation and analysis of raw data. Spearheaded primarily by American economic historians and sponsored by government directives to find statistical patterns of economic growth through historical data, this movement “served as a catalyst for the change in emphasis from narrative to quantitative studies in economic history.”

The cliometric movement would also forever set up a tension among economic historians,
separating them into camps of “traditionalist” economic historians working from the social narrative model of interpreting history, and “new” economic theorists working from a quantitative model. This tension has been played out among historians on several historical debates since the 1950s, but perhaps none so hotly and for so long as the Williams Thesis.

**The Williams Thesis and Its Early Cliometrics Critics**

Trinidadian scholar and politician Eric Williams’ 1944 *Capitalism and Slavery* is the published version of his 1938 dissertation “The Economic Aspect of the Abolition of the West Indian Slave Trade and Slavery.” As the name of the original version suggests, Williams’ primary aim in both works was to explore the economic foundations of the abolition of slavery in the Atlantic world. However, it is another one of his theories, outlined in the third chapter of *Capitalism and Slavery*, for which the book is so notorious. The Williams Thesis, as it is best known by historians, asserted that “the profits obtained [from slavery] provided one of the main streams of that accumulation of capital in England which financed the [British] Industrial Revolution.”\(^3\) The Williams Thesis thus laid the foundational origins of the British Industrial Revolution at the feet of the Atlantic slave trade, and it is for this theory that the book has accrued controversy in the field of economic history. Williams’ Thesis rested on the assertion that surplus profits created by the “triple stimulus” to the British economy by the Triangular Trade, as well as the surplus of individual wealth accumulated by British Caribbean planters, formed the necessary capital for the creation of infrastructures vital to an industrial economy.

To support this, he made great use of broad correlations between the development of mercantilist foreign trade stimulated by slavery and the advent of seaport and trading centers, such as Liverpool, Bristol, and Glasgow, and the subsequent development of such towns as centers of industrial growth. He also pointed to the vast accumulation of wealth by individual profiteers of the slave trade (traders and plantation owners) whose profits from slavery Williams argued averaged 30 percent. However, this particular argument, and the Williams Thesis overall, has come under fire among some economic historians (particularly those belonging to the school of cliometrics), for shoddy statistical data analysis and overgeneralizations. Historian Kenneth Morgan outlines one potential reason for Williams’ generalization in his 2000 *Slavery, the Atlantic Trade, and the British Economy 1660-1800*, in which Morgan asserts that *Capitalism and Slavery* had been written “at a time when statistical presentation in economic history was much less rigorous than today.”\(^5\) Still others have pointed to Williams’ own economic philosophies as sources of inherent bias. His Marxist tendencies (upon which he built his successful bid for the office of Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago in 1962) formed the ideological foundations of his theories. Particularly apparent through his conclusions is the influence of Karl Marx’s primitive accumulation theory, an influence that can be clearly seen in Williams’ assertion that the principle driving force behind British capitalism (and therefore, industrialism) was the incentivization of slavery through the violent colonization of land in the Atlantic. The Marxist undercurrents of the Williams Thesis have laid it bare to yet more critique among cliometrics historians, who
tend to argue that Marxist economic theory does not account for accurate methods of analyzing statistical data at the micro level.

By all accounts, Williams wrote *Capitalism and Slavery* at an inconvenient time. Though in his own Caribbean islands, the wave of post-war decolonization sweeping countries previously ravaged by imperialism brought Marxian theory to the forefront of scholarly study in 1944, American scholarship took a decidedly more quantitative turn. The booming economy of the United States in the latter half of the 1940s had elevated economists to status of great importance. According to Diebolt and Haupert, “Their [economists’] rigorous, mathematical models, applied to copious data collected by the likes of the NBER, became the standard by which other social sciences were measured. At the same time, there was a growing interest in predicting business cycles and understanding economic growth. It was natural that economic historians would join this movement.” It was at the same time as Williams published his thesis that Simon Kuznets, the so-called “father of cliometrics,” revolutionized the use of qualitative data in the analysis of history. It is unsurprising then, that the first cliometrics critiques of the Williams Thesis emerged quite soon after its publication.

The first arguably came in 1952 with the publication of Hyde, Parkinson, and Marriner’s article on the economic fluctuations of Liverpool in 1793 (“The Port of Liverpool and the Crisis of 1793”). Williams predicated his thesis on the idea that steady capital accumulation from the profits of slavery (both overall and from the private accumulation of individual slave merchants) formed the basis of British capitalism, that would later transform towns like Liverpool into industrial centers of production. Hyde et al.’s evaluation of the economic stability of Liverpool’s slave merchants argued that that capital accumulation in the city was anything but steady, or even outrageously profitable. One of the authors, Bradbury Parkinson, an accountant by trade, insisted that analysis of the ledger accounts of Liverpool’s merchant firms demonstrated evidence of drastic fluctuations in prices of colonial products from the West Indies and frequent insolvency of banking firms. Though not a direct attack on the Thesis, Parkinson’s methodology of analyzing the output-to-profit ratios of slavery at the micro-economic level would be picked up by more cliometrics historians, such as Roger Anstey and Richard Bean, each of whom massively extended the breadth of available data regarding slave profits from primary sources. This in turn laid the groundwork for cliometrics historians Stanley Engerman, Paul Thomas, and Richard Bean to pick apart Williams’ data analysis using similar cliometrics methods.

Economist Stanley Engerman stands as perhaps one of the staunchest and long-standing critics of the Williams Thesis to come out of the New Economic school. He first showed himself as such in his 1972 article “The Slave Trade and British Capital Formation in the Eighteenth Century: A Comment on the Williams Thesis,” in which he used similar micro-analytical methodology to Parkinson’s ledger-book examinations to directly attack the Williams Thesis’s capital accumulation through profit theory. He argued that Williams’ “frequent citing of high profits is often due either to a comparison of the cost of producing the goods traded for slaves with the prices received for
the slaves of the New World…or else to a comparison of African prices and New World prices…omitting the costs of shipment and [slave] mortality.”

Taking these two things into account when analyzing the slave-profit data compiled by Anstey for the Caribbean between 1761 and 1780, Engerman calculates that Williams’ original claims of slave traders’ profits reaching 30 percent were wildly overexaggerated, and in fact probably only amounted to roughly 7 percent.

Engerman perhaps could have noted, though conspicuously did not, that a 7 percent annual growth rate still represents a significantly large margin. However, he appears to scoff at the number, concluding from it that the “low share of industrial investment using the more probable estimates [of slave profits] should give some pause to those attributing to the slave trade a major contribution to industrial capital formation in the period of the Industrial Revolution.”

To Engerman, accounting for the massive base of capital that he believed would be required to launch an industrial economy from a 7 percent profit margin from the slave trade simply made no mathematical sense. Unfortunately, and perhaps somewhat detrimentally to his argument, he neglects to ever identify exactly how large that profit margin would have to be in order to catalyze an industrial boom.

Still, Engerman’s theory, which came to be known as the “small-ratios theory,” dominated the historiographical scene of the 1970s. It was picked up and expanded upon, for instance, by Paul Thomas and Richard Bean in their 1974 article “The Fishers of Men: The Profits of the Slave Trade.” Additionally, they used similar cliometrics analysis of the market competition of slave profits in the Caribbean to sweep the legs from under the Williams Thesis’s theory of capital accumulation through the wealth of individual slave traders. Analyzing the market structures and staple crop industries of the major slave islands of the Caribbean, Thomas and Bean conclude that “the competitive nature of the staple crop industries in British-America precluded the long-run existence of economic profit.” Slavers, they argue, could not have formed the capital necessary to stimulate long term economic growth necessary for industrial growth in such a competitive environment. In corroborating Engerman’s small-ratios theory and dismantling Williams’ theory of wealth accumulation among individual slavers, Bean and Thomas effectively enshrined quantitative data analysis as the sharpest arrow in the quiver of the cliometrics anti-Williams Thesis historians of the New Economics school in the decades to come.

The entrenchment of this cliometrics model through the 1970s and 80s is most likely generational in nature. Engerman, the creator of the small-ratios theory and decades long critic of the Williams Thesis, was a graduate student under Simon Kuznets (the “father of cliometrics”) and lifelong friend and colleague of Robert Fogel, with whom he helped pioneer the quantitative study of history in the 1960s. Unsurprisingly, with such a professional pedigree, Engerman went on to lead the charge of the New Economic historians in the debate on the Williams Thesis, and continued to champion the anti-Williams camp right up to the 2000s. This indicates that even as the economic boom of the two decades following World War II fell into decline by the 1970s, the cliometrics historians who came into the majority during the New Economic school’s peak did not abandon the methodologies and theories that had
shaped them. However, they were joined in the 1980s by a new wave of scholars whose tendencies toward a more Marxian interpretation of history reignited the Williams Thesis debate, this time riding to its defense.

Defending the Thesis: The Rise of Atlantic Economy Theory

There have been scores of economic historians who have come to the staunch defense of the Williams Thesis since 1944, but none perhaps so ardently as the Nigerian historian Joseph Inikori did in his 1981 article “Slavery and the Development of Industrial Capitalism in England.” In this article, Inikori lays the first major scholarly foundations and sets himself up as one of the founding theorists of what would become known as the Atlantic Economy theory, which posits that Caribbean slavery formed the basis of a globally connected economy that ultimately incentivized industrial production. Cliometrics historians had been lambasting Williams’ original thesis for its apparent myopia to the actual input-to-profit ratios of slavery on the British economy since the early 1950s, but in this work, Inikori strikes back in defense of the thesis by arguing that “The contribution of the slave trade and slavery to the expansion of world trade between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries constituted a more important role than that of profits.”10 Williams’ critics therefore miss the mark, according to Inikori, by focusing so intently on the micro-economic aspect of slavery’s role in capital accumulation. Rather, he argues, the focus should remain on slavery’s role in the “growth of demand for manufactured goods, which provided both the opportunity for more industrial investment and the industrial profits to finance it.”11 Thus, the Williams Thesis holds up: slavery, profit ratios aside, laid the groundwork for a macro-economic pipeline from Atlantic mercantilism to British industrialism.

Inikori was not the only historian to ride the wave of Atlantic Economy theory in the 1980s; in fact, dozens of economic historians increasingly turned toward it. While Inikori may have formed the theoretical basis of the Atlantic Economy Theory, it was economic historian Barbara Solow that gave it its name in her 1991 book Slavery and the Rise of the Atlantic System. Even before that, however, Solow was following Inikori’s lead in her 1987 article “Caribbean Slavery and the Industrial Revolution: Capitalism and Slavery in the Very Long Run” (later re- published in 2004 as part of her edited volume of British Capitalism and Caribbean Slavery: The Legacy of Eric Williams), in which she argues that slavery “was important to the economic growth of Great Britain at the beginning of the Industrial Revolution.” and, while admitting that it might be going a bit far to say that slavery caused the Industrial Revolution, it “played an active role in its pattern and timing.”12 To justify this, she points to the high rate of returns on British investments in the colonial trades, stimulated by what she calls the “slave-sugar complex” of the Atlantic slave system. For instance, according to Solow’s research, capital investment in the Atlantic colonies amounted to 37 million pounds in 1793 alone, which, if one assumes that growth of exports leads to growth of industry, as Solow does, would be a considerable factor in the development of British industrialism, seemingly lending credence to the Williams Thesis.

She further argues that this complex formed the basis of a wide-reaching network of international
trade that further guaranteed flow of capital, which in turn increased levels of national output, by which “the British colonial empire enjoyed an extension of the market and a concomitant division of labor, which encouraged British manufacturing activity in particular.”13 Like Inikori then, she dismisses previous cliometrics arguments regarding the ratios of profit to capital accumulation in favor of a macroeconomic emphasis on slavery’s role in providing economic stimulus to industrial growth via large-scale investment into a vast economic complex of international trade. On this point, historians William Darrity and David Richardson follow suit in 1989 in their respective “Profitability of the British Trade in Slaves Once Again” and “Accounting for Profits in the British Trade in Slaves: Reply to William Darity,” maintaining that the sugar-slave complex of the Caribbean Atlantic economy had a direct impact on the export growth of British capitalism in the eighteenth century, which formed the capital investment necessary to stimulate industrial growth in the nineteenth.

As the 1980s gave way to the 1990s, the Atlantic Economy theory grew in influence, finding its most ardent expression (and the one that made the Atlantic Economy theory practically orthodoxy within economic history in the final years of the twentieth century) in Robin Blackburn’s 1997 book The Making of New World Slavery. Blackburn not only restated the Inikori-Solow argument of export-growth stimulating long-term economic trends toward industrialization, but also revitalized for the first time since Williams himself the Marxian theory of primitive accumulation in the foundations of the British Industrial Revolution. In the final chapter of his book he argues that slavery’s contribution of cheap raw materials to the British Atlantic economy provided the stimulus of capital necessary to jump-start an industrial economy; “The pace of capitalist industrialization in Britain was decisively advanced by its success in creating a regime of extended primitive accumulation and battering upon the super-exploitation of slaves in the Americas.”14 Combined with the previous pro-Williams scholarship of the 1980s, Blackburn’s book seemed to secure the Atlantic Economy theory’s role as the working model for understanding the relationship between slavery and British industrialism among historians at large. Thus, the 1980s and 1990s saw the defense of the Williams Thesis grow to effectively drown out the cliometrics voices of the previous two decades.

This trend of historians turning away from cliometrics to embrace a Williams-supportive macroeconomic relationship between slavery and British industry in the 1980s could be traced back to the publication of Immanuel Wallerstein’s seminal opus on modern historical economic theory, The Modern World-System, in 1974. In this book, Wallerstein put forth the World-Systems theory, which supposed that the world economic system is divided into a hierarchy of three zones: core countries, semi-peripheral countries, and peripheral countries. The theory asserts not only that core countries (economic superpowers, such as Japan, the United States, and Britain) dominate the world economic system through heavy industrialization, but that that dominance is built primarily off the core countries’ exploitation of countries in the periphery zones. Within the framework of the World-Systems theory, the development of the Atlantic Economy theory revitalizing and validating the original Williams
Thesis seems almost to be a forgone conclusion. It is not surprising then, that Inikori and Solow, both dedicated World-Systems theorists, would make that connection.

In Inikori’s case, his political tendencies may have also played some role in his application of Atlantic Economy theory to the defense of the Williams Thesis. Inikori, much like Williams himself, was a Marxist scholar, and Marxist theory formed a large basis of his scholarship. Indeed, he freely admits in “Slavery and the Development of Industrial Capitalism in England” that “the analytical framework of the present article is designed to capture…long term processes [regarding the British Industrial Revolution] by combining some neoclassical tools with the super-structure model of Marxian analysis.”15 It is worth considering whether the Marxist connections between Inikori and Williams could in some way inform the former’s staunch defense of the theories of the latter. However, it is more likely that rather than Inikori’s holding some sort of communistic camaraderie with Williams as a fellow Marxist, it is actually the Marxian underpinnings of the World-Systems theory that inspired Inikori’s Atlantic Economy theory, and that could account for Inikori’s tendency towards the Williams Thesis.

Deeply inspired by Marxist theory of worldwide economic connection, Wallerstein’s own World-Systems theory reshaped historical scholarship from the 1970s onward. As we have seen, Inikori was joined by other such Marxian-inspired historians as Barbara Solow, Robin Blackburn, William Darity, and David Richardson in the defense of the Williams Thesis using this theory as the basis for their own Atlantic Economy theory. This points toward a general historiographical tendency to rely on Marxist ideology in the study of Atlantic slavery between late 1970s and the 1980s. This is unsurprising, considering the fact that these two decades marked the culmination of a revisionist renaissance of historical scholarship spurred on by the social upheaval of the 1960s, in which the previously ignored role of institutions of inequality (like slavery and capitalism) in founding Western institutions that remain to this day are brought to the forefront of scholarly discourse. It is not surprising that Atlantic Economy theory developed side-by-side with Critical Race Theory. Thus, Marxian preoccupations with systems of inequality may have informed historical scholarship of the 1970s and 80s, resulting in a generation of historians that found a lot to be said for the Williams Thesis’ original supposition that slavery formed the basis of Britain’s industrial economy.

The Rebirth of Cliometrics
It was not until the late 1990s and early 2000s that the cliometrics scholars returned to make another concentrated critique of the Atlantic Economy theory and the Williams Thesis. Ironically, it was the publishing of Blackburn’s The Making of New World Slavery that reanimated the New Economic theory camp. David Eltis and cliometrics veteran Stanley Engerman’s 2000 “The Importance of Slavery and the Slave Trade to Industrializing Britain” seems at times to be a direct attack on Blackburn’s arguments specifically, and in doing so also attacked the Williamsian basis of the Atlantic Economy theory and the Marxian primitive accumulation theory, arguing that “while slavery had important long-run economic implications, it did not by itself cause the British Industrial Revolution. It certainly ‘helped’ that Revolution along, but its role...
was no greater than that of many other economic activities.” True to cliometrics form, Eltis and Engerman focus on the raw numbers in their take-down of Solow and Blackburn’s theories regarding the “slave-sugar complex.” Claiming that the Atlantic Economists ironically limit themselves too much by focusing on only one sector of the British Caribbean economy (sugar), they point to the fact that sugar production made up only 2.5 percent of the British national income, leaving the remaining 97.5 percent of its income to come from other industries, several of which (including iron, textiles, and sheep farming) were largely domestic in nature.

Additionally, they criticize Inikori, Solow, and Blackburn’s seemingly intentional ignoring of the larger picture of Britain’s place among other European nations in export growth. According to their reasoning, Britain’s capital investment in the colonies via slavery was actually relatively small compared to other countries within the same time span, even going so far as to say that, “If economic activity on so modest a scale could contribute significantly to industrialization, then we might expect Europe’s first industrial economy to have been Portugal, not Britain.” In pointing to slavery as the primary stimulus in Britain’s industrial revolution while conveniently ignoring the fact that other nations who also made heavy investments and experienced export-growth did not experience that same industrial growth, they essentially accuse pro-Williams historians of confusing correlation with causation.

This same argument was picked up and further cemented by new-to-the-scene cliometrics historian C. Knick Harley in his 2004 “Trade: Discovery, Mercantilism and Technology,” in which he argues that French and Spanish trade to the West Indies was far more extensive than Britain’s, citing the French domination of the importation of sugar and coffee to Europe and Spain’s larger Caribbean population accounting for a much larger trade market than Britain in the eighteenth century. Despite this, neither Spain nor France saw the same explosion of industrialism in the following century that Britain did. Thus, in Harley’s own words, “The British Empire’s size or trading contribution can hardly have made the decisive contribution to Britain’s lead in the emergence of modern economic growth.”

Harley also takes the opportunity in this article to revive an old cliometrics stand-by, attacking the original supposition of the Williams Thesis that profits from the slave trade accounted for the capital stimulus necessary for the industrial revolution: “Williams’s view is now seen as overblown and the slave trade as not exceptionally profitable.”

The revitalization of the cliometrics stance on the Williams debate in the early 2000s is easy to understand in the context of the global economic issues pertinent to those years. Like in the origins of cliometrics history, this regeneration of New Economic historians was born from economic upsets. But instead of an economic boom creating scholarly interest in quantitative data methods being applied to the study of history, it was the global financial crises of the millennium, and especially those of 2007-2008 which “renewed the attention to economic history to escape from the recession.” This could provide better explanation for the renewal of academic interest in closely examining historical economic patterns. However, other rising trends in the quantitative analysis
of history also emerged at the time that complicated the cliometrics orthodoxy on the Williams debate.

By the mid-2000s, Harley was establishing himself as the new vanguard of the cliometrics argument, but fellow economists Ronald Findlay and Kevin O’Rourke complicated the hardline stances of the New Economic camp in their 2007 book *Power and Plenty: Trade, War, and the World Economy in the Second Millennium*, to the point that even Harley would have to concede. Findlay and O’Rourke seem on the outset to support the Atlantic Economy theoretical tenets at the heart of the Williams Thesis. In fact, they go so far as to say that “the link between the Industrial Revolution and the extension of the slave plantations in the New World on which the essential raw material was cultivated could not…be more obvious.”22 This conclusion is at first surprising coming from such quantitative-leaning economists as Findlay and O’Rourke, and yet more surprising is an apparent about-face coming from Harley in response in his 2013 “Slavery, the British Atlantic Economy, and the Industrial Revolution.” In this, he concludes that “Eric Williams was certainly right to bring interaction between industrializing Britain, slavery and the Atlantic economy into the centre of discussion of British change in the eighteenth century.”23

To account for this seemingly uncharacteristic concession by the cliometrics historians, one must go back to the 1980s and consider the rise of New Trade theory. This theory, though rooted in quantitative data analysis akin to New Economic theory, posits that network effects have a large impact on increasing returns in international economies. In an ironic twist, New Trade theory actually espouses the same basic ideas that formed the World-Systems theories and Atlantic Economy theories of Wallerstein, Inikori, and Solow (note the correspondence of the development of the Atlantic Economic theory and the New Trade theory). However, unlike Atlantic Economy theory, New Trade theory is ultimately a quantitative methodology with highly capitalist (and decidedly anti-Marxian) undertones. Thus, for all its foundational similarities to its Marxian counterpart, it falls squarely in the purview of New Economic historians. This ironic convergence of theory could account for the apparent willingness of the new generation of cliometrics historians to lend more credence to the Atlantic Economy theory, and by extension some portions of the Williams Thesis. Harley, Findlay, and O’Rourke, after all, were all economic historians who, though inspired by the older cliometrics troupers like Engerman, were schooled themselves in the New Trade theory of the 1980s.

While their New Trade theory tendencies may have opened the New Economic camp to the ideas of the Atlantic Economy theory, they never lose sight of their cliometrics roots decrying the Williams Thesis’ Marxian preoccupation with primitive accumulation and high profits arguments. It should be noted that Harley, Findlay, and O’Rourke all eagerly avow in their respective works that that Williams’ original arguments based in primitive accumulation were patently false.

**The Latest Take: New Historians of Capitalism (and their critics)**

At last we come to the most recent scholarship regarding the Williams Thesis, which appears to be at somewhat of a crossroads. The cause of this convergence seems to be the explosion of the New History of Capitalism
(NHC) theory in the late 2010s, and currently extending into the early 2020s. The NHC is a decidedly Marxian school of thought, having risen from “the intersection of social, economic, and intellectual history that arose in the work on the ‘making of the working class’ in the 1960s and 1970s.”24 At its core is a firm conviction that slavery was a crucial contributor to the development of Western capitalism, and by extent, a foundational component of the industrial revolutions of Western countries - particularly Britain and the United States. As such, it was almost inevitable that the Williams Thesis found new champions in the generation of historians coming to majority in this time.

Several major works come to the forefront of this movement in the late 2010s and early 2020s, the first of which is Sven Beckert and Seth Rockwell’s 2016 Slavery’s Capitalism: A New History of American Economic Development. It should be noted that Beckert and Rockwell’s book (as its title suggests) is primarily focused on the development of American capitalism through slavery, as indeed, is the scholarship of most NHC theory. However, Beckert and Rockwell’s conclusions draw expansively from the Marxian theories of Williams’ original thesis, especially in identifying Atlantic slavery “as the primary force driving key innovations in entrepreneurship, finance, accounting, management, and political economy that are too often attributed to the so-called free market.”25 Their staunch defense of the original tenets of Williams revitalized the debate over the slave origins of Britain’s industrial revolution as well. Where they differ from previous Williams’ defenders, however, is in their insistence that the data truly relevant to understanding slavery’s connections to capitalism and industrialism is not in the eighteenth century (where almost all historians on both sides of the debate have focused their attention up to this point), but in the nineteenth.

Clearly inspired by Beckert and Rockwell is the work on this very subject by Mark Harvey, in his 2019 “Slavery, Indenture and the Development of British Industrial Capitalism.” Here he not only reaffirms Williams’ broad connections between slavery and industrial formation, but also concludes from analyzing patterns in production, exchange, distribution, and consumption in the British market system of the early 1800s that “the British industrial revolution [was] characterized by its hybridity and heterogeneity, always combining varied regimes of exploitation: metropolitan wage labour, directly-owned British Caribbean and Mauritian slavery, and US Deep South slavery.”26 His conclusions not only understand industrialism as a direct result of slavery, but the two institutions as intrinsically feeding and building off of one another in an interconnected system of capitalist exchange based on a racially and economically hierarchical power structure.

The latest NHC historians to take up the debate are Stephan Heblich, Stephen J. Redding, and Hans-Joachim Voth’s, whose 2022 “Slavery and the British Industrial Revolution” also focuses on the critical assessment of data from the nineteenth century. Specifically, they use a dynamic-spatial model to analyze the relation of investments in slavery to capital accumulation. Their findings prompt them to conclude that “greater slavery wealth promoted local economic growth and led to a reallocation of economic activity away from agriculture, and towards manufacturing, the diffusion of new manufacturing technology (cotton

Bridgewater State University

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mills), and the adoption of steam power – the key new technology of the Industrial Revolution.”

New to the pro-Williams argument is their ultimate conclusion that slavery’s foundational role in British industrialization comes not primarily from slave trading in the eighteenth century, but from slaveholding in the nineteenth. This particular point also reaffirms the Williams Thesis’ original supposition that the accumulation of wealth via slave owners contributed heavily to the foundations of industrialism.

The New History of Capitalism theory and its proponents’ reaffirmation of the Williams Thesis, however, is not without its critics in the late 2010s and 2020s. Gavin Wright, a defender of the cliometrics camp since the 1970s, attacks what he sees as the overly generalizing Marxian assumptions of the New Economic historians. In his 2016 review of Beckert and Rockwell’s *Slavery’s Capitalism*, he decries the entire NHC school’s hardline stance on slavery’s pivotal role in the development of industrialism as ‘bluster and bombast.’ His 2020 “Slavery and Anglo-American Capitalism Revisited” is as direct critique by NHC historians to that date. On the Williams Thesis specifically, he concedes that “the slave trade and slave-based commerce were core contributors to British economic development during the eighteenth century,” but he refutes all claims of the new historians of capitalism that slavery directly contributed to the industrial development of the nineteenth century, arguing that “the new imperial regime [of that century] required neither ‘captive’ markets nor ‘captive’ workers.”

Historians Trevor Burnard and Giorgio Riello also lob criticisms of the New History of Capitalism theory in their 2020 “Slavery and the New History of Capitalism.” Overall, they cite NHC’s greatest weakness as an overreliance on the broad connotations of the World Systems theory and taking for granted the origin of industrialism in slavery (as argued by the Williams Thesis) as an inherent truth. Specifically, they state that, “it stresses the transformative role of American raw cotton in British industrialization after the invention of the cotton gin, but provides a narrow view of economic change, in which slavery and the plantation economy are taken as the sole motor of early modern global economic change.”

The recent explosion of New History of Capitalism in the 2010s and 20s is quite timely; the current trends in historiography, especially by the younger generation of historians, lean toward large global frameworks of the World-Systems Theory. In particular, currently in vogue is the analysis of a “particular kind of rapacious capitalism emerged after the Columbian exchange of the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, in patterns of colonial conquest, expropriation of native American lands, and abusive labour relations.” And just as the World-Systems theory rose from the resurgence of Marxian socialism in the wake of sweeping social upheaval of the 1960s, so this New History of Capitalism has most likely emerged from the Marxian underpinnings of responses to the issues of racial and social inequalities of the past five years. Marxian academic movements addressing the historical origins of inequality of all types are currently on the rise in the age of such social movements as the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement and the increasing tension surrounding wealth inequality. And just as the BLM movement reemphasized the Critical
Race Theory (both in academia and in the public discourse), so is the social upheaval of our times reviving the Marxian tenets of the World Systems theory in the New History of Capitalism movement. However, with older cliometrics critics already leaping into the ring to decry them, it remains to be seen if the NHC school’s defense of the Williams Thesis will prove to be successful in finally turning the debate in its favor.

Conclusion
Since its publication in 1944, the debate over the Williams Thesis has swung like a pendulum back and forth within the historical profession. Seemingly every economist or economic historian has cut their teeth on the subject at least once. The pattern that emerges from the close analysis of the historiography of the various contribution to the question of the thesis suggests that one can predict which way the pendulum will swing based on society’s general criticism or support of global capitalist systems and social power structures at the time the contribution is made. In times when economic prosperity or crisis prompts a societal interest in the predictions of financial success through quantitative methods, the historical schools will meet these demands in the study of history using cliometrics historical methodology. In times when social upheaval revives the Marxian spirit of denouncing intrinsic systems of inequality, the historical milieu will shift back to a broader interpretation of history through the lens of social interactions, rather than statistical ones. It thus becomes quite clear why the Williams Thesis has been so hotly debated for over 70 years. Standing at the precarious crossroads of both social and economic history, it is not only one of the likeliest candidates for causing division between the quantitative and social models of history, but is perhaps even doomed to remain so. Until the general historical world (or indeed, the world in general) can decide whether to see history through a quantitative or social lens, the Williams Thesis is nearly impossible to prove or disprove objectively, as the historiography regarding the matter suggests.

Note on Author: Jennifer Agel completed her Master in Arts in Teaching (History) in 2023. Her research project was completed in the fall of 2022 under the mentorship of Dr. Brian Payne. She plans to continue her career as a secondary teacher, with ultimate plans to pursue a PhD.

Notes
4 Williams, Capitalism and Slavery, 101.
5 Kenneth Morgan, Slavery, the Atlantic Trade, and the British Economy 1660-1800. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 83
6 Diebolt and Haupert, Cliometrics: 6 Past, Present, and Future,” 5.


17 Eltis and Engerman, “The Importance of Slavery and the Slave Trade to Industrializing Britain,” 132.

18 Eltis and Engerman, “The Importance of Slavery and the Slave Trade to Industrializing Britain,” 130.


20 Knick C. Harley, “Trade: Discovery, Mercantilism, and Technology,” 197


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Suburban Superheroes: Sitcom Suburbia Reimagined in WandaVision

Elisa Cavanaugh, Master of Arts in Teaching (English), Department of English, Bridgewater State University, e2cavanaugh@student.bridgew.edu

Abstract: The superhero genre traditionally dictates that a hero’s traumatic past drives them to save people, and cities—often perceived as highly populated places that are full of crime—make for places where there are plenty of people in need of saving. This trope is notably disrupted, however, in an MCU sitcom-style television show released in 2021: WandaVision. This article contends that WandaVision’s suburban setting serves to mediate and reflect Wanda’s trauma and subsequent sense of powerlessness, as she constructs a small world that is (on the surface) stable and safe from the pain, loss, and violence of the outside world, yet (beneath the surface) furthers the entrapment and instability that characterizes her past. Wanda reconfigures the stereotypical role of a suburban housewife from something that is constrictive to something that is freeing, as it offers her an escape from her identity as a hero and a reprieve into a new life that is structured and stable. However, this quaint suburban life is not sustainable for a superhero, and ultimately the pitfalls of suburbia crumble Wanda’s contrived reality, serving as an ominous reminder regarding the power of the suburbs: though they may be places of order and stability, the control inherent in this dynamic is reciprocal; just as residents of the suburbs shape their community, the suburbs shape their residents right back.

Keywords: Suburbs; suburban studies; dramatic arts; television and video; superhero; trauma; WandaVision.

When Bruce Wayne utters the words, “This city needs me,” in The Dark Knight Rises (2012), he is not merely stepping up to his heroic duty as Batman; rather, in these words, Batman makes explicit an assumption that is implied by most superhero settings preceding and following this moment—a city needs a hero to protect it. This premise is present in nearly all classic superhero tales: Superman has Metropolis, Batman has Gotham City, and innumerable heroes spanning a myriad of franchises (e.g., Spider-Man, Captain America, Doctor Strange, Green Lantern, Ghostbusters, and even the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles) share New York City. Implicit in this pattern is the notion that cities are places in need of saving; as urban spaces are historically regarded as crowded, polluted, corrupted, and crime-ridden environments, it is no surprise that such a backdrop has become home to characters dedicated to protecting the public and fighting crime (Jackson 1985, 32). Concisely put, to many viewers, superheroes “are urban dweller[s] because that’s where the criminals are” (Bakutman 2013, 171).
The Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU)—most famously the creators of the Avengers comics and films—generally abides by this guideline of the genre; despite jaunts across the globe and even into outer space, New York City most frequently prevails as home base for this team of superheroes. This trope is notably disrupted, however, in an MCU sitcom-style television show released in 2021: *WandaVision*. Wanda Maximoff, previously a supporting Avenger and now protagonist of *WandaVision*, possesses many of the classic traits of a superhero—a dramatic backstory, a collection of supernatural powers, a secret identity concealed from her surrounding community, and, of course, a history of saving the world. However, the setting of this show, at least on the surface, lacks the grandeur, exoticism, and adventure that typically characterizes a story of its genre; instead, *WandaVision* is set in the fictional suburb of Westview, New Jersey. This deviation in locale does more than simply offer some new scenery for a franchise that has already traversed all seven continents and many fictional planets. *WandaVision*’s positioning inside a quaint American suburb—and the complexities and contradictions that accompany this environment—is an essential component of the show’s exploration of Wanda’s grief and trauma following the conclusion of *Avengers: Infinity War* (2018). Furthermore, Marvel’s cinematic shift to suburbia takes place during a time in which more Americans than ever before (a 69% majority) reside in the suburbs, enabling *WandaVision* to leverage its audience’s familiarity with these spaces and tap into the increasingly relevant aspirations and anxieties of this growing demographic (Anderson 2020, 6).

Five years after the events of *Infinity War*, Wanda Maximoff and her husband Vision (a synthezoid who was killed in the previous film) live an idyllic suburban life in the town of Westview, without a clear recollection of how they arrived there. The episodes progress through the sitcom styles of different decades (beginning with the 1950s in a style reminiscent of *Leave it to Beaver* and concluding with the 2010s in a nod to the mockumentary style of shows like *The Office*) as the couple begins to uncover the mystery of how they got there and what they are doing. As Wanda, Vision, the Westview residents, and those outside of Westview investigating the strange occurrences in the town all eventually discover, Wanda has used her powers to manifest an altered reality in which she is able to live happily-ever-after in a peaceful suburb with Vision. As summarized by one of the investigating agents, Wanda “has the world’s only vibranium synthezoid playing Father-Knows-Best-In-Suburbia” (Schaeffer 2021b). To outsiders in the show and audiences alike, this choice to settle down in suburbia may seem particularly strange for a superhero, but it is important to note that the suburban locale is not meant in jest; rather, it is chosen by Wanda as a reprieve from the sorrow wrought by the outside world (until, that is, it is shown not to be a reprieve at all). Ultimately, the suburban setting of Westview, New Jersey, serves to mediate and reflect Wanda’s trauma and subsequent sense of powerlessness, as she constructs a small world that is (on the surface) stable and safe from the pain, loss, and violence of the outside world, yet (beneath the surface) furthers the entrapment and instability that characterizes her past.
WandaVision joins a broad collection of suburban literature and film that have offered reflections—both critical and celebratory—of the social and geopolitical impacts of a widespread migration to the suburbs in nineteenth- and twentieth-century American society. These literary and cinematic interpretations reveal the hopes and anxieties Americans experienced as suburban development gave way to a new culture of dualities: community accompanied by conformity, ambition accompanied by entrapment, and affordability accompanied by standardization. Robert Beuka offers a foundational investigation of suburban literature and film of the 1950s in his book SuburbiaNation, distinguishing between “two-dimensional” depictions of suburbia, which he views as reductive, and more nuanced, realistic depictions of suburbia (2004, 4). As a way of “overcoming” the limiting framework set by two-dimensional representations, Beuka applies Michel Foucault’s notion of a “heterotopia” to suburban spaces. He asserts that the suburb reflects both the idyllic and the foreboding aspects of American middle-class culture and applying the idea of a heterotopia to suburban spaces reveals that “utopian and dystopian views of suburban life [are] really two sides of the same coin,” where the “fantasies” and the “phobias” of a broader culture are reflected (2004, 7-8). Ultimately, Beuka suggests that the spatial context of the suburbs has become a mirror for both the promises and shortcomings of American life and culture. WandaVision accomplishes a unique feat when viewed through the framework of Beuka’s arguments: the series intentionally mirrors the styles of those “two-dimensional” sitcom depictions of suburbia that Beuka dismisses, and at first glance, it appears to adhere to the reductive tropes and stereotypes that seem to define the sitcom genre. However, upon closer examination, WandaVision increasingly subverts those very same tropes, adding nuance as the same traits that make suburbia attractive to Wanda simultaneously make it more difficult for her to live in the community of Westview.

Bernice Murphy further investigates the implications of suburbia, and its unique position between urban and rural, on American culture and psyche by tying popular suburban narratives to the American gothic tradition in her book The Suburban Gothic. Murphy posits a dichotomy between two categories that she dubs the “suburban dream” and the “suburban nightmare,” echoing the dualism present in Beuka’s notion of heterotopic suburban spaces. She examines how the suburban dream (a paradisiacal place in which families thrive, where beautiful homes and kind neighbors make for a safe community, and the threats of the outside world are kept at bay) clashes against the suburban nightmare (a tormented place in which untrustworthy neighbors have something to hide, dangers lurk throughout the community, and the “threats come from within, not from without”) (2009, 3). The tension between these two states of being paves the way for the Suburban Gothic, which, as Murphy contends, “has always had much more to do with how people chose to perceive suburbia than the reality of such neighborhoods” (2009, 5). Much like Beuka, Murphy considers the significance of the American suburbs as more than just a place, but also a mindset.

WandaVision, while not strictly Gothic, contains many elements of Murphy’s suburban nightmare. There are, in Murphy’s words, “neighbors
with something terrible to hide” (namely, Wanda herself given her usurpation of the town of Westview, as well as her neighbor Agnes, later revealed to be an ancient witch); there is a “place of mindless conformity and materialism” (the residents of Westview are literally mind-controlled to behave in ways that fit with Wanda’s quaint suburban family storyline, and the story is periodically interrupted by strange commercials advertising fake products within the Marvel Universe, such as the all-new ToastMate 2000 by Stark Industries or Yo-Magic, “the snack for survivors”); there is a “place in which the most dangerous threats come from within” (as there is a literal force field protecting the community from outside threats, but Wanda herself remains a force that is arguably terrorizing the Westview residents) (Murphy 2009, 3). However, perhaps the most noteworthy link here is Westview’s role as a “place of entrapment and unhappiness” (Murphy 2009, 3). Since Wanda’s takeover, Westview is literally entrapped by a bubble-like force field, dubbed the “Hex” on the show. Essentially every person within the Hex is trapped: Wanda and Vision cannot leave without causing their altered reality to crumble, while the Westview residents are victims of Wanda’s mind control and do not have the autonomy to act on their own—they cannot even leave their homes unless as pawns in Wanda’s story. Despite Wanda’s initial conception of her family’s life in Westview as a peaceful existence in line with the “suburban dream,” their life in suburbia is quickly exposed to be more complicated, more contested, and more perilous than the surface reveals.

Furthering Beuka and Murphy’s explications of the contradictory nature of American suburbia, David Coon focuses on how the suburban façade of white picket fences and picturesque lives falsely conceals “desires, secrets, and problems that threaten to disrupt the tranquil suburban existence” in his book Look Closer (2014, 18). Orienting his argument amongst the many suburban works that suggest a “darkness” lurks “beneath the charming surface of suburban life,” Coon claims that these works “interrogate and subvert conventional images of American suburbia” in order to complicate the values promoted by the suburban myth (2014, 2). He agrees with Beuka’s rebuke of the two-dimensional suburban image and focuses his attention on works in which the suburban landscape is not a mere backdrop, but a defining force of the narratives contained within it (2014, 17). Coon ultimately concludes that the motif of the suburban façade has the potential to “challeng[e] conservative ideologies” by suggesting that ideas such as tradition, family, community, gender roles, and the American Dream “are not as simple and clear-cut as they might appear,” and instead, they are inherently accompanied by darker underbellies such as discrimination, misconduct, and exclusion (2014, 29). This discrimination that Coon sees as characterizing of suburban spaces can exist in explicit ways, such as overt racism or the exclusion of LGBTQ+ folks, but it can also come into play in a less obvious manner, quietly rejecting those who do not conform to the values and expectations of the culture that governs suburbia.

Catherine Jurca offers a lone dissenting opinion in her book White Diaspora: The Suburb and the Twentieth-Century American Novel, in which she rejects a focus on the pitfalls of suburbia and aims to expose the ludicrousness what she dubs the “fantasy
of victimization” of the white suburbanite (2001, 8-9). Jurca observes the way in which suburban literature of this time centers the trials and tribulations of this population, sympathizing with their feelings of entrapment and tedium in the suburbs, which she views as unreasonable. She highlights the tendency of this literature to “convert the rights and privileges of living [in a suburb] into spiritual, cultural, and political problems of displacement” and resists the notion that the suburbs could be disempowering to the white, middle class in any substantial way (2001, 4). Instead, she ironically invokes the term “white diaspora” to suggest that white suburbanites have taken on a narrative of victimization that distorts the reality of “white flight” into the suburbs as a byproduct of their persecution, rather than their privilege (2001, 9). Jurca’s commentary on representations of race in suburbia suggests that white suburbanites have become a byproduct of their persecution, rather than their privilege (2001, 9). Jurca’s commentary on representations of race in suburbia suggests the value of further exploring the paradoxical nature of suburbia, which serve to shape the culture of seemingly all of the works that find themselves set in such a contested, complex space.

The suburban façade critiqued by Coon is, in fact, the very reason that Wanda’s story is situated in a suburb. American sitcoms, and, by extension, suburban spaces, are established early in Wanda’s story as a childhood refuge from her war-torn home of Sokovia, a fictional country in Eastern Europe. In a flashback, the audience is transported with Wanda back to the night of her parents’ deaths; it is young Wanda’s turn to choose what the family would watch on television that night, and she makes her usual choice of a contraband copy of The Dick Van Dyke show. It is implied that this choice is typical for Wanda, as her brother complains, “Dick Van Dyke again? Always ‘sitcom, sitcom, sitcom’, but Wanda’s eagerness to rewatch the same sitcom over and over again suggests that she finds comfort in the predictability of the sitcom structure—a predictability that is absent in her war-torn space (Schaeffer 2021c). Shortly after her family settles down to watch the show, their apartment is bombed, killing her parents and causing Wanda and her brother to lose consciousness. When she awakens, the sitcom is still playing amidst the wreckage of her home, providing an eerie laugh track to the traumatic scene. Despite the trauma born of this night, sitcoms—and the polished suburban lifestyle depicted within them—remain associated with a sense of safety and comfort for Wanda. Thus, when she is grief-ridden following the death of her husband and in desperate need of consolation, it is understandable that she would seek solace in the place that offered her such a reliable source of reassurance as a child. In the genre of early sitcoms, regardless of the conflicts that arise during the episode, conclusions are reliably happy and confrontation is resolved peacefully; it is here that Wanda has the ability to construct her own peace. As she says herself as a child regarding the low-stakes conflicts of the sitcom genre: “At the end of the episode, you realize it was all a bad dream. None of it
was real” (Schaeffer 2021c). She does not know, at this time, that the source of her comfort is merely a scripted façade of joy, ultimately unattainable in any tangible sense to her in the real world.

This desire to manifest the simple bliss she imagined of the suburbs depicted in *The Dick Van Dyke Show* is what spurs Wanda to create her altered reality within the suburb of Westview. The actual construction of this altered reality is somewhat unintentional—overcome by grief, Wanda finds the deed to a plot of land that Vision had purchased with the aim of beginning a family with Wanda before his death. She drives to that location, passing through a sad, worn-down looking town that has seen better days. Then, in a scream of despair, her powers pour out of her and construct both an alive version of her husband and a quaint, enclosed, seemingly protected world in which they can live. The construction of this suburban world is the ultimate act of escapism for Wanda. The audience is first introduced to this setting without any of this context though; we merely thrust into the black-and-white world of episode one, watching as newlywed Wanda and Vision pull into the driveway of their new house, ready to begin their happy suburban life together.

The old-fashioned sitcom aesthetics of the first episode—complete with a sepia film color, an exaggerated laugh track, and a mise-en-scène that near-exactly mirrors kitchen scenes from *The Dick Van Dyke Show*—clash with the audience’s expectations of a story from the typically vibrant, action-packed superhero genre, but this action-free life is precisely what Wanda desires. As a theme song (emulating the jazzy musical style of the 1950s) announces at the start of episode one:

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Oh, a newlywed couple just moved to town / A regular husband and wife / Who left the big city to find a quiet life / WandaVision! / She’s a magical gal in a small town locale / he’s a hubby who’s part machine / How will this duo fit in and fulfill all? / By sharing a love like you’ve never seen / WandaVision! (Schaeffer 2021a)
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After a lifetime of fighting and trauma, a “quiet life” in the predictability of a “small town locale” is appealing to Wanda, and the order implicit in a suburban existence offers this consistency. As sociologist Herbert Gans observes in his exploration of life in Levittown, a quintessential example of 1950s American suburbia, “Because the suburb makes [it] possible, morale goes up, boredom and loneliness are reduced, family life becomes temporarily more cohesive, social and organizational activities multiply, and spare-time pursuits now focus on the house and the yard” (2016, 327). This low-risk, family-centered life is precisely what Wanda is seeking. In entering the suburbs, Wanda and Vision enter a structured world governed by routines, social expectations, and problems of little consequence (for example, forgetting the date that they were supposed to be hosting Vision’s boss for dinner, or an inelegant talent show performance for the neighbors). Even when things do go awry in a more substantial way—for instance, when Wanda receives a radio correspondence from outside of the Hex while socializing with the other neighborhood ladies at a garden gathering—Wanda is able to reclaim control over the scene, using her powers to “rewind” it and rescripting it to fit her desired narrative. From the outset, it seems that Wanda is exerting influence
not only over herself and her family, but also her environment and those around her. The suburban locale first seems to facilitate this ability of Wanda’s to manipulate her environment with such precision, as its natural tendency toward conformity and order paired with its geographic separation from the world beyond it makes Westview particularly vulnerable to Wanda’s attempts to control it.

Just as the show’s suburban sitcom aesthetics clash with expectations of a show in the superhero genre, Wanda’s role in the story disrupts audience expectations of the superhero herself. In a move seemingly contradictory to the modern empowered woman—especially a woman with an extensive history of single-handedly fighting off evil forces and saving the world—she intentionally steps into the ordinary role of a suburban housewife and embraces the domestic duties of this position. Betty Friedan, in her salient second-wave feminist text The Feminine Mystique, contends in a chapter about the “Happy Housewife Heroine” that the “fulfillment of femininity,” which seems to be the “the highest value and the only commitment for women” during the mid twentieth century is, in actuality, not fulfilling at all, and is contributing to a widely-felt dissatisfaction amongst American housewives during this time (1963, 50). Wanda, however, has a vastly different experience with suburban housewifery and motherhood, for two reasons: it is a role she has created for herself, rather than a role she has been subjected into, and it offers her a reprieve from the responsibility of superherodom. In early episodes, she is often pictured in the kitchen, grappling with silly dilemmas such as how to cook an appropriate supper for dinner guests, but these dilemmas are a welcome alternative to the prospect of a life outside of her suburban bubble. During one such conundrum, Wanda’s neighbor, Agnes, saves the day by popping into her kitchen carrying piles of food and announcing “What kind of housewife would I be if I didn’t have a gourmet meal for four just lying about the place?” (Schaeffer 2021a). To be rescued in such a way contrasts starkly with the role Wanda played in the “real” problems she faced in her life outside the Hex, before she attempted to shed her superheroism by entering into this simplified existence. By the third episode, Wanda is pregnant and (rapidly) progressing toward motherhood, quickly fulfilling the third and final role of a standard suburban woman: wife, homemaker, and mother. Wanda’s performance of a suburban housewife is both a result of and a reprieve from her trauma; she is driven toward a desire for normalcy and order in the wake of her devastating past, and she welcomes the mundanity of life as a suburban housewife because it offers her an escape from the reality of her post-war life without Vision.

The force of the suburban environment becomes ever more coercive upon Wanda’s story; whereas at first it may seem that Wanda is shaping the suburbs in which the narrative of her dream family plays out, it soon becomes apparent that suburbia is simultaneously shaping her and the story she is attempting to write for her family. There are several key suburban qualities that play such a pivotal role in molding Wanda’s story from her ideal scenario into something less dreamlike. Firstly, Wanda soon learns that suburban living comes with nosy neighbors and an acute lack of privacy. Despite the privacy that would seem to accompany having one’s own home, their house is quickly subject
to frequent drop-ins, mostly by next-door neighbor Agnes, who is prone to throwing open the front door and announcing “Hiya!” or “Knock knock!” For Wanda and Vision, this invasion of privacy is not merely an imposition; rather, it threatens the secrecy of their identities, as their neighbors are not supposed to know that Wanda is a witch and Vision is a synthezoid (who must conceal his android features—a red face and body with metallic accents—and switch into his human form when in the presence of those outside his home).

These recurrent moments of privacy breaches begin to wear on Wanda and Vision’s relationship, as Wanda takes on a laxer attitude toward hiding their identities (perhaps because she can always rewrite the script of their life if something goes awry). In one such moment, Agnes pops over from next door when she overhears that Wanda’s sons have brought home a puppy, and while Agnes is still in the kitchen with them, Wanda conjures a collar and tag for the newest addition to their family, Sparky. Appalled, Vision remarks, “Agnes was right there!” but Wanda brushes him off, saying, “She didn’t notice. She didn’t even notice when the boys went from babies to five-year-olds.” Vision is unconvinced, replying, “That’s not what we agreed upon. You made no effort to conceal your abilities,” but Wanda counters, “Well, I’m tired of hiding, Vis. And maybe you don’t have to either” (Schaeffer 2021b). After some time in the suburbs, Wanda seems to think that she can have it all: a quaint family life with her husband and sons, and an opportunity to live authentically as themselves. She will soon learn, though, that just as Coon highlights in *Look Closer*, suburbia is not built for the authenticity of outsiders.

The entrapment of suburban life—symbolized by a literal force field supposedly keeping outside threats out but also keeping Wanda’s family in—continues to drive a wedge between Vision and Wanda, as Wanda can only keep up the reality if she does not share the truth with Vision (who still lacks all memories prior to arriving in Westview, and does not know that his wife is the puppeteer behind their entire community). This leads to conflict in their relationship and pushes Vision to investigate the truth. On Halloween night, Vision ventures to the outskirts of the town of Westview and discovers that the further from the town center he goes, the more ghostlike the town becomes. In the outer streets immediately before the force field, he finds the residents there frozen in time; they have tears in their eyes, but they are unable to move. It appears that in maintaining control of the town, Wanda has focused her energy on the spaces and people closest to her family, and she has kept control of those further from her family by merely freezing them in place, without giving them a role to play in her story. These individuals are stuck in one place, confined to roles barely more than mannequins, offering a rather grim picture of suburban existence as they remain trapped in half-finished loops of tasks such as hanging laundry on a clothesline or perpetually waiting for a traffic light to turn green. In a direct contradiction to Herbert Gans’s aforementioned assessment of suburbia, Wanda’s creation of a suburb offers far from a reduction in boredom and loneliness—in fact, Wanda inflicts acute idleness and isolation upon these residents who are paused in time, nearly boring them to death.

Beginning to connect the dots, Vision confronts
his wife, informing Wanda that he “unearthed the man’s suppressed personality and… spoke to him free of your oversight. He was in pain, Wanda… He has a family, and he can’t reach them because you won’t let him reach them” (Schaeffer 2021b). Wanda denies playing the omnipotent role of which Vision accuses her, but the seeds of doubt have been planted, and the sustainability of Wanda’s creation has now been called into question. The reprieve from the pain of the outside world that Wanda initially sought out in suburbia seems less simple now, as guilt and pain seep into the bubble that Wanda intended to keep the rest of the world at bay.

The inevitable infiltration of the outside world into Wanda’s quickly devolving suburban bubble continues with the surprise arrival of Wanda’s beloved brother, Pietro, at her doorstep on the same evening as her above-mentioned conversation with Vision. Pietro’s arrival comes as an uncanny shock, given that he was killed eight years prior in the Avengers movie *Age of Ultron* (2015). Orphaned together as children, Wanda and Pietro shared a close bond, and his loss was comparably traumatic to her loss of Vision. She seems to have rectified this latter loss through her takeover of Westview, and when Pietro reappears at Wanda’s door, he too is alive and entirely healed, seemingly a further extension of Wanda’s wish fulfillment manifestation of her new life in this suburb. However, in a jarring moment in the next episode, Pietro takes Wanda’s hand and as she glances up at him, she sees his body as it appeared immediately after his death—bloody and riddled with bullet holes. This moment mirrors a scene from a previous episode, in which Wanda turned to look at her husband on the couch and was instead met with the macabre image of Vision’s dead body, pale with a caved-in forehead from his death in *Infinity Stone*. These gruesome sights are both reversed in her next glances, but the unease of the moments remain, showcasing the impossibility of locking out the reality of Wanda’s traumatic past permanently, even in the quaint, quiet streets of the suburbs.

The danger present in suburbia ultimately comes to its most explicit fruition in the final episodes, when the friendly neighbor Agnes is revealed to be an ancient witch who intends to steal Wanda’s powers. Masquerading as a well-intentioned (if a bit meddlesome and gossipy) friend to Wanda, she offers to babysit Wanda’s sons so Wanda can have some time to herself. When Wanda goes next door to retrieve her children, she learns that Agnes is actually the centuries-old witch Agatha Harkness, and—in an allusion to the reality that suburbanites are not immune to the lurking threats of child predators—Wanda’s children have been kidnapped as a means of drawing her in so that Agatha can steal her powers. True to Murphy’s notion that, despite suburban spaces being seemingly “insulated from the dangers of the outside world,” in reality, “the most dangerous threats come from within” these spaces (2009, 3). Murphy’s explication of the “suburban nightmare” highlights how the threats families seek to escape by moving to the suburbs (such as the possibility of kidnapping, along with other dangers such as pedophilia, violence) can exist within suburban spaces just as they can exist in urban spaces: the suburbs, in reality, offer no real protection from the evils of humanity. Thus, Wanda discovers that despite her attempts to escape the pain of the outside world and protect her family in the bubble of suburbia, the
real threat was inside Westview all along.

While the reveal that Agnes is really Agatha produces a major plot twist that sparks a suspenseful battle scene in the final episode of the series (returning WandaVision to its superhero genre roots in an exciting finale), it is not Agatha but Wanda herself who brings about the end of their brief period of suburban bliss. She is able to defeat Agatha, but she cannot overcome her realization of the fact that her idyllic suburban existence has been built upon the suffering and captivity of the Westview residents. When Wanda’s mind control on the town residents is temporarily paused, she is approached by one character who begs Wanda, “My name is Sarah. I have a daughter. She’s eight. Maybe she could be friends with your boys. If you like that storyline. Or, uh, the school bully, even. Really, anything. If you could just let her out of her room. If I could just hold her, please.” If this moment were not heart-wrenching enough, an elderly neighbor follows up this request with, “If you won’t let us go, at least let us die” (Schaeffer 2021d). At this, Wanda is forced to confront the full reality of the injustice she has created: in order to live out her life with her family, she has been preventing an entire town of people from doing the same. The order of the suburbs was temporarily comforting to her, but ultimately, she cannot justify the cost of maintaining this suburban life, and she must recognize that the safety she created within the bubble of Westview was never real in the first place. Following her defeat of Agatha, Wanda performs one final role as a mother by tucking her boys into bed, then collapses the Hex, ending her reign over this suburban town and erasing her family along with it.

Jac Schaeffer, head writer of WandaVision, comments in a New York Times coverage of the series that the show intends to “shatter that safety [of a sitcom] in a calculated way” (Itzkoff 2021). Drawing on the rich tradition of suburban portrayals in sitcoms, WandaVision exposes the false nature of the safety felt within suburbia and challenges the achievability of the suburban dream. By situating Wanda’s story in a suburban setting, the show not only offers a fresh take on the superhero genre but also provides a nuanced examination of a universally human experience: the search for solace and control in the face of trauma. While Wanda’s eventual failure to protect her magic-produced family and their quiet suburban existence is complex for the above-explored reasons, the ultimate infeasibility of her experiment raises the question: if the suburbs operate upon a base level of sameness, conformity, and order, is the term “suburban superhero” itself an oxymoron? Is it possible for the supernatural to be contained and accepted by the suburbs, or will the social governance of suburbia inevitably reject the Otherness that inherently sets heroes apart? Ultimately, the elusive solace Wanda seeks is not to be found in suburbia, and her failure serves as an ominous reminder regarding the power of the suburbs: though they may be places of order and stability, the control inherent in this dynamic is reciprocal; just as residents of the suburbs shape their community, it seems that the suburbs shape their residents right back.

Note on Author: Elise Cavanaugh is currently pursuing her Master of Arts in Teaching in English at Bridgewater State University. This paper was completed in spring 2023 under the mentorship of Dr. Heidi Bean for the course ENGL 570: The Suburbs
in American Literature and Film. Elise works as an English teacher at King Philip Regional High School in Wrentham, Massachusetts and will complete her master’s degree in summer 2023.

References


The Day We Marched Behind You: A Modern Twist to Graveyard Poetry

Sadie Harb-Ranero, Master of Arts Candidate, Creative Writing, Department of English, Bridgewater State University, sharbranero@bridgew.edu

Keywords: Graveyard; poetry; gothic literature.

Death is the only inevitable phenomenon we experience as humans. No matter where we’re from, our socioeconomic status, sins, or good deeds, our lives lead with honor or disgrace; death will claim us all. In the eighteenth century, graveyard poetry became how death was brought to light in daily conversation around communities. That poetic genre religiously follows a set of tropes as identifying markers, always ending the poem with religious reconciliation.

Spirituality is becoming a journey of discovery; a discovery of the self and what we as human beings can do on our own. People are moving away from the providential and the “what is written” as a way of living, they/we are gearing toward our ability to take charge of our lives and believing that every decision we make contributes to our future. The idea that everything is predestined lifts all responsibility off us, and our failures and joys of our successes, giving all blame or praise to God after believing that, and to quote the eighteenth-century Scottish graveyard poem Robert Blair, “Sicknesses, / Of every size and symptom, racking pains, / And bluest plagues, are thine!” are a form of punishment bestowed upon humankind for all the crimes we have committed against God (2015, 65).

Eighteenth-century poets reconcile their poems by going back to God at the end, offering faith in an afterlife and resurrection. In a way, ending it with some hope that we are not alone in this. They also offer proof to mankind that we will go to heaven if we believe; we just must never lose faith.

There are eight tropes with the addition of a well-suited ninth:
1- Memento Mori: always remembering the inevitability of death.
2- The transitory nature of life from one realm to the other.
3- There is always a graveyard setting in each poem.
4- No escaping the bodily decay in the poems.
5- Death is an absolute leveler in this life.
6- Always a tone of gloom, sadness, and mystery.
7- A religious reconciliation must occur at the poem’s end, reflecting the life they led in the eighteenth century.
8- In each poem, there is only one narrator, and he/she remains alone.
9- The last trope was a question mark, but the poems leave no room to debate this trope. One way or another, there is an apparition somewhere, somehow.

As I am a strong believer that the world is moving toward a secular worldview, Jose Fuliga proves
me to be on to something. He starts off his article, “Factors Contributing to the De-Christianization of North America,” with a powerful claim in the opening paragraph stating that “The hold of the Christian faith on Americans is rapidly fading. Its churches’ pews are almost half empty, only filled with a graying generation. The absence of young faces is noticeable. The institutions preparing priests and pastors have dwindling enrolments” (3). He did not waste any time. I can see Fuliga’s statement and research reflected in many contemporary/modern poets.

In the Graveyard poem I composed, I move away from the religious reconciliation and leave my endings open to interpretation. I stay true to form except when it comes to the seventh trope, the religious reconciliation. As in life, unanswered questions outweigh the answered ones. Loss is part of life. Grief is part of life. My poem translates my pain, anger, and reconciliation with death.

The Day We Marched Behind You

Sinéad O’Connor’s song Nothing Compares 2 U Came on the radio in the car the other day. It reminded me of you.
I had to pull over to catch my breath for a minute.
It was your favorite song.
You would sing to it so loudly
Even though you never really knew all the words.
It reminded me of you.
It reminded me of the day our city turned into a graveyard
Welcoming you onto your next journey.
We were only sixteen

Yours was the first funeral I attend,
The first body I had ever seen.

You didn’t look like you.
You weren’t pretty anymore.
I guess death does that to you.
You loved life.
You used to call me out all the time for being cranky and angry.
You hated whenever I started fights with people
Who would just look at me the wrong way?
Remember when you had to pull me off that girl on the street?
I had blood all over me
And you hated that I stained your favorite shirt.
It wasn’t my blood
It was hers after I broke her nose and jaw.
“You are abnormally strong for a tiny human,” you said.
I liked that.

Your blood didn’t stain my shirt
It stained our streets.
Where you died.
Where we carried you to church.
You never cared much for churches
But you went all the time because you loved to pray.
You loved wearing the crucifix for protection.
He must’ve been too distracted the day you died on that bike.
She was your baby, wasn’t she?
I don’t think you ever loved anything
Or anyone more than you loved that bike.
She killed you, didn’t she?

Bridgewater State University
My foot was hurting me so much that day. Remember how I stepped on the sea urchin? You thought it was weird I didn’t see it on the beach. I still had pieces of thorns stuck at the bottom of my foot.

We marched behind you, taking turns carrying your coffin. The girls didn’t. Only the boys.

So many dancers everywhere celebrating your life. I never understood that in our culture. Just fucking weird. You would’ve hated it. I thought you should’ve had a bike parade, But since your bike killed you, I suppose that would’ve been inappropriate.

We marched behind you all the way to the church. I couldn’t feel anything but void. I was numb. All the stores on the main streets of our city were in mourning. Each sign felt like a tombstone paying tribute to a dead loved one.

You broke the city’s heart that day.

Here lies “him” a beloved father and husband. Here lies “her” a beloved grandmother and mother. How is it that everyone that dies is “a beloved?”

Not a single one of these people was a horrible human being? I wasn’t sure why my mind kept wandering to these places; About how horrible some humans are.
How much pain one might bring another human being.
Do you think the woman who backed her car at full speed,
The one who hit you riding your bike will have a
“Beloved” on her tombstone when she dies?

Every once in a while, I would purposely put pressure
on my injured foot.
I wanted to feel something other than the void.
The pain was good.
Pain is a feeling. I wanted that.
The urchin’s thorns kept digging into my foot the
harder I stomped.
That was ok.
I was ok then until we got to St. Jean Marc’s Church
You loved that place so much.
You used to think it was beautiful.
I was glad your parents chose it for you.
It would’ve made you happy.
I wasn’t.
The mass started.
I must’ve blocked it because all I kept hearing is a
whimper.
It must’ve been your mother.
I was no longer feeling pain.
I was feeling angry.
Very angry.
I was angry with your god.
Angry with your crucifix.
Angry with your saints.
None of them did a damn thing to keep you alive.
I hope you knew they failed you.
I hope you know that I was right.
That they weren’t real.

That they were a made belief fairy tale people tell
themselves
So, they stop taking responsibility for their mistakes.
That saying “it was God’s will” was
And still is the most outrageous concept human beings
created.
It was your will to drive on one wheel up a hill.
It was your stubbornness that refused to wear a helmet.
It was her will to reverse her car out of an alley without
looking.
You should not have died that day.
You should not have been hit so hard that you flew in
the air so high,
And landed on your head in the middle of the road.
Your friends should not have watched you die like that.
Where were they then?
Those saints and your God.
You couldn’t answer me. Couldn’t you?

You are gone now.
And here I am writing this to you, but you will never
read it.
You know,
I used to see your mother at the Lebanese church here
in Jamaica Plain,
When I first moved here.
I saw Maroun, your little brother at a party.
His childlike heart remembered me and hugged me so
tight.
He still doesn’t know his strength.
My heart stopped for a moment that night.
His eyes reminded me of you,
And the air got knocked out of my lungs for a while.
I don’t know what happened to your little sister.
They all left Lebanon after you died.
You would’ve hated it here.
The law requires you to wear helmets,
And cops stop you if you ride on one wheel.

I never approached her you know, your mother.
I don’t know why.
I felt void again when I saw her,
But no spikes to stomp on anymore.
The thrones are all gone, and I am left with scars from
that march.
I buried them with you.
All that is left of you is this poem.
Just a scar.

To Rami…
Until we meet again.

Note on Author: Saide is an immigrant who survived the
Lebanese Civil War as a child. Growing up in the
aftermath of that war still affects everything she does as
a writer. She holds a master’s degree from Bridgewater
State University and is applying for PhD programs in
Irish Studies in Europe under the mentorship of Dr.
Ellen Scheible. Saide is an adjunct professor at BSU
as well as a managing editor for The Undergraduate
Review. She wrote this graveyard poem under the
advisory of Dr. Elizabeth Veisz. This poem is dedicated
to Saide’s childhood friend, Rami. Rami died at the age
of 16 in a motorcycle accident and this poem describes
his funeral. His was the first funeral Saide attended,
opening a long and curious relationship between her
and death.

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The Impact of Driving Cessation on Quality of Life in Older Adults

Megan Lane, Master of Occupational Therapy (MOT) Candidate, Worcester State University, meg.lane11@gmail.com

Abstract: As individuals age, they face a variety of new experiences and transitions. Having to stop driving, due to a medical condition or for some another reason, is one of the many transitions older adults may undergo. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the impact driving cessation, or giving up driving, has on quality of life in older adults. The developed research questions aimed to observe changes in social relationships and engagement, motivation, and emotional well-being after giving up driving. The study followed a qualitative design and used semi-structured interviews to gain insight into the participants’ experiences. Six participants who were 65 years old or older and gave up driving at least a year ago were recruited to participate. The participants were assigned numbers to keep their identities confidential throughout the entirety of the study; they each completed a one-on-one interview either in person or on Zoom. The interviews consisted of a set of demographic questions followed by questions that were specific to the three research questions developed. Through the use of the NVivo software, the student researcher was able to analyze the transcripts and search for themes within the data. The four major themes identified after analysis were planning ahead, support network, utilization of time, and acceptance and coping. Additionally, utilization of resources was identified as a sub theme within the theme of support network. Findings from this study indicated a mix of both positive and negative experiences following driving cessation. Within all three of the areas examined, there were variations between the participants’ experiences. The results from this study suggest that driving cessation is a major life transition for many older adults and is unique to each individual.

Keywords: Driving cessation; older adults; social participation; emotional well-being; motivation.

Introduction

Driving is an occupation that holds significant value to many older adults because it provides them with independence as they age. An occupation is identified as any activity an individual does in their daily life that is meaningful to them (American Occupational Therapy Association [AOTA] 2020). For many individuals, driving is considered a meaningful activity that they need to do or want to do regularly. Challenges that arise due to age, declines in health, or other factors can indicate a need to make the transition to no longer driving. The intent is to decrease safety risks for the driver and others on the road, but the transition can have more effects than what may be originally anticipated. Individuals may experience a variety of...
both negative and positive changes, depending on their unique situation. The purpose of this study was to examine the impact driving cessation has on quality of life in older adults.

Significance to Occupational Therapy
The Occupational Therapy Practice Framework (OTPF-4) categorizes all activities individuals complete in their daily life into various areas of occupations (AOTA 2020). Driving and community mobility is identified as an instrumental activity of daily living (IADL) in the framework and refers to any way in which individuals access their community (AOTA 2020). A change in driving status not only affects the IADL of driving but also can impact all other occupations listed in the OTPF-4 including work, social participation, and health management (AOTA 2020). Additionally, the OTPF-4 considers roles and routines, which are both significantly affected in individuals who give up driving. Since driving is a meaningful occupation for many individuals, OT intervention can address driving or work on adapting to the transition and finding new meaningful activities to engage in. The close link between the profession and the occupation makes this study significant to the field.

Review of the Literature
Relevance of Driving Cessation in Older Adults
The population of older adults in the United States is consistently increasing with 54.1 million people being over the age of 65 years old in 2019 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC] n.d.). Within this, it is predicted that around one million individuals go through the process of driving cessation each year (Choi et al. 2012). Driving cessation occurs when an individual completely stops driving for any reason (Chihuri et al. 2016; Choi et al. 2012). Many older adults connect their ability to drive to their identity and feel it provides them with independence (Chihuri et al. 2016; Edwards et al. 2009; O’Connor et al. 2013). As a result of the high volume of older adults driving and the significant value it holds to many individuals, this topic is one that is necessary to address.

The process of driving cessation is different for every individual as there are various reasons an individual may stop driving. Some individuals make the choice independently while others require a push from an external source (Antin et al. 2017; Choi et al. 2012). Family members expressing concern, discussions with health care professionals, changes to medical status, and involvement in vehicle crashes are some of the most common reasons older adults give up driving (Chihuri et al. 2016; Choi et al. 2012).

How Driving Cessation Impacts Community Mobility and Participation
Driving cessation can significantly impact community mobility. For the purpose of this study, community mobility is focused on driving a car, but the term encompasses all ways in which individuals access their community (Di Stefano et al. 2012; Spinney et al. 2020). The ability to drive is valued by older adults due to the convenience and independence it provides to them in their daily routine (Di Stefano et al. 2012; Vrkljan and Polgar 2007). Making the transition to non-driver forces individuals to face changes in their daily activities and adapt to new ways of community
mobility, which often means relying on others for transportation (Spinney et al. 2020; Vrkljan and Polgar 2007). Individuals no longer have the flexibility to go out whenever they want to and they have to plan their routine based on the schedule of their driver (Spinney et al. 2020; Vrkljan and Polgar 2007). The reduction in ease of community mobility also affects participation with individuals who no longer drive being less likely to participate in activities outside of their homes (Spinney et al. 2020; Vrkljan and Polgar 2007).

Changes in participation can lead to changes in how the individual views who they are and what they are capable of (Vrkljan and Polgar 2007). For many individuals, the roles they engage in change when they stop driving and they experience a decrease in satisfaction with their involvement (Spinney et al. 2020; Vrkljan and Polgar 2007).

**Effects of Driving Cessation on Emotional Well-Being**

Giving up driving after years of completing the occupation is a significant transition that requires time to adjust to (Holden and Pusey 2021; Patterson et al. 2019; Sanford et al. 2019). Every individual’s path looks slightly different and their emotional responses to hearing and accepting the news will vary (Holden and Pusey 2021; Mullen et al. 2017; Sanford et al. 2019). Older adults view driving as part of their identity and may go through a grieving process when giving it up (Chihuri et al. 2016; Holden and Pusey 2021; Mullen et al. 2017). Previous research suggests this loss is a “traumatic event” for some individuals and compares it to someone losing their job by identifying the possibility of self-doubt, crying, sleep loss, and more (Mullen et al. 2017).

Previous research has noted that individuals who give up driving involuntarily are more likely to have stronger negative emotions during the process such as refusing to stop driving and expressing anger or resentment (Holden and Pusey 2021; Mullen et al. 2017, Sanford et al. 2019). Additionally, mental health challenges such as helplessness, loneliness, low self-esteem, and depression are seen to be higher in individuals who are no longer driving (Chihuri et al. 2016; Mullen et al. 2017; Pachana et al. 2016; Patterson et al. 2019; Sanford et al. 2019).

Although negative emotions are commonly expected after driving cessation, research does support some positive emotions as well. If older adults have support from family and friends during the transition and begin planning early, they are more likely to accept the change and adapt accordingly to their environment (Holden and Pusey 2021; Sanford et al. 2019). Additionally, some individuals are able to see the positive aspects such as learning to use public transportation, spending more time with family members who provide rides, or feeling less anxious (Holden and Pusey 2021; Mullen et al. 2017; Patterson et al. 2019).

**Effects of Driving Cessation on Social Engagement**

Health status has been found to be associated with levels of productive and social engagement, with lower levels of social interaction leading to lower levels of mental health (Curl et al. 2014; Pachana et al. 2016). The presence of social support throughout the transition to non-driver can help counteract many of the emotional consequences of driving cessation (Pachana et al. 2016; Stinchcombe et al. 2021). Remaining socially
connected and receiving transportation from social connections has been shown to decrease depressive symptoms and feelings of social isolation (Curl et al. 2014; Pachana et al. 2016; Stinchcombe et al. 2021). Additionally, individuals may strengthen social connections through realizing who is there to support them during this time (Mullen et al. 2017; Pachana et al. 2016; Pellichero et al. 2021).

Although social supports play a significant role in helping older adults through the transition, research depicts decreases in the size of social networks after giving up driving (Curl et al. 2014; Pachana et al. 2016; Spinney et al. 2020; Stinchcombe et al. 2021). Many individuals lose connections with people that live farther away, spend more time with neighbors or family located nearby, or have fewer opportunities to connect because they have to move somewhere that is more supportive of their functional needs (Curl et al. 2014; Stinchcombe et al. 2021). The dynamic of relationships can also change, resulting in individuals feeling like they are a burden on their loved ones (Mullen et al., 2017; Pellichero et al., 2021).

Effects of Driving Cessation on Motivation
Driving has clearly been identified as a valuable occupation for older adults and one that is essential in assisting individuals with their daily routines (Bertrand et al. 2021; Curl et al. 2014; Liddle et al. 2014). When individuals go through the process of giving up driving, they will notice changes in their routines, roles, and engagement due to the disruption of a previous occupation (Bertrand et al. 2021; Curl et al. 2014; Holden and Pusey 2021; Liddle et al. 2014).

Research has shown that non-drivers spend less time participating in activities outside of their home, leading to engagement in more domestic activities (Liddle et al. 2014; Nakamura et al. 2021). Liddle et al. (2014) concluded that drivers spent 29.4 hours each week in solitary activities and 20.4 hours in social activities whereas non-drivers participated in 40.8 hours of solitary activities and only 14 hours of social activities. Additionally, research has concluded that non-drivers hold fewer roles than individuals still driving (Curl et al. 2014; Liddle et al. 2014). Losing roles that have been engraved in an individual’s routine for many years can take a toll on their health, especially their mental health. Individuals commonly experience feelings of grief, isolation, and more that can lead to decreases in satisfaction with performance and overall health (Liddle et al. 2014).

If individuals do not want to see decreases in participation and satisfaction with participation, they must be motivated to find new ways to accomplish desired tasks and structure their routines (Bertrand et al. 2021; Liddle et al. 2014). This may involve them discovering new occupations that are more feasible or putting in more energy to remain connected to the community by asking for rides (Bertrand et al. 2021; Haltiwanger and Underwood 2011).

Evidence in the literature clearly depicts the need to address driving cessation due to the aging population and the potential safety risks (Antin et al. 2017; Chihuri et al. 2016; Choi et al. 2012). Research has addressed the impact of driving cessation on various areas of health including physical, cognitive, social, and emotional. The purpose of this study was to examine the impact driving cessation has on social interactions, emotional well-being, and motivation.
Research Questions
The research questions that were explored in the study were:

1) How does social engagement and/or social relationships change after driving cessation? Do individuals experience social isolation?
2) Does motivation to engage in occupations decrease after driving cessation?
3) What changes to emotional well-being can be noted in individuals after driving cessation?

Method
Research Design
The described research study followed a qualitative design, allowing the student researcher to gain insight into each participant’s unique experience. Data collection occurred through semi-structured interviews either over Zoom or in person. The interviews varied in length and consisted of eight demographic questions and 18 questions that addressed the three specific research questions. All of the interview questions were created by the student researcher.

Participants
The student researcher recruited six individuals to participate in the study. In order to be included in the study, individuals had to be 65 years old or older, gave up driving at least a year ago, and spoke and understood English fluently. The participants were recruited in three different ways. First, the student researcher created a post on her personal Facebook account. Additionally, the student researcher created a flyer and posted it at a local urban senior center and a suburban church. The student researcher received permission from the Operations Director at the senior center and the Office Coordinator at the church to post the flyers. The first six individuals that expressed interest in the study and meet the criteria were selected.

Procedures
Before the student researcher began the study, she received permission from an Institutional Review Board (IRB). The student researcher submitted an exempt application and received approval to move forward with the study on July 8, 2022.

The first step in the study was to recruit participants, through the methods mentioned above, to complete the interviews. Once the participants were recruited, the student researcher provided them with a consent form that they needed to sign. As the student researcher received each consent form back, she assigned the participants a number to ensure privacy throughout the study. Any time the individual was referenced, their number was used instead of their name.

Next, the student researcher scheduled an interview with each participant. Five of the interviews were conducted in person and one was conducted on Zoom. The interviews were conducted one-on-one and lasted between 15 and 75 minutes in length. The student researcher recorded all of the interviews through the Voice Memo app or Zoom program in order to transcribe them for data analysis. All of the participants were asked the same questions, in the same order and were encouraged to share as much as they were comfortable sharing. After the participants completed their interviews, their role in the study was done.
Data Analysis
Following the completion of the interviews, the student researcher transcribed the interviews and uploaded them into the NVivo software. Using the software, the student researcher created codes based on the participant’s responses. Four main codes titled “Background on Participant’s Experience,” “Emotional Well-being,” “Motivation,” and “Social Engagement and Relationships,” were created to organize the collected data. Within each of these, sub codes were created to more specifically categorize the information. This allowed the student researcher to organize the information and analyze it more efficiently. After the coding was completed, the codes were used to develop themes that answered the research questions.

Results
The characteristics of the sample for this study are depicted in Table 1 and Table 2. Table 1 states the current age and age at which each participant gave up driving. The mean current age of the sample was 88.83 years and the mean age participants stopped driving was 84.17 years.

Table 1
Current Age and Age Stopped Driving for Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Current age</th>
<th>Age stopped driving</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>90</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. N= 6.

Table 2 depicts all the other demographic characteristics of the sample. As shown in Table 2, all six participants reported being retired. Female was the most common gender identified, suburban was the most common location, and widowed was the most common marital status. Living arrangements had the most variation out of all demographic questions with two participants living with a family member, two living with a spouse, and two living alone.

Table 2
Demographic Characteristics of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>66.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>33.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>100.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marital status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>33.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widowed</td>
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<td>66.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living arrangements</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family member(s)</td>
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<td>33.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spouse</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>33.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alone</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>33.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>66.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>33.34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. N= 6.

The student researcher identified four main themes: planning ahead, support network, utilization of time, and acceptance and coping.

Planning Ahead
The first theme found in this study was planning ahead, which connects well to all three research questions examined. All six participants indicated that since they gave up driving they have had to plan ahead in order to
continue participating in their environment. Participant 4 expressed this by saying, “When you have to change your mode of living, you have to plan.”

The theme relates to research question #1 due to the fact that most participants had to plan outings based on the availability of their social connections. The participants expressed having to schedule their appointments or errands based on when they can get a ride. Oftentimes, the rides come from friends, family, or neighbors. Engaging with the driver can be social on its own, but the ride also provides access to social events. Without the support of family and friends, individuals may be more likely to experience a decrease in social participation.

Although an individual’s social network can increase their ability to participate in the community, there are some challenges. For example, Participant 5 stated that what they did and where they went was dependent on his spouse’s schedule. This could lead to individuals feeling like they have less choice. Additionally, Participant 2 stated, “It was a little scary because I’m not used to asking anybody for anything.” Individuals may feel bad for asking for help and feel as though it could compromise their social relationships. Participant 6 explained how their spouse brought their own calendar to each of the doctor’s appointments and was responsible for scheduling follow-ups to organize transportation. An individual’s social connections can be a support for planning ahead and helping to navigate a new world with no car. However, it is important to note that some participant’s felt bad asking for rides or commitment from others.

Planning ahead can also relate to motivation levels, which was addressed through research question #2. A majority of participants stated that their interest in activities has not decreased and all stated that their routine is similar to what it was before they stopped driving. However, participants indicated a need to plan ahead in order to accomplish their daily tasks. Participant 3 stated, “I have somebody that takes me out. So I make a list of the errands and things, you know.” Therefore, they are required to plan her routine around another individual and complete everything they need a car for in one afternoon. The participants seem to be accustomed to planning ahead now and do not let this inhibit their participation or motivation levels.

Research question #3 aimed to determine if changes to emotional well-being occurred after driving cessation. A few of the participant’s responses suggested that planning ahead could be associated with some negative emotions, including both a decrease in freedom and impulsivity. Participant 3 explained, “I’m depressed that I can’t pick, just pick up and go” and Participant 6 said, “I was sorry to give up the measure of freedom that driving gives and but I was determined to make it work.” Without the ability to drive, individuals are not able to go where they want whenever they want. They have to make a transition from being fully independent to constantly checking in with others. Feeling restricted due to having to plan ahead can have a negative impact on emotional well-being. However, planning ahead can also open up opportunities for increased participation and emotional well-being, depending on the situation.

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1 Gender-neutral pronouns have been used to protect the identity of the participants.
Support Network
The theme of support network directly relates to research question #1. Every participant mentioned one or more individuals who have supported them since they gave up driving. Each individual’s support network looked different, but they all led to opportunities for social engagement. A majority of the participants named family members as their support network. Participant 1 stated, “I have a lot of family support. A lot.” Similarly, Participant 6 stated, “and our, when our children are here, they, we, sometimes have, save some errands to do with them, so they, they support us also.” Participant 3 discussed their living facility and stated, “Everybody is pretty supportive of each other.” Participant 4 focused on their community support by stating, “and if you are lucky, you have a good church.” All of the participants made it clear that they had individuals they could rely on during their transition. Participant 5 mentioned their family stood by them and stated, “Yeah I think they’ve accepted the challenge as have I and we are moving along at that speed.” Support networks contribute to continued participation and can help prevent social isolation that can result from decreased community mobility.

Utilization of Resources
Within the theme of support network, utilization of resources was identified as a sub-theme. Knowing what resources are available and using them can help individuals engage in their environment and prevent social isolation. Transportation resources can make up an individual’s support network and often overlap with social relationships. Participant 6 recognized his spouse’s support and stated, “I thank my [spouse] every day for being my driver.” Friends and neighbors were also identified as resources that individuals use to attend social activities in their community. Participant 2 mentioned they leave their living facility for games with friends and stated, “My best friend lives in the building... and [they] drives.” A majority of participants also stated that they have used a local bus or taxi to get around as needed. Participant 6 stated, “the local taxi service will get us anywhere and get me anywhere I want to go and I know that in the back of my mind and so, so that’s, that’s a relief and it’s a good, good service.” Participant 2 mentioned the services in their urban area as one way to get around and stated, “Well, they have the, they have the [company name omitted] service.” Participant 3 also mentioned the city resources and described the bus by saying “it’s pretty reliable.”

The findings from this study suggest that the majority of participants are still able to engage socially due to the support from their social connections and the resources they have for navigating around their environment. No significant changes in social relationships were noted and participants did not express increases in social isolation following driving cessation.

Utilization of Time
The theme of utilization of time aims to answer research question #2. Participants were asked about their activity involvement, routine, and energy and concentration levels to determine if their motivation has declined since giving up driving. A majority of participants stated that since they stopped driving the amount of time they engage in community activities
has decreased. Participant 2 stated, “oh I got out more when I was driving” and Participant 3 stated, “I’m in the apartment more.” Since giving up driving, participants’ ability to go out whenever they want has decreased, which for some resulted in more time spent at home. Along with this, half of the participants expressed having more free time than they did when they were driving, and half also reported decreased energy. Participant 3 stated, “Yeah my energy level is less because I can be around, I spend a lot more time lying in bed and watching TV.” Participant 5 said, “Yeah, and they, the energy levels have decreased” as well as “unmotivated would be a good characterization.” In terms of filling free time, participants reported mixed feelings. One participant expressed they used the extra time to try a new hobby and said, “I do knitting, I do a lot of stuff. I do puzzles, I do, um, I hate to be idle.” In contrast, a few other participants reported feeling lazier with the increase in free time.

Although a majority of participants stated that their community engagement has decreased, a consensus was not reached on how motivation changed after driving cessation. Each individual varied in the way they spend their increased free time and how they felt about it. A few participants expressed they continue to keep motivated even with the loss of driving. Others reported feeling less content with how they fill their time. Therefore, it is hard to conclude whether there is a significant relationship between driving cessation and motivation levels.

Acceptance and Coping
The theme of acceptance and coping corresponds to research question #3, which aimed to determine if changes to emotional well-being were present after giving up driving. A majority of the participants stated they have not felt hopeless since giving up their license. Participant 1 responded by saying, “I’m fairly optimistic about, about things.” Similarly, Participant 2 stated, “there’s always hope.” Participant 3 and Participant 5 were the only two who reported feelings of hopelessness. Participant 3 said “Yeah, I get depressed” and Participant 5 stated “Yeah it’s disappointing. Definitely disappointing.” A majority of the participants reported no increases in stress since giving up driving and none of them reported anxiety related to the transition. Participant 5 is the only one who reported an increase in stress. When asked about stress and anxiety Participant 1 responded, “I face it one day at a time” and Participant 3 responded, “I’m pretty content with it.” Participant 6 reflected on his stress levels and stated, “I’m never concerned about that. I realize that some, sometimes there may be something that gets in the way but, what, what I notice is that things work out.”

To help further analyze this theme, the participant’s reason for driving cessation was also examined. Half of the participants reported they stopped driving due to a health condition such as carpal tunnel syndrome, Parkinson’s disease, or vision loss. Although a decline in health was their reason, the individuals still reported it as a choice they came to terms with on their own. The other three participants reported they made the decision after car trouble or general declines in driving ability. In each case, it was clear that the participant made the choice. The element of choice here could provide evidence to support the observed acceptance and coping.
This theme examines all three aspects of emotional well-being that were observed through this study and suggest that a majority of participants have not experienced significant declines in emotional well-being since they stopped driving. Overall, many individuals expressed being able to accept the change and find ways to cope with the transition to remain optimistic.

The findings of this study provide insight into the transition from driver to non-driver. Planning ahead, support network, utilizing resources, and acceptance and coping were common themes that helped to explain the participant’s experiences and consider if and how their quality of life has been impacted. The results indicated some variations among the participants, but no consistent declines in the examined areas were found in the sample.

Discussion
Findings indicate that driving cessation is a significant transition for older adults, which can explain both the positive and negative impacts on quality of life that were observed. General decreases in social engagement were discovered, but maintaining a support network was found to be essential for participants for both socialization and transportation support. The findings from the current study are consistent with previous research that suggested that having a support network can help to counteract some of the common negative emotions that may follow driving cessation (Curl et al. 2014; Pachana et al. 2016; Stinchcombe et al. 2021).

Participants also expressed the negative social effects they experienced such as feelings of guilt that were attached to constantly asking loved ones for rides. This barrier aligns well with previous research which identified that many individuals feel embarrassed or powerless when asking for rides from their loved ones (Holden and Pusey 2021; Mullen et al. 2017). Previous research also identified social isolation as a common result of driving cessation in older adults (Mullen et al. 2017; Spinney et al. 2020). Although the current study found some decreases in social engagement, it cannot be implied that social isolation follows driving cessation. There were numerous positive social experiences depicted that support continued engagement and increased quality of life for older adults. A majority of previous research focused on the negative effects of driving cessation on social engagement, making the findings of this study surprising.

Additionally, findings do not provide concrete evidence that motivation decreases after driving cessation. Decreased engagement time and energy were noted, but individuals stated they were still interested in participating in occupations. It was clear that participants saw an increase in time spent at home, but there were variations in how they adapted. This increased time spent at home is consistent with previous research that found individuals spent more time in solitary activities after giving up driving (Bertrand et al. 2021; Liddle et al. 2014). Also, it is important to note that the increased time at home could be due to decreased flexibility in rides rather than motivation. Oftentimes, individuals expressed they still wanted to go out, but that they had to wait for a ride. Previous research also indicated a need for discovering new occupations to remain connected in the community (Bertrand et al. 2021; Haltiwanger and Underwood 2011). This was observed through new
hobbies surfacing and time being utilized differently.

A mix of positive and negative emotions among the participants was also noted in the study. Consistent with previous studies that linked the ability to drive to an increased sense of freedom and independence, individuals in the current study identified that it was disappointing to give up the impulsivity they used to have (Chihuri et al. 2016; Edwards et al. 2009; O’Connor et al. 2013). Previous research also identified other negative emotional changes in self-esteem, helplessness, loneliness, and depression (Chihuri et al. 2016; Holden and Pusey 2021; Mullen et al. 2017; Pachana et al. 2016; Patterson et al. 2019; Sanford et al. 2019; Stinchcombe et al. 2021). The current study noted some disappointment but did not indicate significant increases in hopelessness, stress, or anxiety among the population. Previous research also identified that acceptance of the transition and more positive emotional responses usually resulted from planning ahead and having support (Holden and Pusey 2021; Sanford et al. 2019). The current study aligns with this through the identified themes of planning ahead and support network.

One possible explanation for why the emotions displayed in this study were more positive than expected could be that all the participants chose to give up their licenses on their own, giving them more control over the decision. This added level of choice could have provided more opportunity to cope with the transition. Another alternative explanation could be that individuals were more content with the decision because they have had at least a year to adjust. Bertrand et al. (2021) supports these explanations by stating that some individuals in their sample were more able to accept the decision and gain control, which could possibly be a result of the increased time since giving up driving. Within their study, Bertrand et al. (2021) categorized those who had more control over the decision as “progressive narratives,” with reasons for driving cessation resembling the current study.

Due to the small number of participants in this study, the results should be considered with caution. Future research should target a larger and more diverse sample to gain more insight. Future research could also look more specifically at various demographics such as looking at how geographic location influences individuals’ responses. Another limitation of the current study was that the results were reliant on the accuracy of the participant’s responses. If participants viewed themselves as more independent than they actually are, the results may have been skewed. A future study may incorporate another point of view such as the caregivers to account for this. Lastly, the participants made the decision to contact the student researcher and join the study. As a result, the participants seemed to be more accepting of the transition, leading to more positive responses. An increased sample size may have led to a larger mix of experiences that represent the population more accurately.

Findings from the study indicated both positive and negative changes in the areas targeted, depicting that giving up driving is a major life transition that requires making adaptations. It can be concluded that the transition to no longer driving is unique to each individual, resulting in a variety of different outcomes.

Note on Author: Megan is pursuing her Master of Occupational Therapy (MOT) at Worcester State
University. Her thesis was completed in spring 2023 under the mentorship of Dr. Joanne Gallagher Worthley. After receiving her degree, she plans to begin her OT career working with the geriatric population.

References


How Emerging Adults are Living with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD): A Qualitative Study

Morgan Leger, Master of Occupational Therapy (MOT) Candidate, Worcester State University, mleger@worcester.edu

Abstract: Attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is a diagnosis characterized by symptoms of hyperactivity, inattention, and impulsiveness. These symptoms present functional challenges that can significantly affect quality of life and occupational outcome. This study employed a qualitative approach to better understand the lived experience of emerging adults with ADHD. More specifically, the approach was used to better understand how these symptoms contribute to occupational balance and quality of life, and how individuals cope with symptoms when they arise. This study included six participants between the ages of 20 and 24 who were medically diagnosed with ADHD. Data was collected via semi-structured interviews and analyzed using NVivo. The data analysis revealed both commonalities and unique differences characterized by broad themes and subthemes. The themes indicated an overall negative impact on quality of life, the use of diverse learned coping techniques, and compromised occupational participation. The subthemes indicated hyperactivity contributing to positive social experiences, the varying use of medication, and inattention contributing to an atypical amount of time spent per task. These findings among others suggest that emerging adults with ADHD present needs to be addressed within and across the occupational therapy domain and scope of practice. Occupational therapists can provide specialized services to improve the quality of life and occupational balance in emerging adults with ADHD. These findings also have implications for future research, namely studies that expand upon the correlation between awareness of symptoms and the use of coping strategies, as well as the effects of ADHD on memory and sleep quality.

Keywords: ADHD; occupational therapy; attention deficit hyperactivity disorder; quality of life; occupational balance; lived experience; coping.

Introduction

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a prevalent disorder affecting approximately 4.4% of the general population (Lyrone et al. 2021). It is associated with decreased social, educational, and overall occupational functioning (Lyrone et al. 2021). The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders criteria for ADHD includes a “persistent pattern of inattention and/or hyperactivity-impulsivity that interferes with functioning or development”
It further states that these symptoms are present in two or more settings, and they “interfere with, or reduce the quality of, social, academic, or occupational functioning” (APA 2022, p. 69).

Emerging adulthood is a phrase coined by Jeffery Jensen Arnett, PhD (Hochberg and Konner 2020). It is defined as a phase of life with distinguishing demographic, social, and psychological features present between adolescence and fully developed adulthood (Hochberg and Konner, 2020). Arnett continues to describe emerging adults as individuals between the ages of 18 and 25, during which they become increasingly economically independent (Hochberg and Konner 2020). There is little research that exists regarding how emerging adults are living with a diagnosis of ADHD, as much of the literature focuses on other age groups (Bjerrum et al. 2017; Goffer et al. 2020; Hupfeld et al. 2018). Although, it is generally understood that heightened challenges are present in work, academic, and other settings (Bjerrum et al. 2017; Goffer et al. 2020; Hupfeld et al. 2018). Difficulties with time and productivity management in those with ADHD may affect occupational participation, but further research is needed to explore this area (Amadou et al. 2013; Cain 2021, Gjervan et al. 2012; Jansen et al. 2017; Lyhne et al.,2020; von Wirth et al. 2022). Furthermore, people with ADHD often present with executive functioning impairments that may impair occupational functioning and participation (Sjöwall and Thorell 2022). The purpose of this study was to analyze how emerging adults are living with a diagnosis of ADHD and specifically, its impact on quality of life and occupational balance, as well as how they are coping.

Review of the Literature
The Effect of ADHD Symptoms on Quality of Life
Quality of life refers to a multidimensional construct that concerns a person’s evaluation of their own life while considering global health, level of functioning, and daily occupations (Agarwal et al., 2012). Across medical settings, quality of life has become an important outcome measure, commonly using assessments such as the health-related quality of life (HRQoL) concept, the quality of life enjoyment and satisfaction questionnaire (Q-LES-Q), and the World Health Organization quality of life scale (WHOQOL-BREF) for measurement (Krauss and Schellenberg 2022; Lucke et al. 2021; Zhang et al. 2021).

Quintero et al. (2019) explored the effect of ADHD on adults and found significant differences in mood symptoms and quality of life between subjects with ADHD and control subjects. Others found that ADHD symptoms negatively impact all subdimensions of quality of life according to the HRQoL and could significantly affect quality of life indirectly via executive functioning and depression/anxiety symptoms (Krauss and Schellenberg 2022; Zhang et al. 2021). A systematic review found that pharmacological treatment and early diagnosis both have a positive impact on functional outcome, long-term prognosis, and quality of life in adults diagnosed with ADHD (Agarwal et al. 2012; Quintero et al. 2019).

Young Adults Living with ADHD
There is a need for additional research regarding the effects of ADHD in emerging adulthood as it has been studied less frequently than ADHD in childhood (Krauss and Schellenberg 2022). Living with ADHD symptoms
can affect multiple areas of daily functioning and living, such as social relationships, academic functioning, and community and workplace involvement (Bjerrum et al. 2017; Goffer et al. 2020; Hupfeld et al. 2018). Goffer et al. (2020) found that college-aged students with ADHD experience significant challenges in occupational performance. Furthermore, a study by Hupfeld et al. (2018) explored how adults with ADHD report living “in the zone,” or more commonly put, in periods of hyperfocus. Studies have reported that adults with ADHD often experience episodes of increased attention or hyperfocus. This is unexpected because inattention is a prominent symptom of ADHD. This study found a significant prevalence of hyperfocus in adults with high reported levels of ADHD symptoms. Further research is needed to explore these findings to gain a deeper understanding of how emerging adults are living with ADHD (Hupfeld et al. 2018).

**The Effect of ADHD Symptoms on Occupational Participation**

As stated in the literature, ADHD is associated with poor functional outcomes (Amadou et al. 2013; Cain 2021, Gjervan et al. 2012; Jansen et al. 2017; Lyhne et al. 2020; von Wirth et al. 2022). Functionality strongly affects occupational participation, which can be described as one’s status of partaking in various meaningful tasks and activities (Kreider et al. 2019).

ADHD symptoms contribute to impairments in a variety of social domains, such as employment, academia, and overall maintenance of social or romantic relationships (Amadou et al. 2013; Cain, 2021, Gjervan et al. 2012; Jansen et al. 2017; Lyhne et al. 2020; von Wirth et al. 2022). Gjervan et al. (2012) found that adult ADHD was associated with decreased educational attainment and decreased levels of employment. Although further research is needed, the literature indicates a lack of professional collaboration and occupational functioning present for individuals with ADHD in the workplace (Amadou et al. 2013).

A qualitative study by Cain (2021) found that challenges related to each person’s specific lived ADHD experience impacted how they navigate romantic relationships. In academic settings, students with ADHD face challenges in higher education due to various functioning and participation difficulties (Jansen et al. 2017). The literature suggests that students with ADHD often experience challenges with focus and sustaining attention during school related occupations (Jansen et al. 2017). They further state that most challenges arise during traditional teaching methods (Jansen et al. 2017). The literature supports a need for continuous support to establish and maintain healthy daily routines, and that occupational professionals such as occupational therapy practitioners are vital resources who can fulfill the need for continuous occupational support (Lyhne et al. 2020).

**Coping Strategies and ADHD**

ADHD is commonly related to psychological distress and functional impairments within personal, professional, and social contexts (Barra et al. 2021). ADHD was found to be associated with a low probability of choosing adaptive stress coping strategies and a high probability of choosing maladaptive stress coping strategies (Barra et al. 2021). This behavior causes increased functional impairment and further psychological distress (Barra et al. 2021). These findings
emphasize the importance of utilizing professional support in adults with ADHD and support the use of stress coping strategies as a treatment method for reducing functional life impairment (Barra et al. 2021). Individuals presenting with neuropsychological deficits tend to utilize maladaptive stress coping strategies more often (German 2020). One study controlled for pharmacological treatment and still found that disparities among coping skills play significant roles in the quality of life outcomes in adults with ADHD (German 2020). Thus, pharmacological treatment by itself is not sufficient for treating the overall functional impact of ADHD (German 2020). These findings emphasize the importance of integrating positive coping strategies into the therapeutic treatment of ADHD (German 2020).

Another study investigated fixed and/or growth mindsets of self-regulation and how this can predict an individual’s ability to cope with setbacks and explored the connection between executive functioning impairment and ADHD status (Burnette et al. 2020). Growth mindsets predicted a decreased negative affect, increased efficacy, and less avoidant coping (German 2020). The participants with greater executive functioning impairments as well as an ADHD diagnosis reported weaker growth mindsets of self-regulation (Burnette et al. 2020). It was found that prior to diagnosis and treatment, people with ADHD may develop many different coping skills that they perceived as helpful (Canela et al. 2017). This study, among others, reinforced the idea that effective coping strategies were vital to the self-management of those with ADHD (Barra et al. 2021; Burnette et al. 2020; Canela et al. 2017; German 2020; Kreider et al. 2019).

Summary
ADHD symptoms have significant effects on overall quality of life and functional outcome. Based on the gap in the literature regarding this specific age group, the purpose of the study was to gain a deeper understanding of emerging adults’ life with ADHD by analyzing how it affects quality of life, occupational balance, and how they cope with ADHD.

Research Questions
The following were the research questions explored in this study:

1) How does ADHD affect overall quality of life in emerging adults?
2) How are emerging adults coping with symptoms of ADHD?
3) How does ADHD affect occupational balance in emerging adults?

Method
Research Design
This design was a qualitative study. There were 17 semi-structured interview questions that were asked of each participant.

Participants
A social media post as well as the snowball method were used to recruit participants for this study (Parker et al. 2019). The social media post consisted of a small paragraph introducing and explaining the study. This was accompanied by a digital flyer with the inclusion criteria and researcher contact information.

This study included interviews with six participants. All participants reported having a
diagnosis of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder from a medical professional. The participants were also all within the age range of 20 to 24 years old and could speak and understand English. Participants could participate in this study regardless of whether they were diagnosed with other non-neurocognitive medical conditions. Lastly, the participants had access to a computer or other technology device with the Zoom application, a working camera, and a microphone.

**Demographics**

Table 1 shows demographic information pertaining to gender, age, education level, and ethnicity. This study consisted of six total participants; (66.6%) were female, and two (33.3%) were male. Participants ranged from 20 to 24 years old. In regard to their highest education level, two participants (33.3%) earned bachelor’s degrees, while four participants (66.6%) earned high school diplomas. More specifically, all participants who had their highest completed education level as high school diplomas were currently enrolled in a four-year college. Five participants, (83.3%) were Caucasian, and one participant (16.6%) was biracial.

<table>
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<th>Ethnicity</th>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Biracial</td>
</tr>
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**Procedures**

Ethical approval for exempt status for this study was granted by an Institutional Review Board. Participants were interviewed via Zoom. Before completing the interview, each participant was required to read, sign, and return a consent form. The consent forms with participants’ signatures were stored in a locked file cabinet at the department of the researcher’s home institution and will be disposed of after three years.

During the interviews, the researcher read an introductory paragraph followed by the demographic and interview questions. After the interviews, the researcher downloaded the Zoom recordings and transcripts and checked them for accuracy. These transcripts were transferred to the qualitative analysis software called NVivo, where response themes were identified.

**Instruments**

The researcher created 17 semi-structured interview questions for the purpose of the study. These questions were not modeled after any other study or any other examples directly, however, they could have been influenced by reading research articles in preparation and creation of the literature review. The questions were based on the developed research questions and addressed the impact of ADHD on quality of life and occupational balance in emerging adults, as well as how emerging adults cope with ADHD. Examples of interview questions include, “How has ADHD affected your day-to-day life?,” “How do you cope with symptoms of ADHD when they arise?,” and “How does ADHD interfere with your engagement in meaningful occupations?”
Data Analysis

This was a qualitative study that used the NVivo software to analyze the data received from participants’ responses and categorize them into themes and subthemes. There were three themes found: (1) overall negative impact on quality of life, (2) the use of diverse learned coping techniques, and (3) compromised occupational participation. The three subthemes found were (1) hyperactivity contributing to positive social experiences, (2) the varying use of medication, and (3) inattention contributing to an atypical amount of time spent per task. The themes of the study generally address the overall impact of ADHD on quality of life and occupational balance, and how emerging adults cope with ADHD.

Results

Negative Impact on Quality of Life

All participants reported that living with ADHD had a negative impact on their overall quality of life. Participant six stated, “I struggle more than most to complete everyday tasks,” participant three stated, “if I don’t go, go, go, I almost feel like I am depressed,” and participant two described how they view their diagnosis, stating, “I view it in a negative way. I get down on myself for it.” Participants reported their ADHD symptoms of both hyperactivity and inattention contributed to the negative impact. Many participants used words like “hyper” and “jittery” when describing feelings of hyperactivity, and words like “focus” and “distracted” to describe feelings of inattention.

All participants described particularly negative experiences in traditional academic settings, for example, participant one stated, “I found myself not doing well in academics, because I simply couldn’t focus.” Participant three stated that, “when in the public school system, I had a hard time paying attention and getting work done. I was falling behind a ton.” Participant four reported, “I end up just teaching myself because I wasn’t paying attention. I am having to put double the amount of time into classes to relearn whatever I wasn’t focused on that day.” And lastly, participant six said, “I could not concentrate in school, I did very poorly up until my sophomore year just because I had a lot of trouble paying attention in class, focusing, and I was very, very jittery.”

Participants also mentioned other ways ADHD symptoms negatively impacted their quality of life, with many stating feelings of boredom and frustration. For example, participant two stated that she “gets bored really easily,” and participant four said, “it makes tasks more demanding throughout my life because you have to consciously focus.”

Finally, two of the six participants stated that they experienced negative impacts of ADHD symptoms on memory. Participant two stated, “I forget to do things. Sometimes I have one thing on my mind to do but then something else comes up that seems more important in the moment, so I completely forget about the other task.” Participant one stated, “my memory isn’t the best so other people would get mad that I couldn’t remember things.”

Positive Social Participation

When asked about social participation, however, the data revealed a theme among all participants that ADHD symptoms, specifically feelings of reported hyperactivity, aided in social participation. For
example, participant one stated that, “people think that I’m hyper and fun and I am always down to have a good time. And I know that this is because of the ADHD because when I am on my medication I am not as fun,” and participant four stated, “the hyperactivity portion definitely does make you a little more extroverted.”

**Techniques and Strategies**

All participants stated they had developed techniques and/or strategies to help them cope with ADHD symptoms when they arise. Many of these techniques and strategies were learned by lived experience and some were taught by professionals such as therapists and psychiatrists. Participant one stated, “I write a lot of lists. I learned if I do lists, I can’t do long lists, or else I will see the big list, and I kind of go blank and won’t do anything for the day. I keep it short. I found one template on Amazon that is short and has three priorities and a list of stuff so I can prioritize my days.” Participant two stated, “I do see a therapist now, so she helps me with some techniques, especially when it comes to slowing down my thoughts and trying to be present in the moment.” She went on to say, “Usually when my mind wanders to a certain spot, counting or identifying certain objects in the room helps to slow things down for me,” and when her ADHD symptoms impact memory, she stated, “having alarms on my phone remind me of things I need to get done.” Participant four stated that they cope by making sure they “eat a good breakfast in the morning.” Participant four also reported that time of day influenced the effects of ADHD symptoms, and stated, “I have to do things in the afternoon when I am more awake if I want to focus on them.” Participant six utilizes accessibility services at her school to cope with ADHD symptoms in academic settings, stating, “I am also part of the student disability services at my school, so I’m able to get extra time on tests.”

Two participants also stated that sometimes they are not able to tell when they are experiencing ADHD symptoms, so they are unable to use coping strategies in those moments. Participant four stated, “I feel the irony of it just like when I’m spaced out, I don’t know I’m not in the moment so I can’t actively do anything about it.” And participant five stated, “I don’t recognize that I’m doing it when I’m doing it.”

**Medication**

All participants took medication to cope with their ADHD symptoms at some point throughout their lives. Participants one, four, five, and six were actively taking ADHD medication at the time of this study. Some medications mentioned were Ritalin, Adderall, Escitalopram, and Concerta. For one participant, medication served to be beneficial for treating ADHD symptoms, although she found other effects of the medication to be unfavorable. Participant one stated, “I am on Ritalin, I have two different prescriptions for that. It works fantastic. Although I don’t really like taking them because I don’t feel like myself when I take them. That being said, sometimes I need to weigh the options. Do I want to be my fun self, or do I want to be focused? It’s kind of a weigh the options type thing.” She also stated, “I don’t want to [take medication]. I want to be able to do my job without the need for medications, but every once in a while I need a quick fix.”

Participants two and three were not currently on medication. There were varying reasons for this.
Participant two reported, “I was on Adderall, but I didn’t like it. It felt like it wasn’t making the difference that I wanted.” And participant three stated, “I noticed when I was on medication it was terrible, like so bad physically and mentally. It was a terrible spiral.”

Compromised Occupational Participation
All participants stated that ADHD compromised their occupational participation. Participant one stated, “I feel like it’s hard for me to balance different occupations.” And participant four stated, “In the morning I would say it cuts my engagement [in occupations] in half.” Many participants reported that they get distracted and skip important tasks. For example, participant one stated, “Sometimes I just skip tasks, leave them for the next day and even into the next week because I want to do other things.” Some participants felt that their ADHD symptoms prevented them from participating in activities that require the ability to focus that they would otherwise want and choose to do. For example, participant one reported that, “when it comes to a book group, I know it’s something I’m never going to be able to do which is kind of frustrating.” And “if something requires me to sit down and focus while I do it, I’m just not going to because I know I can’t.” Participant three reported, “I do notice irritancy when it comes to trying to relax or read a book.”

Another theme that was found among participant responses was that ADHD symptoms also impacted participation in occupations because inattention contributed to an inability to focus on tasks that were in front of them. For example, participant two stated, “I get bored really fast of the thing that I’m doing.” Participant five stated, “If it’s not something that I’m super interested in or I’m pulled to, I can get distracted really easily.” Participant six stated, “there are so many things on my mind that I’m struggling to complete the things I want to do throughout the day.”

Participant three also mentioned that his ADHD symptoms decreased his desire to participate in certain occupations, stating, “[ADHD symptoms] cause me to lose the meaning or the desire to do other things, so it makes a task really heavy. It makes it more difficult than it needs to be because I’m so unorganized and lack attention to what I’m doing.”

Time Spent Per Task
All participants stated that the amount of time they spend per task is influenced by their ADHD symptoms, and this contributed to compromised occupational participation. For example, participant two stated, “I think that ADHD makes it so that I don’t have as much time to do the things that I love, or that I lose motivation to do those other things because I feel so down about the fact that I’m wasting so much time. So, then I feel like I don’t have any time to do anything else and I get almost in a depressed mood.” Participant four stated, “I would say [ADHD symptoms] definitely hinder [time management] because you have to spend more time doing the things that you’re already doing. So, you might not have as much time to try something new.” Participant six stated, “I’ll start a bunch of different tasks and I won’t like to finish them all so I think it reduces the amount of time that I can spend on other activities and stuff. I’m sometimes not able to do the things that I want to do because it’s taking me so much longer to complete the task that I have to do.”

Bridgewater State University
Many participants also stated that they have decreased time management skills, for example, participant four stated “There really is no time management. You sit down until enough becomes enough. You’re like, right now I’m going to get this done because I’ve been telling myself to do it. So, time management is just something that goes out the window.” Overall, many participants reported that their ADHD symptoms contribute to the length of time spent per task, and this affects participation in other meaningful occupations.

Summary of Results
Overall, the findings of the study revealed that the quality of life of emerging adults living with ADHD is negatively impacted by the disorder, however, hyperactivity does have a positive impact on social participation. The study also revealed that when participants notice ADHD symptoms arising, they use an individualized combination of learned techniques and medication to cope. Lastly, the study revealed that ADHD symptoms compromise occupational performance, specifically due to the amount of time spent per task and an inability to participate in focused activities.

Discussion
The findings of this study illuminate the experiences of emerging adults living with ADHD. Firstly, this study suggests that the quality of life of people living with ADHD is negatively impacted by the disorder, which is consistent with those of other studies (Agarwal 2012; Quintero et al. 2019). However, the present study suggests that there is one found exception, that ADHD in emerging adults has a positive impact on social participation. The finding of ADHD’s positive impact on social participation is consistent with a study by Krauss and Schellenberg (2022), who reported an overall negative quality of life in adolescence with the exception of well-being concerning friends/peers. This information provides healthcare practitioners with insight into the quality of life of those with ADHD. It does this while maintaining a strengths-based outlook by addressing the potential positives as well as perceived negatives during treatment.

The study also revealed that people with ADHD use a variety of learned techniques to cope with symptoms of ADHD when they arise. This finding is consistent with many other studies that state patient-reported use of diverse compensatory strategies (Bjerrum et al. 2017; Canela et al. 2017; German 2020). This is relevant to all healthcare professionals because understanding a patient’s individualized coping strategies may aid in developing patient-centered care. It is also essential to consider that self-taught coping strategies may influence the timeline of ADHD diagnosis or contribute to the underdiagnosis of ADHD. The present study goes beyond this and finds that people with ADHD cope with symptoms by taking prescribed medication. However, many people choose to opt out of taking medication for various reasons. Additionally, those with ADHD are not always aware of the ADHD symptoms as they are occurring, which poses difficulty in consciously choosing to use coping techniques. Further research is needed to expand upon the correlation between the awareness of symptoms and the use of coping strategies.

Similar to the findings in other studies, the present study also found that ADHD symptoms
compromise occupational performance (Goffer et al. 2020; Jansen et al. 2017; Lyhne et al. 2020). This was found specifically in relation to the inability to participate in focused activities and the amount of time spent per task. Occupational therapists specifically can be of requisite assistance to those with occupational imbalance as they possess a specified and extensive expertise regarding occupational participation. Continually, this study suggests that it takes longer for those with ADHD to complete work or school-related occupations, which leaves less time to participate in other meaningful occupations they enjoy. This is similar to the finding of Gjervan et al. (2012), who states that ADHD-related problems are most frequent in traditional academic settings.

**Conclusion**
The findings of this study suggest that emerging adults diagnosed with ADHD have needs to be addressed within and across the occupational therapy scope of practice. Emerging adults with ADHD were found to have compromised occupational balance, use a variety of learned coping techniques to manage symptoms, and the diagnosis was found to have an overall negative impact on quality of life. Occupational therapists can provide a unique and essential outlook on the potential treatment of ADHD and the management of symptoms to improve the quality of life and occupational balance in those diagnosed with the disorder.

**Note on Author:** Morgan Leger is a 23-year-old Master of Occupational Therapy student at Worcester State University. She received her Bachelor of Science in Occupational Studies in May 2022. While earning her undergraduate and graduate degrees, she worked in a psychiatric setting and is passionate about further exploring mental health and health-related quality of life. Her interests include mental health advocacy, occupational therapy’s role in mental health, and pediatric occupational therapy. She completed her thesis under the mentorship of Dr. Joanne Gallagher Worthley, Ed.D., OTR/L. She plans to sit for the NBCOT exam in spring 2024.
References


Nurture: Exploring Surrogacy through Visual Art

Megan O. Kenealy, Master of Arts in Teaching (Art), Candidate, Department of Art and Art History, Bridgewater State University
mkenealy@student.bridgew.edu

Abstract: This body of work portrays my time being a gestational surrogate for a family member and the honor I felt to be part of the journey. As a surrogate you are opening your life – physically and mentally to carry someone else’s load – for me this was a choice, a joy, and not a burden. This work takes the form of a large mixed media installation, which chronicles the complex journey I had as a gestational surrogate. Wall-mounted assemblages take viewers through a timeline documenting the different chapters of this experience. Stages include contracts and legal status, medical examinations and preparation, implantation, and my relationship with the family. The assemblages contain altered medical documents, medication, correspondence, tins, hair, breast milk, and personal items collected during the surrogacy. While this pregnancy was not always easy, the hard work and challenges do not make it less important or rewarding. I am devoted to sharing this story and remove the stigma that surrogacy would be an impersonal service or doomed to end with a sense of loss. The gift of surrogacy is invisible after the baby is born. This work provides visual evidence of this intangible experience.

Keywords: Ceramics, milk glazing, obvara, saggar, surrogate.

Over the past two years, my research and artistic practice has looked at gestational surrogacy based on my experience as a surrogate for a family. The journey of being a surrogate was significant but once I wasn’t pregnant anymore, there was no evidence of that experience. How do I share my joy and happiness? What do I want people to know about surrogacy? How do you create art that shows “surrogacy” without just looking like pregnancy?

My first semester as an MAT graduate student, I spent exploring ceramic forms and alternative firing processes. The forms are influenced by the womb and the protection it creates for a growing fetus. The vessels are tipped forward, inviting the viewer to see inside of them. This is my invitation to share my journey as a surrogate.

When thinking about creating shapes that represented a uterus, I knew that traditional glaze would not be right for my project. Researching and experimenting with milk glazing, obvara, and saggar firing became my focus for two semesters. Milk glazing uses milk on bisque fired ceramics to seal the pieces. Using milk to seal a womb-like vessel continues with my theme of protection, joy, and hard work that being a surrogate entail. Obvara is an Eastern European technique dating back to the twelfth century. It is when a fermented mixture is used on hot bisqued ceramics to scald the surface before dunking it in cold water to stop the reaction. The mixture is water or milk, yeast,
flour, and sugar. Connections are made between the fermented mixture with milk and gestating a baby. The last technique that I researched and tested was saggar firing. A saggar is a container used to keep precious pots or ceramics from being damaged during firing. Since my body was used to protect a baby, I became the “saggar” while a surrogate. What is fascinating about saggar firing is that no matter what you put into the container, the results are unpredictable. You need combustible materials to create color and patterns. I used seaweed, banana peels, hay, hair, steel wool, and other items in my experiments.

I really enjoy the puzzle solving that art is. My ceramics were documented, tracked and the data has helped me get closer to a completed body of work. It also showed me that for this project, ceramics is not the correct material. Without my time making and reflecting, I wouldn’t have put together those puzzle pieces. The theme of gestational surrogacy has stayed the same—but the materials needed to change. The abstract forms don’t show enough information to the viewer for them to see “surrogacy.”

My next steps will be to explore including personal items such as medical documents, conversations, and images between the families, as well as including hair, milk, and those containers that keep coming back into my research. I plan to create an installation that is chronological as well as brings personal joy back into the picture. Even though the ceramic pieces are not likely to be part of my thesis art
show, they are a key part of my artistic research and development in the process of my journey as an artist (come back next year for part two).

Note on Author: Megan Kenealy is an artist and art teacher living in southeast Massachusetts. She received her Bachelor of Arts from BSU. Before becoming a teacher, Kenealy worked in museums and art institutions throughout Massachusetts such as the Institute of Contemporary Art, Fuller Craft Museum, and the North Bennet Street School. She has been teaching for over ten years in public schools. When not in the studio or teaching, she enjoys spending time with her two kids and husband outside playing all the games and sports or tending to her garden. Kenealy expects to receive her Master of Arts in Teaching in Visual Arts from BSU in December 2023.
The Male Gaze and Women’s Sports Identity: Male Authorship of the Female Experience

Jennifer LaVoie, Master of Science, Physical Education, Coaching Concentration, Bridgewater State University, Jennifer.LaVoie@bridgew.edu

Abstract: The male gaze “construes women subjectively, according to stereotyped cognitions which harmonise with the expectations of the male reader [viewer]” (Brandt 2005, 235). This article examines how the male gaze shapes women’s participation in sport and physical activity. A brief historical retrospective provides examples of how the male voice authored ways in which women were allowed to compete and then offers contemporary examples that show how the male gaze continues to influence women’s sport clothing and behavior, rules, policies, and coaching methods. Despite the improvements in women’s sport participation, men still have the lion’s share of leadership positions with sports authorities in America, which means they can literally author how women compete. Women are still held captive by the male gaze, which creates a dangerous feedback loop forcing some women to conform to the stereotypes supported by the wider culture. In recent years, women have found a voice to talk about their unique athletic needs. Whether it is dark shorts so they can focus on competition during their menstrual cycle or wearing less revealing clothing on the handball court, women want to be seen as competent athletes and not as objectified sexual objects.

Keywords: Women’s sport’s history, feminism, sports attire

Introduction

Participation in sport and physical education is important for women and girls. It not only improves physical health; it also can alleviate stress and anxiety. Historically, women have struggled to be recognized as athletes with their own agency, and while things have undoubtedly improved for women in terms of participation and respect, there remain obstacles to women’s full recognition as elite athletes; obstacles such as sexual objectification, policing women’s bodies, gender tests, and discrimination against transgender women in sports. While connected, perhaps the biggest obstacle among them is the continued objectification of women athletes by what Laura Mulvey called “the male gaze.” To discuss the male gaze and its impact on the female sports experience, one must define a few terms.

The first term to define is scopophilia. In the groundbreaking essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” scopophilia is defined as “the pleasure of looking” (Mulvey 1975, 806). Freud associated scopophilia with “taking other people as objects,
subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze” (quoted in Mulvey 1975, p. 806). Mulvey expands on Freud’s idea of the controlling gaze to include “the erotic basis for pleasure in looking at another person as object” (806). Mulvey goes on to explain, “In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, the pleasure in looking has been split active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with the appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact” (808-9).

Because the female figure is styled according to the male fantasy, women’s self-definition is erased and replaced, metaphorically, by the authorship of the male viewer. Who gets to control the definition of concepts like “feminine” and “athlete?” In the article “The Male Gaze and Online Sports Punditry: Reactions to the Ines Sainz Controversy on the Sports Blogosphere,” Merrill et al. write, “the concept of voyeuristic pleasure enables the patriarchal construction of an exhibitionist role for women” (2012, 3). They reason that it is the continued sexual power imbalance between men and women that is ultimately responsible for the male authorship of the female sports experience.

One thread that connects contemporary female athletes with their historical sisters involves sport clothing choice. Historically, as women pushed to participate in physical education and sport, they required clothing that would allow flexibility and comfort. However, their clothing choices were defined by prevailing concepts of modesty, femininity, and socio-economic standing; and, these definitions were not always their own.

A Brief History of Women’s Sport Clothing

Women’s clothing style, material, and contextual appropriateness served as a driver for women’s participation in sports during the Progressive era. With the establishment of Normal Schools in the United States during the 1840s, physical education pedagogy became codified. Women made up most of the teachers throughout the nineteenth century, including physical education teachers. Ironically, women were still considered constitutionally unable to participate in vigorous or competitive sport, yet they were charged with creating and teaching in these programs.

As Hult notes in *A Century of Women’s Basketball: From Frailty to the Final Four* (1991), women in the early twentieth century still had to contend with societal attitudes around femininity, biological determinism, and appropriate behavior (3). These attitudes encompassed male judgments about the appropriateness of sportswear for participation in physical activity and whether women had the physical, emotional, and mental resilience to participate in sport activities, especially competitive sports. It is important to note that these concerns were shared by women as well as men (Hult 1991).

As cultural shifts caused by industrialization occurred at this time, and more workers were needed in factories and “lower paid and more tractable immigrant women largely replaced those women who had been factory workers” (Hult 1991, 5). This shift allowed middle-class women more leisure time. The increase in leisure time contributed to women’s ability to participate in reform movements of the era (Hult 1991, 5). Becoming a teacher was considered an appropriate profession because it fit into the well-worn middle-
class assumptions surrounding women being nurturers. Still, it represented a choice for women: did they want to marry and have children or become wage earners?

In the domain of teaching, women took physical education head on. They had “both the responsibility and the power to direct its course” (Hult 1991, 4). They participated in teacher training at innovative summer education programs. One such program was a collaboration between the State Normal School at Bridgewater and the State Normal School at Hyannis between 1941 and 1943. The program encompassed a rich curriculum that included instruction and physical activity. For an additional fee to students, it included room and board as well. When the Normal School at Hyannis closed in 1944, Bridgewater accepted the program and its students. Women taught women’s physical education and men taught the men. As more women entered higher education, they became interested in participating in sports programs, such as basketball and tennis. The physical education teachers “maintained respectable cultural trappings and ideals as they set their goals for programs of physical education and sport” (Hult 1991, 6).

Central to the question of participation was appropriate sportswear. Appropriate had a dual meaning in this case: it had to be both appropriate to women’s decorum and appropriate to participation. The sportswear had to maintain women’s modesty and allow for ease of movement. The clothing could not be so modest and conventional that it restricted movement or proper breathing.

Sportswear became a tool to empower women and allowed entrance into the domain of sport for fitness and pleasure. As their interest in different sports activities expanded, “they needed to figure out in their time what would be appropriate to wear” (Mendelsohn 2021). Gone were the boned corsets that restricted breathing. Long skirts gave way to bloomers and skirts with a shorter hem, and then just bloomers. Hats were discarded. Tops became less voluminous while still protecting modesty. Roberta Powell notes that “it was eventually exercise, not fashion, that provided the key that unlocked women from the corset prison” (1981, 21).

As clothing became less of a barrier, the increased participation in higher education and athletics helped women define and redefine what it meant to be a woman; to retain and redefine their femininity while broadening their horizons and exerting their influence on wider cultural problems. However, they were still cognizant of the male gaze. For example, President Theodore Roosevelt’s philosophy was that “sport could be used to define manliness” (Hult 1991, 4) and this put pressure on women to be the opposite. Women would “avoid a great athletic performance if it did not embrace the feminine sport behaviors” (Hult 1991, 12-13). The personification of the feminine ideal was conceptualized by the “Gibson Girl,” first articulated in the turn of the twentieth-century pen-and-ink drawings of Charles Gibson. There were two different types of Gibson girls: “The working girls” Gibson Girl achieved beauty through make-up and artificial curls and had sensual traits, freer sexual behavior, and more latitude to engage in all sports than her middle class/college sister. The latter saw natural beauty as central, and sexual behavior restricted” (Hult 1991, 12). Gibson, quite literally, authored the concept of the idealized feminine. In doing so, he obscured what women might have conceptualized...
organically based on their own needs and desires.

There is tension between what women want and how far society (which also includes women) allow them to go. The further they push, the further they get, but always within the confines of the male gaze. The special collections archive at Bridgewater State University holds many fascinating items related to women in sport and physical education: scrapbooks, photographs, year books, and sports uniforms and clothing. Of interest in this article are the bloomers belonging to Alice Bowman (see figure 1). They are made of what feels like light cotton broadcloth or linen, though that is not explicitly stated. They measure 12 inches at the waist (flat), 36 inches on the outside length, 23-inch inseam, and 8 inches on the leg (flat). There are box pleats at the waist (see figure 2). They have button closures and hook and eye closures. There are internal buttons on the waist band to adjust the waistband, and they are black. There is no maker’s mark, so their origin and manufacture are unknown. There are simple gathers at the leg (see figure 3). Alice Bowman wore these between 1896 and 1898 for gym classes. The bloomers allowed more freedom of movement while still maintaining the modesty required of women and girls at the time. They were also lighter than the heavier skirts they typically wore. The ease of movement allowed women to participate in physical fitness and sports in greater numbers, especially as more women went to college.

**Figures 1-3: Bloomers Belonging to Alice Bowman**
*(Bridgewater State University Special Collections)*

Another item of interest is a sepia photograph is of four young women in 1892 wearing the same style of bloomers and is housed at the Bridgewater State University Archives (see figure 4). It was taken by A.C. Bowman in Bridgewater, Massachusetts. Only one woman is identified on the front, but the back of the photo is signed “Alice Bowman.” The gym-wear had a high neckline, long sleeves, long socks, bloomers, and showed no skin. This photo is a good example of what gym clothing was like for women at the time. While still modest, wearing the bloomers can be interpreted as a political metaphor about what women wanted for their future. They wanted to wear the clothing that best accommodated their new interest in sport and fitness. More still, they wanted their choices and desires recognized as valid. The photographer’s stamp is also visible on the back. While the last name is the same, it is not know whether the photographer was related to Alice Bowman.
The Bridgewater State University Archive also has some chromolithographs featuring sportswomen. These lithographs date from around 1885. These are baseball card sized “freebies” that were given out to advertise tobacco products. The first example, titled “Base Ball Scenes,” shows a woman in tight fitting, revealing clothing bending over in a suggestive manner. Her pose shows she is ready to catch a baseball, despite not having a glove (see figure 5).

The second example shows a woman ready to go fishing, in thigh high stockings and smart shoes (see figure 6). This series, called “Pretty Athletes,” again shows a sportswoman created by and catering to the male gaze, her suggestive pose and impractical fishing gear aside.

In the third example called “Scotland,” a woman is pictured in a skin-tight tartan jumpsuit playing rings (see figure 7). Here again, one can see that the picture is meant to appeal to a male viewer to sell a product. The sportswoman is drawn with traditional femininity in mind: small waist, dainty hands, and arms, and voluptuous curves.

The fourth example shows a woman, again in skin-tight clothing with a plunging neckline. She appears to be ready to throw a ball (see figure...
8). Clearly, these lithographs are examples of how women’s sports bodies were used to sell products, those specifically marketed to men. As is clear in the sepia photo, realistic women’s sports clothing at the time was not revealing in any way. However, in the sepia photo, bloomers, and lithographs, the male gaze creates a tension. The idealized feminine is both sexy and revealing while being modest and appropriate.

Figure 8. “Cut Plug.” Lithograph, c.1885
*Bridgewater State University Special Collection*

The Male Gaze and Contemporary Sport Clothing for Women
The male gaze continues to shape the sports experiences of women. In 1972, the US Government’s Title IX legislation required equal funding for women’s sports in public schools, colleges, and universities. However, it “left untouched pervasive fundamental inequities in leadership, decision making authority, coaching systems, and role models for girls in all athletic situations” (Hult 1991, 243). What is more, as women’s and girls’ sports governing bodies were merged, “it has led to male governance power in all amateur sports form high school competition to college, non-school agencies, and the Olympic movement” (Hult 1991, 243). Male governance is, quite literally, rewriting the experiences of girls and women in sport by the way men make policy and rules. These rules include uniforms.

Women and girls in sport have expressed the desire for choice in their competition-wear. They want competition-wear that will highlight their athletic ability and allow them to perform at the highest level. Women want to feel comfortable and not have to worry about being subjected to the pressure of the male gaze. In the article “The Discourse of the Male Gaze: Critical Analysis of the Feature Section ‘The Beauty of Sport’ in SA Sports Illustrated,” Brandt notes that “the stereotyped images of sportswomen stand in stark contrast to the portrayal that the majority of sportswomen prefer, namely that of physically strong and emotionally balanced sporting professionals” (2005, 233). The consequences of this continued objectification of athletes can include “dropping out of sports programmes, deliberate underperformance and resorting to harmful slimming practices” (2005, 233-34). The male gaze and the response to it has become a dangerous feedback loop in which many women and girls find themselves trapped.

Even young women in youth sport want choices. In my own recent experience in Kingston, Massachusetts, one youth soccer player expressed her desire to have a women’s cut jersey instead of a unisex (men’s) cut. She felt the men’s cut erased her femaleness. She recognized, however, that two years prior, she would have preferred the men’s cut. These conversations are happening everywhere.

Female athletes are also concerned about inclusion. They want more girls and women to play
sports, and some cultural differences can make it difficult for women to participate if the “kit” is not flexible. For example, Federation Internationale de Football Association lifted the hijab ban in 2014, allowing women who are observant Muslims to play in international competition.

A quick Google search reveals many photos of women’s sports teams where some women wear more modest versions of team’s kit, allowing everyone some choice in how they choose to express their athleticism. In the Beach Handball Euro tournament in 2021, the Norwegian women’s handball team “asked permission to swap out the bikini bottoms for shorts ahead of the tournament, citing the players’ preference to wear something less revealing and more comfortable” (Elliot, 2021, para. 3). They argued that they should be allowed to wear the similar style to the men’s team. In this photo taken from the New York Times article “Women’s Handball Players are Fined for Rejecting Bikini Uniforms,” one can clearly see the difference between the men’s and women’s uniforms (see figure 9). The men’s uniform appears to be constructed for comfort, while the women’s uniform is clearly constructed for the “male gaze.”

In the world of women’s professional soccer, the Orlando Pride has updated one of their away kits to replace white shorts with black ones, so players can “feel more comfortable and confident when playing during their menstrual cycle” (Orlando Pride Communications, 2023, para. 1) (see figure 10). They are the first team in the National Women’s Soccer League to do so. But other sports organizations are following suit. Manchester City women’s football team will stop wearing white shorts, as will Ireland’s women’s rugby team. Women athletes want the choice of what to wear to compete at their best. Dark shorts, they argue, mean they can concentrate on their game.
Figure 10. “Women’s Handball Players are Fined for Rejecting Bikini Uniforms,” New York Times

Conclusion
Policing women’s clothing choices continues today along with all of the political implications they have. Women and girls are required to advocate for sports clothing that makes the most sense, whether that is dark shorts, so women and girls do not have to worry about their menstrual cycle (Orlando Pride), or less-revealing kits like the Norwegian Beach handball team. Women want to feel comfortable so they can perform their best in their sport. They want to be seen as athletes and respected for their skill. They do not want to wear kits that objectify them or run the risk of a “wardrobe malfunction.” They want kits that are inclusive, so that more women and girls can participate. In the age of Spandex, in a world where women are encouraged to compete at the highest level, why are women still forced to advocate for the uniforms that make the most sense for them?

The world of sport and women’s sport has evolved. Things are objectively better than they were in Alice Bowman’s time. But there are still battles that women must fight for inclusive and comfortable sports clothing that allows more women and girls to play while validating them as full people worthy of respect as athletes and escaping the male gaze.

Note on Author: Jennifer LaVoie graduated in May 2023 with her Master of Science in physical education with a coaching concentration from Bridgewater. She earned her MA in English in 2002 from Bridgewater as well. She is a youth soccer coach for the Town of Kingston, MA and a member of the Executive Board. She is a runner, cyclist, swimmer, poet, and a vegan. She works in the IT department at Bridgewater State and Adjuncts at Bristol Community College in the English Department teaching composition. Professor Maura Rosenthal was instrumental in bringing this essay and project to completion as both a professor and mentor.

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Muller v Oregon: Reassessing Protective Legislation

Emma Wells, Master of Arts in Teaching (History) Candidate, Department of History, Bridgewater State University, e3wells@student.bridgew.edu

Abstract: Although the Progressive Era has drawn the attention of countless scholars, few historians have deeply investigated one of the most important Supreme Court cases of the era, Muller v. Oregon (1908). It was not until the failure of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) in 1972 that scholars seriously considered the case. The failure of the ERA brought a surge of scholarship from the field of history, law, sociology, psychology, and communications. This historiography examines the reemergence of interest in Muller v. Oregon in the years following the ERA’s failure. In addition to examining the increasing interest of scholars, this historiography also considers the method in which secondary school educators should teach the Muller case. Should Muller be taught as a triumph of progressivism or as a setback for women’s rights? This historiography considers the important changes Muller brought to the Supreme Court’s decision-making process as well as the damaging legacy left in its wake. As the United States appears to move toward revoking protective legislation for a woman’s reproductive rights, Muller v. Oregon, deserves to be studied by students and scholars alike.

Keywords: Muller v. Oregon; feminism; progressivism; women’s workplace legislation.

Introduction

Progressive reformers celebrated the 1908 Supreme Court decision in the Muller v. Oregon case as a victory for both labor and women. However, as women have gained more equal footing in the workforce in the decades since the ruling, the ruling has come under scrutiny. A wide variety of academics, including historians, lawyers, sociologists, psychologists, and communications experts, have debated the Muller v. Oregon case. The variations in interpretations and legacy associated with Muller no doubt impacts the methods in which history students learn about the landmark Supreme Court case. Although progressives initially celebrated the Muller v. Oregon decision, it did not receive much academic attention until the emergence of second-wave feminism in the 1970s. The failure of the Equal Rights Amendment to ratify led historians and educators to reconsider the Muller case as a blow to women’s rights rather than a victory for workplace justice.

The interdisciplinary interest in Muller v. Oregon has resulted in a significant variation in writing themes and methods. There are those who defend the Supreme Court decision from a legal standpoint in which gender is a secondary and largely irrelevant component. The Muller case also entered sociological jurisprudence into the Supreme Court for the first time,
which has been noted by many scholars. One of the more recurring concentrations of academics includes a focus on the rhetoric and verbiage of the famous “Brandeis brief” and the majority opinion delivered by Justice Brewer. In addition to the rhetoric of the case, the legacy of limiting women’s working hours and conditions continues to haunt the legal, historical, and sociological approaches to understanding women’s working rights. While one of the most vocal supporters of the ruling in Muller was Florence Kelley, a female progressive reformer, the precedent set through the protective legislation also resulted in the fracturing of the women’s movements during the early twentieth century.

**Muller v. Oregon**

Did an Oregon law that limited the hours women were allowed to work in certain manufacturing plants and laundries violate the Fourteenth Amendment? The Supreme Court was tasked with answering this question when it heard *Muller v. Oregon*. In 1903, Oregon passed legislation limiting the number of hours women were allowed to work in factories and laundries to no more than ten hours per day. Prior to the passing of Oregon’s law, progressive reformer Florence Kelley had drafted a similar law in 1893 that would have limited women’s working hours to no more than eight hours per day in Illinois, but this law was struck down by the Supreme Court in the 1895 *Ritchie v. Illinois* case. In 1905, the Supreme Court struck down a similar law in the *Lochner v. New York* case. *Lochner v. New York* determined that the state of New York could not limit bakers, a male-dominated profession, to a ten-hour workday because it violated their “freedom of contract,” a freedom guaranteed in the due process clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.

After these defeats, Kelley focused on passing legislation that sought to protect women as a separate class of citizen who needed their hours limited, for their own benefit. When fined for violating Oregon’s 1903 law, laundry owner Curt Muller challenged the constitutionality of the law. In Muller’s eyes, the law violated the Fourteenth Amendment because it violated women’s freedom of contract. The 1905 ruling in *Lochner v. New York* established the precedent Muller needed to challenge Oregon’s law, allowing Muller to argue that women, “equally with men, are endowed with fundamental and inalienable rights of liberty and property” and that “difference in sex alone does not justify the destruction or impairment of these rights.”

Muller’s assertion that women were indeed entire citizens and deserved to be treated as such may be viewed today as a feminist argument, but his motivation was less altruistic; Muller likely wished to continue exploiting poor immigrant labor. Regardless of Muller’s real intent, his argument was simple – women should have the same rights as men, as previously decided in the *Lochner* case.

After the loss in *Ritchie v. Illinois*, Florence Kelley, committed to labor reform, partnered with fellow reformer Josephine Goldmark and her brother-in-law Louis Brandies to appeal to the Supreme Court that women belonged to a separate and more delicate class of citizens, who needed protective legislation.

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They argued, like Oregon’s law, that women needed protective legislation to protect their health and more specifically, their reproductive organs. Through the famous “Brandeis brief,” Brandies utilized a sociological approach to argue why it was not only constitutional, but necessary, for the government to limit women’s working hours. The “Brandeis brief,” paired with the Court’s preconceived notions on women, resulted in the unanimous decision to uphold Oregon’s law. The Court drew a distinction between Muller and Lochner on the basis of the “difference between the sexes.”

Justice Brewer, delivering the majority opinion, declared that women are “properly placed in a class by herself, and legislation designed for her protection may be sustained even when like legislation is not necessary for men, and could not be sustained.”3 Progressive reformers celebrated the Court’s ruling as a victory for labor, and while there was criticism in the immediate aftermath, it was not until the failed ratification of the ERA in the 1980s that historians and activists alike have reflected on the Muller ruling as an anti-woman ruling that had lasting effects for working women.

**In Defense of the Court’s Decision**

Historians and legal scholars have increasingly criticized the 1908 Supreme Court decision in Muller v. Oregon in recent years. While radical feminists like Alice Paul were critical of Muller in the immediate aftermath of the ruling, it was not until the women’s rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s that it received consistent scrutiny. Historians and legal scholars both place Muller in context with other progressive Court cases. Perspectives differ, but only slightly. Historians tend to write about Muller in line with other Court cases as a means of telling the history of progressive movement, whereas legal scholars tend to write about Muller in line with other progressive Court cases as a means for explaining precedent. The failure of the ERA has not changed the perspectives in which historians nor legal scholars write about the case, as few were writing about Muller before the ERA’s failure. The ERA’s failure sparked a renewed interest in the Muller case as critics searched for a moment in history to begin the story of the unfair treatment of women in employment and highlight the necessity of the ERA. Despite the criticisms that have arisen, there are historians and legal scholars who defend the Court’s decision in Muller. Ann Allen, Ronald Collins, Jennifer Freisen, and Melvin Urofsky argue that the necessity of protective legislation in the early twentieth century outweighed the anti-women implications of the ruling in Muller.4

The Supreme Court frequently decides court cases based on political lines, influences, and the conditions of their time rather than the sole constitutionality of a case. Further influencing the Court’s perspective is the ongoing debate between a

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2 “Muller v Oregon,” Oyez, https://www.oyez.org/cases/1900-1940/208us41
3 Muller v. Oregon, 208 U.S. 412, 422 (1908)
strict and limiting reading of the US Constitution and more contextual interpretations of law and society. According to some historians and legal scholars, the Supreme Court’s ruling in Muller v. Oregon does not deserve the criticism that it receives for being anti-woman because it ruled along the more popular reformist lines of the early twentieth century and thus reflects a Court that played a more active role in improving society.

At the time of the Muller case, progressives saw labor reform as both an individual reform, but also as a means of promoting gender equality. For some progressives, namely radical feminists like Alice Paul, the insinuation that women required protective legislation was more harmful than helpful. While there were women actively fighting for women’s suffrage, for many progressive reformists, labor reform was the bigger issue, evidenced by the multiple court cases surrounding labor legislation, like Lochner v. New York (1905). In their 1983 article, “Looking Back on Muller v. Oregon,” First Amendment scholar Ronald Collins and labor lawyer Jennifer Friesen provide an explanation as to how the Supreme Court came to their decision and how progressive leaders of the time overwhelmingly regarded it as a victory. “Looking Back on Muller v. Oregon” was published in the American Bar Association journal just one year after the failure of the Equal Rights Amendment, although the authors do not directly address the immediate context of the failure of the ERA, likely due to the legal and stoic nature of the publication source. Collins and Friesen note that “protective laws were part of a growing labor and social reform movement” and the Supreme Court made many rulings related to protective legislation. Collins and Friesen do not make a specific argument within their piece, but instead provide an easy-to-follow explanation of the Court’s rationale for their ruling. Where other historians who defend the Supreme Court note the political influence progressive reformers had during the early twentieth-century, Collins and Friesen simply write the history of the court case. The importance of including the political context of the era cannot be overstated.

Historians largely agree that the 1980s was a decade defined by a more conservative political outlook; both federal and state governments pulled back on labor regulations even as the ERA failed ratification, limiting women’s ability to be constitutional equals to men. The political context of the decade in which each defender of the Supreme Court’s ruling writes is important. In her 1985 article “Women’s Labor Laws and the Judiciary: Reaction to Progressive Philosophy,” historian Ann Allen writes a political history discussing the powers of the judiciary in relation to the political ideology of the early twentieth century. Allen cites multiple labor court cases, such as Ritchie v. Illinois (1895), Holden v. Hardy (1898), and Lochner v. New York (1905) in order to put Muller in a broader context of the progressive goal of protective legislation. Allen compellingly argues that “progressive philosophy was, indeed, influential in the judicial process of determining the constitutionality of protective work laws for women.”

By placing Muller

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in line with other examples when the Supreme Court ruled on labor legislation, regardless of the gender of those impacted, Allen makes the Muller case one that should be viewed in line with labor reform and not for its implications for working women. The Supreme Court’s willingness to be influenced by partisan politics emphasizes that its ruling, while sexist in rhetoric by contemporary standards, was more about appeasing progressive labor reformers than it was the women’s movement.

The defenders of the Court’s ruling in Muller are more focused on the immediate implications Muller had in the moment rather than the lasting implications that occurred as a result of the ruling. Where many historians and other scholars criticize the implications for gender working roles in the decades following the ruling and claim that the Supreme Court was anti-reform, historian Melvin Urofsky disagrees. One year after the ERA failed, Urofsky published “Myth and Reality: The Supreme Court and Protective Legislation in the Progressive Era,” in which he argues “in-sofar as the Supreme Court decided issues of protective legislation in the Progressive Era, one would have to conclude that far from being the enemy of reform, the Court was as progressive as most reformers could desire.”

Utilizing the same court cases as Allen, Urofsky goes on to cite fifteen more cases that all support his and Allen’s claim that the Court ruled in favor with Progressives more often than not. According to Urofsky, the rulings in almost all of the cited court cases “aimed at redressing the perceived imbalance between the lords of industry and their ill-used workers.” Urofsky’s legal history semi-effectively negates the importance that gender plays in progressive reforms, and that ultimately, the ruling was just and acceptable by Progressive reformers. The defense of the Supreme Court’s ruling in Muller v. Oregon relies on the reader’s ability and willingness to separate gender from a case whose majority opinion rested on the notion that women were weaker than men and needed special protections.

The four scholars discussed above provide a sample of the very few scholars who separate the Muller ruling on lines of labor rather than gender. While it is not necessary to review the Muller case through a lens where gender and labor are inextricably linked, separating the two creates a different understanding of the case. The ruling in Muller tied gender and labor together, as protective legislation existed because of gender, not in spite of it. By removing gender as a defining factor in the Court’s ruling one can defend the Court’s decision. Other scholars, however, disagree with the arguments made by Collins, Friesen, Allen, and Urofsky based on the fact that gender had been inextricably tied to many pieces of protective legislation in the early twentieth century. The defense of Muller v. Oregon is rooted in the consistency of writing its histories using almost exclusively rulings in other Supreme Court cases, which limits the scope of research. Yet, as each scholar defending the ruling noted, the Supreme Court’s decisions were ultimately dictated by the progressive politics of the era, but by not

drawing from the larger historical context these scholars present an incomplete history of *Muller v. Oregon*.

**Sociological Jurisprudence**

Progressive reformers of the early twentieth century remained divided on what should be the focus of their efforts. Despite the inability to agree on what should be the focus of the movement, a broader progressive ideology increasingly influenced the way in which Supreme Court justices understood society, governance, and law via a gradual acceptance of what contemporary legal scholar Roscoe Pound defined as sociological jurisprudence. This legal philosophy is central when discussing the legacy of *Muller v. Oregon* because it was the core ideology of the “Brandeis brief,” which allegedly swayed the Court’s decision. Legal historian, Kermit Hall, discusses sociological jurisprudence extensively in his renowned book, *The Magic Mirror: Law in American History*. Hall explains that sociological jurisprudence represented a new way of thinking about law and legislative decisions. Justices and judges no longer ruled exclusively based upon precedent, but also considered “the social and economic consequences of their decisions” and that lawyers should also take on the “role of gathering and presenting evidence that would help a judge in reaching a determination about those consequences.”

The legal approach of sociological jurisprudence also calls on judges to “seek enlightenment from disciplines outside law, including political and social sciences.”

The importance of the Brandeis brief is not limited to the effects it had for working women and in the short and long term, it also is significant because it fundamentally changed how cases were argued to the Supreme Court. Prior to the Brandeis brief, cases argued in front of the Supreme Court relied on legal precedent in supporting their argument. The “Brandeis brief” introduced a new method of arguing court cases – the field of sociology was now relevant. In her 1994 article “The Science of Protection: Gender-Based Legal Arguments for the Ten-Hour Work Day” social historian Susan Englander compellingly argues that “the emergence of sociological jurisprudence… institutionalized scientific method as a means of legal procedure and social reform.”

Had the Supreme Court’s decision been solely based on legal precedent, *Muller* would have been ruled upon in the same way

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that *Lochner* had been, because the precedent was established that workers had a right to “freedom of contract.” Englander relied heavily on secondary source material, like Alfred Chandler’s *The Visible Hand* and Nancy Erickson’s “*Muller v. Oregon* Reconsidered” to construct her argument. Despite limited use of primary sources and court cases, Englander’s claim about the importance of the Brandeis brief for its establishment of sociological jurisprudence holds up as it is supported by many other scholars. Englander also reiterates the importance of the Brandeis brief’s establishment of women as a “distinct legal category” that required special protections, and states that “the Court’s decision in the *Muller* case set a precedent which remained in effect until the late 1960s.”

Other historians disagree with the effect ending in the 1960s but agree with the argument that *Muller* and the Brandeis brief had lasting impacts on working class women.

The Brandeis brief officially entered sociological jurisprudence into the Supreme Court as a legitimate legal option. Political Scientist Judith Baer argues that the ruling in *Muller* also entered women as a separate class of people into the high Court, creating a new precedent in which future women’s rights cases would be decided. Baer’s expertise falls in public law and feminist jurisprudence, and her 1991 article, “Women’s Rights and the Limits of Constitutional Doctrine” showcases her expertise perfectly. Baer cited 92 Supreme Court cases in her article, the oldest dating back to 1880 and the most contemporary ones being from 1990, one year before her article’s publication. Baer argues, using these 92 cases, that *Muller* introduced a new form of case to the Supreme Court, cases that focus on sexual equality. While many political scientists and legal scholars have argued that this shift in the Court’s focus was a good thing, Baer claims that “the conclusion is inescapable: so far, men have been the primary beneficiaries of the new doctrine of sexual equality.”

*Muller’s* impact on women resulted in decades of Court rulings where women continued to come up short, and Baer states that women did not begin to see any “wins” in the Court until the 1970s, where women won sexual discrimination cases more often than men. While many scholars’ interests in *Muller* renewed in light of the ERA’s failure, there was also another resurgence in interest in *Muller* during the 1990s, when sexual harassment cases continued to come to light. Baer’s article makes it clear that *Muller* effectively cast women as existing in a separate legal category. This separation and distinction continued well into the late twentieth century.

The Brandeis brief entered sociological jurisprudence into the arena of legal arguments and forever changed how the Court would rule in cases. The legacy of this legal practice has been felt for decades following the 1908 ruling in *Muller*. While the importance of the Brandeis brief begins with its introduction of sociological jurisprudence into legal practice, this is not where it ends. The verbiage and rhetoric of the case laid the foundation for decades worth of women being considered a separate and lesser class of citizens, both in the eyes of society and in the eyes of the law.

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The Rhetoric of Muller v. Oregon

Progressive politics influenced the Supreme Court’s rulings in several cases throughout the early twentieth century, and while the legal precedent existed for sex-based discrimination, a new precedent emerged as a result of the Muller case. Josephine Goldmark recruited her brother-in-law, Louis Brandeis, to help argue the progressives’ side to the Supreme Court. Brandeis brought a new form of legal argument to the Court by using a sociological approach to show how the Oregon law impacted American citizens. To support their claim that women workers needed their hours limited on the basis of reproductive and physical health, Brandies and Goldmark compiled statistics from both medical journals as well as sociological journals to produce 113 pages that “proved” women needed their working hours limited. The Brandeis brief’s significance comes from the fact that it was the first of its kind to be submitted to the Supreme Court. This was the first time that a case argument relied on extra-legal data to prove its claim. While historians and legal scholars debate whether or not the brief truly swayed the Supreme Court’s decision, the citation of non-legal data (sociological jurisprudence) soon became common practice. Historians, lawyers, psychologists, and communication studies scholars debate the importance of the Brandeis brief in relation to the Court’s ruling in Muller, but collectively agree that the implications of the brief’s rhetoric on contemporary working women and the Court cannot be ignored.

The rhetoric of the Brandeis brief places women in a class of citizenship that requires coddling and special protections that men do not require. Many historians look at the importance of the Brandeis brief in relation to its affect on how the Supreme Court decided cases, and the jurisprudence that it establishes. Those who have written about the brief focus almost exclusively on the implications it had for the Court’s ruling in Muller and how it categorizes women, but few have mentioned, or even noticed, the grammatical errors that exist in its concluding paragraph. In his 2005 article “Revenge of the Triple Negative: A Note on the Brandeis brief in Muller v. Oregon,” legal historian Clyde Spillenger approaches the case from an English grammar-forward method. Spillenger argues that the final paragraph of the Brandeis brief is grammatically flawed and actually negates its entire purpose for the brief. Brandeis’ final paragraph, which is a run-on sentence, includes a triple negative in which Brandeis inadvertently argues that the state of Oregon’s law limiting the hours of laundresses was unnecessary; “the Legislature of Oregon had no reasonable ground for believing that the public health, safety, or welfare did not require a legal limitation of women’s work.”

Spillenger goes further to state that “it is hard to believe that a reputable law firm today would allow such a brief in a major U.S. Supreme Court case to leave the office printer without first ensuring the final paragraph has been subdued and domesticated.” The grammatical errors of the concluding paragraph of Brandeis’ brief are no doubt interesting and worth noting, but Spillenger fails to recognize any of the effects the brief had on

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the Court’s ruling in Muller. Justice Brewer’s majority opinion succinctly summarizes the main point of the Brandeis brief and ultimately deserves more of the attention paid by historians and other related scholars.

While many scholars agree with the assertion that the Brandeis brief was a turning point in the Court’s proceedings, not all scholars are convinced that it was instrumental in the Court’s overall ruling in Muller. As has been previously established, Muller v. Oregon was not the first time the Supreme Court heard cases related to women’s working conditions, and it certainly was not the last time. In her 1989 article “Muller v. Oregon Reconsidered,” legal scholar Nancy Erickson utilizes numerous court cases, both preceding and following Muller to argue that the Supreme Court would have reached the same decision, with or without the Brandeis brief. Erickson was active during the women’s movement of the 1970s, and her activism paralleled the goals of progressives during the early twentieth century, with a focus on women’s rights and child welfare. Erickson’s focus on women’s rights undeniably shapes her perception that the Supreme Court would have upheld its sex-based discrimination without the Brandeis brief because it had already done so for years prior. Erickson is highly critical of the “science” presented in the Brandeis brief, so much so that she argues that “it seems unlikely that any brief, no matter how persuasive, could change the minds of all four if some of them had not been inclined in that direction already.” Erickson’s background in women’s rights paired with her extensive citation of related court cases like the Slaughter-House Cases (1873), Commonwealth v. Hamilton Manufacturing Company (1876), Commonwealth v. Beaty (1900), and State v. Buchanan (1902) results in a semi-compelling argument that the Brandeis brief did not sway any justices in their decision in Muller. The issue with Erickson’s argument lies in the fact that the Muller decision cited the Brandeis brief extensively. The justices of the Court may have already agreed with the argument being made in the brief, but the Brandeis brief itself provided the Court with the rationale it needed to rule in favor of the Oregon law. Despite Erickson remaining unconvinced that the Brandeis brief mattered to the case, many other scholars highlight the importance of its verbiage and rhetoric as being a defining approach in future women’s rights cases.

For those who disagree with the assertion that the Brandeis brief was the convincing factor in the Court’s ruling in Muller, they do not discredit the role sociological jurisprudence had on the Court in decades to come, but rather focus on the preexisting conceptions of womanhood as influences for the Court. Justice Brewer’s majority opinion placed women in an entirely separate class of people based upon their physical capabilities and how work would impact their reproductive abilities. In their 1991 article “Social and Social Scientific Perspectives in Judicial Interpretations of the Constitution,” psychologist Alan Tomkins and lawyer Kevin Oursland explore the idea

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17 Erickson, “Muller v. Oregon Reconsidered,” 249.
that “social perspectives have long been a part of the Court’s decision making when it has confronted different social issues.”

Tomkins and Oursland’s multidisciplinary approach utilizes a plethora of Court cases, both preceding and following the Court’s ruling in *Muller* to argue that the Court has relied on social perspectives of race and gender for a long time. Tomkins and Oursland also extensively cite Roscoe Pound’s writings where he called on the Court to recognize a new form of legal argument, sociological jurisprudence. While Tomkins and Oursland support their claim that the Court had always ruled in line with social perspectives, they also acknowledge the importance the Brandeis brief did have in the *Muller* ruling. The Court ruled in favor of the right to contract in the *Lochner* case because it was socially accepted for men to work as many hours as they wanted. Brandeis had to compile scientific evidence that women were incapable of having this same freedom. According to Tomkins and Oursland, the Brandeis brief, while not necessarily central in swaying the Court’s decision, did mark a change in which certain classes of people would be represented as being scientifically different in the eyes of the Court.

As Tomkins and Oursland explained how the Brandeis brief laid the foundation of women being regarded as a separate class of citizen, in the eyes of the law, other scholars go further and assert that the Brandeis brief is also responsible for the lasting impacts of these discussions. Throughout the early twentieth century, the socially accepted norm was that men’s place was in public where a woman’s place was in private, meaning the home. As more women entered the workforce, society had to come to terms with women entering the public sphere. Communication studies professor Katie Gibson argues in her 2007 article, “Judicial Rhetoric and Women’s ‘Place’: The United States Supreme Court’s Darwinian Defense of Separate Spheres” that the “Supreme Court employed a Darwinian framework to justify its decision in *Muller v. Oregon*.” While Gibson does not cite many primary sources, such as court cases, she utilizes a wide array of secondary sources to analyze and discuss the rhetoric found in the Brandeis brief. Gibson notes that Justice Brewer focuses much of his opinion on describing women being physically inferior to men, and thus needed to have their working hours limited. While this was a commonly held social perspective, as defined by Tomkins and Oursland, Gibson goes further to say that the *Muller* case specifically set women back in what they could accomplish. The lasting legacy of *Muller* is explained by the Court’s “emphasis of women’s difference from man” and how the ruling of the Court “advanced the principle that sex was a valid basis for enacting special legislation, resulting in the legal treatment of women as a separate class of workers for six decades.”

Though Gibson’s article was written in 2007, she asserts that the legacy of *Muller* impacted working women until the late 1960s. The late 1960s saw a reemergence of the women’s movement as

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21 Gibson, “Judicial Rhetoric and Women’s ‘Place,’” 166.
second wave feminism gained traction in wake of Betty Friedan’s *Feminine Mystique* of 1963. Second wave feminism sought to revive the ERA and fought fiercely for its passing. While Gibson’s piece falls outside the scope of those initially interested in revisiting *Muller* in the wake of the ERA’s failure, it still falls in line with the timeline of influence that *Muller* had. Many scholars agree with Gibson’s assertion that the impacts of *Muller* were felt until the late 1960s, following the passing of Title VII, but others argue that the rhetoric of the Brandeis brief and majority opinion in *Muller* lasted well into the 1980s.

The 1980s brought many changes for working women, including the highest percentage of American women entering the workforce. These high numbers of women entering work also brought a new diversity in the kind of work women did. However, with this diversity, came continued limitations based on gender and women’s reproductive organs continued to be the reasoning for these limitations. In her 1986 article “From *Muller v. Oregon* to Fetal Vulnerability Policies,” legal historian Mary Becker constructs a comparative legal study in which she compares the early twentieth-century perceptions of womanhood to contemporary fetal vulnerability policies. Citing Title VII, *Muller v. Oregon, Lochner v. New York,* and *Bunting v. Oregon,* Becker argues that “like sex-specific protectionist legislation, sex-specific fetal vulnerability policies have been adopted without firm empirical evidence,” and that while Title VII has limited protective legislation from being enforced, it continues to uphold employer policies of fetal vulnerability as a just reasoning for limiting women’s work.22 Through her utilization of *Muller* and other protectionist legislation allowed by the Supreme Court, Becker compellingly argues that *Muller* allowed for future discrimination of women in the workplace to occur if it meant protecting a hypothetical fetus that she may carry one day. Becker’s article was published four years after the ERA’s failure and places the rhetoric of *Muller* at fault for decades worth of sex-based employment discrimination.

The rhetoric of the Brandeis brief and Justice Brewer’s majority opinion in *Muller v. Oregon* laid the foundation for decades worth of sex-based discrimination for women to overcome. Brandeis’ data and Brewer’s opinion place women in a class in which they are viewed on the basis of motherhood and the future children they may bear. Historians, lawyers, communication studies scholars, and psychologists all agree that *Muller* had damaging and lasting effects on women because of the verbiage found in the evidence and ruling of the case. The Court placed women in a separate class of people that it would take decades for them to emerge from, and even then, constitutionally women are not viewed as equals. The rhetoric of *Muller* created lasting impacts on women throughout the United States.

**The Legacy of *Muller v. Oregon***

A renewed interest in *Muller* emerged as the ERA failed and women across the United States faced the reality that they were not constitutional equals with men. The legacy of *Muller* lasted for decades following its ruling and continues to impact the women of the 1970s

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through 1980s, and in many ways continues to impact working women today. Some scholars review Muller on the basis of legal precedent and validity, others on the verbiage and rhetoric of the case itself, and others have focused their writings on the immediate impacts on the Court’s ruling. In light of the ERA’s failure, the writings with the most diverse areas of scholarship focus on the hurtful legacy of Muller v. Oregon on the “modern” woman and how this legacy can be blamed for the failure of the ERA. The decades following the Court’s ruling in Muller saw women’s employment opportunities drastically limited on the basis of sex. Sociologists, psychologists, legal scholars, historians, and political scientists have all written about the hurtful legacy of Muller through the lens of their scholarship. The diversity of scholars highlights the significant harm many feel Muller has had for women. The 1960s through the 1980s have seen an increase in gender-focused legislation and court cases in which women are still relegated as a separate class.

The 1970s appear to be the widely accepted decade in which the effects of Muller begin to fade, but not disappear entirely. Despite the legal effects of Muller fading in light of the passage of Title XII, and more women winning sexual discrimination cases than men per year, women still found themselves cast in a separate class to men. In her 1979 article, “Protection of Women Workers and the Courts: A Legal Case History,” Ann Hill argues that “the courts, in their decisions on protective legislation, have legitimated rather than challenged the second-class position of women in the American labor force.”

Hill’s article comes before the ERA’s failure to ratify, but in the wake of Cleveland Board of Education v. LaFleur (1974), in which the court ruled that the Cleveland School Boards violated women’s Fourteenth Amendment rights to freedom of contract. Sixty-six years after the Muller ruling, women regained the right to work on their own terms. But as Hill points out, the impact of Muller did not immediately end with the Court’s ruling in Cleveland. The Court left the door open for less restrictive maternity leave policies that would ultimately continue to hurt women. So, while the immediate employment impacts of Muller seemingly began to end in the 1970s, the impacts it had on women in relation to their reproductive rights continued to last. As discussed in Becker’s article, the impact of Muller on women’s ability to work, and be mothers, continued into the 1980s.

As second-wave feminism spread throughout the United States during the 1960s and 1970s, women became increasingly disenchanted with being relegated to the home all day. The 1970s and 1980s saw a surge of women entering the workforce for the very first time, hoping to shed the notion that a woman could only be a wife and mother. Much that has been written about the Muller ruling has been written by lawyers and historians, but this does not mean those are the only interested parties. In her 1981 article, “Protective Labor Legislation and the Cult of Domesticity,” sociologist Ava Baron compellingly argues that “the impact of Muller is still alive in the law” and the only way to right this wrong is through the passage of the Equal

\[23\text{ Ann Corrine Hill, “Protection of Women Workers and the Courts: A Legal Case History,” Feminist Studies 5, no. 2 (1979): 248.}\]

\[24\text{ Hill, “Protection of Women Workers and the Courts,” 267.}\]

Rights Amendment. Baron argues this point through her utilization of Ruth Bader Ginsburg’s arguments before the Supreme Court, the California Commission on the Status of Women, and other court cases in which women have been placed in a class of their own. The California Commission on the Status of Women material displays the impact of the ERA if it were to pass. Ginsburg’s career was marked by her dedication to undoing the effects of gender-based legislation, for which the Muller case set the precedent Baron’s piece, published one year before the ERA failed, highlights the lasting effects of Muller and the need for women to be equal in the eyes of the law. “The Muller decision established the precedent that justified the differential application of the 17th Amendment to male and female workers.”26 This differential treatment experienced by women, created by Muller, is a driving force for scholars to study the implications of the Court’s ruling.

Muller’s legacy lasted for decades following the Court’s ruling, and ultimately continued to hurt women for the duration of the twentieth century. While there have been no articles written about Muller’s hurtful legacy in the twenty-first century, it would not be surprising if historians and legal scholars found a renewed interest in the wake of the Supreme Court’s overturning of Roe v. Wade (1973). Muller defined women as a separate class of people based upon their reproductive organs and potential to be a mother. The failure of the ERA reaffirmed that the United States views women as a separate class of citizens, and sexual harassment and assault cases, like Anita Hill’s, has brought renewed interest in a case based upon working hours. While the twenty-first century has not brought a renewed interest in Muller, the immediate effects on the women’s movement in the twentieth century were felt.

Fracturing the Women’s Movement

The Court’s ruling in Muller v. Oregon had lasting effects on working women for decades, but also had implications for women in the short-term. Many progressives regarded the Court’s ruling in Muller as a victory for labor because it shortened the workday and was a step towards better working conditions. While many progressives celebrated the effects of Muller, others immediately began to criticize the implications it would have for women, particularly poor women of foreign descent. Muller benefited women in middle-class circles who did not have to worry about finances and working hours nearly as much as impoverished immigrant women. The progressive movements conflicts on who should be the beneficiaries of reform ultimately impacted poor, immigrant women. The early twentieth century saw an influx in immigration to the United States, which necessitated men and women working long hours to support their families in the ever-expanding cities.

The early support of Muller reflects the political climate of the early twentieth century while the delayed criticism reflects the social upheaval during the second half of the twentieth century. The failure of the Equal Rights Amendment in 1982 renewed interest in Muller, but in the eyes of a few legal historians, this is not the only connection between Muller and the ERA. Three years after the ratification of the Nineteenth

Amendment, the Equal Rights Amendment was proposed in Congress. The initial proposal of the ERA resulted in many women, who considered themselves progressives, to begin questioning whether Muller was actually a good thing for women. Two legal scholars point to the 1920s as when the women’s movement began to fracture, evidently as a result of the increasing criticisms over the Court’s decision in Muller.

As many progressives focused on bringing more cases like Muller to the Supreme Court as a means to advance labor rights, another branch focused their efforts and energy on the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment. The focus and priorities of the progressive movement were never clearly defined, and no clearer can a divide be seen than during the first two decades of the twentieth century. Many progressives felt that workers’ rights and fixing the capitalist system was the most important aim of the movement, while others argued that until all citizens had an equal voice, the country would never truly be equal. In her 2011 article, “Consensus, Dissensus, and Enforcement: Legal Protection of Working Women from the Time of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire to Today” lawyer Marcia McCormick writes the history of women in the progressive movement and in the workplace. McCormick’s article is better described as a paper as she does not make a coherent argument throughout it, and it more serves the purpose of laying the foundation for explaining the first- and second-women’s movements. Through her utilization of federal laws pertaining to women’s rights, McCormick writes a history that highlights the fact that every legislation passed with the intent of advancing women’s rights has fallen short in some way or another; “the gendered nature of the tragedy and its place in the development of laws protecting women as women, rather than as beneficiaries of laws protecting all workers, has not been fully explored.”

27 Laws, and Court rulings, like the one in Muller, were designed as a means of assisting women, but in reality they have done more harm than good. McCormick also points to the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment as a marker for the history of when the first women’s movement began to fracture. With the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, women were now freely able to represent their own interests in law and did not have to rely on cases like Muller to advance their interests. McCormick points to the fact that as women gained political autonomy, criticisms of Muller began to emerge in earnest. The progressive movement’s division of priority once again emerged and ultimately resulted in the women’s movement dividing its efforts and ultimately itself.

In addition to the Nineteenth Amendment renewing criticism over the ruling in Muller, so too did the ERA. As women gained political equality, they also sought constitutional equality through the passage of the initial ERA. The failure of the ERA in 1982 brought forth a decade of women continuing to be both exploited at work as well as excluded. 1991 brought to light yet another reality that has plagued women since the beginning of their employment – sexual harassment and assault. Historian Joan Zimmerman published her article “The Jurisprudence of Equality” the same year as the Anita Hill accusations against Supreme Court

justice nominee Clarence Thomas came to surface. Zimmerman’s publication, like those who came before her, showcases the renewed interest in the legacy of Muller v. Oregon in response to injustices committed against women in the workplace. Zimmerman argued that “the jurisprudential divisions that helped polarize the women’s movement may also illuminate other struggles for reform in the Progressive Era.”

Zimmerman utilizes drafts of the ERA, letters written by reformer Florence Kelley, and the publications of Kelley to explain how the categorization of women in the workplace not only hurt working women, but also laid the foundation for the fracturing of the women’s movement. Zimmerman showcases that reformers like Kelley did not necessarily want to focus on protective legislation for women alone, but that those reformers understood that in order to pass protective legislation for all, they had to first convince the Court that it was necessary for women. Many progressive women understood that they were viewed as the weaker sex and to ultimately accomplish long term goals, they would have to sacrifice their own rights for longer, but others refused to be held back any longer. The divisions that emerged with the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment and proposal of the ERA forever fractured the first women’s movement.

The fracturing of the women’s movement of the early twentieth century was inevitable. As more women joined the movement, more ideas manifested. There were those who thought women workers rights was the preeminent issue to address while others viewed the issue of suffrage to be more important. Muller v. Oregon was the perfect case to cause divisions among women. Many women in the women’s movement belonged to the middle and upper class and were fortunate enough to not need to work for a living. Those who struggled were forced to work. The women’s movement was divided long before Muller was ruled on, but its ruling made the glaring economic differences clear within the women’s movement. Those with means could not understand how so many women were willing to accept second-class citizenship for a day longer where working women could not understand why those with means were so selfish to the workers’ cause. The reemergence of the women’s movement via second-wave feminism during the 1960s and 1970s both highlights the lasting class divisions that existed among women and also serves as an explanation for the renewal in interest in Muller after the ERA fails for the last time.

Teaching Muller v. Oregon

While historians, communication specialists, and law professionals have many different things to say about the Muller v. Oregon case, education professionals have published minimal resources on the subject. Author Nancy Woloch has published a book entitled Muller v. Oregon: A Brief History with Documents, that provides teachers with the resources necessary to teach the case to students, but there are few online resources for teachers that offer insights and lesson plans on teaching high school level students the Muller v. Oregon case. The online resources focus on reading and analyzing the rhetoric of Justice Brewer’s majority opinion and

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pay next to no attention to the Brandeis brief.²⁹ None of the available lessons suggest discussion questions about whether *Muller* was a progressive victory or an anti-woman ruling. The lack of history educators discussing how to effectively teach this court case is shocking considering the plethora of opinions found when discussing the case in a purely legal and historical context. Despite the lack of published scholarly work, and the minimal lessons available online, the method in which history teachers teach *Muller* going forward is immeasurably important.

When taken in conjunction, the available literature highlights the need to teach *Muller v. Oregon* both as a progressive victory and as an example of women being harmed based on the perception of their fragile nature. American history, like much of the world’s history, places women in a category of their own in which men must protect and care for them, because they are incapable of advocating for themselves. *Muller* exemplifies both the harmful implications of protective legislation on the basis of sex but also the growing voice of women in the twentieth century. Florence Kelley and Josephine Goldmark spearheaded the case and rhetoric surrounding it in order to accomplish their political goals. While *Muller* was harmful for women in the long run, and must be taught as such, it would be reckless to omit the fact that women reformers led this fight.

*Muller* is often taught as a standalone case, and it should not be. For students to grasp the full picture of sex and progressive reforms, *Muller* must be taught alongside other successful and failed protective legislation Court cases. *Lochner v. New York* should be included in the lesson as it lays the foundation for Curt Muller’s argument. Without *Lochner*, *Muller* appears to be the first case in which limiting work hours of certain careers emerged, and it minimizes the role that sex played in the Court’s decision. It is undeniable that *Muller* is an important Court case, but it cannot and should not be relegated to only being taught as a women’s case. In its time, *Muller* was a labor victory that was criticized. The many nuances surrounding this case and the Court’s decision makes *Muller* the perfect topic for teaching students how to critically evaluate history.

**Muller’s Place in the 21st Century**

Women being relegated as a second-class of citizens on the basis of sex is a reality that is still seen in 2022. States throughout the United States are enacting laws that limit women’s ability to make decisions about their reproductive health in the wake of the *Dobbs v. Jackson* decision in the summer of 2022, which overturned the precedent of *Roe v. Wade*. Until the Equal Rights Amendment failed in 1982, many historians and other scholars ignored the important legacy of *Muller v. Oregon* and failed to discuss the lasting implications the Court’s ruling had for working women throughout the United States. Beginning with Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963, women throughout the United States began to question the status quo and the notion that they were a separate, secondary class of citizen when compared to men. The 1960s and 1970s brought a reemergence of the women’s movement that fractured in the early twentieth century, partially

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because of the implications *Muller* had for women. It is undeniable that *Muller* had devastating lasting impacts for working women, but the literature available also makes it clear that *Muller* was not unique in regard to sex-based work discrimination. The significance of *Muller*, according to many academics, is that it officially put into writing that it was constitutional to categorize women as an inherently different and separate class that needed special protections. *Muller* may have been one case in a long line of sex-based discrimination rulings, but the precedent that *Muller* established is irrefutable. The failure of the Equal Rights Amendment, in many ways, highlights the fact that despite all the progress made in the decades following the Court’s ruling in *Muller v. Oregon*, women are still considered secondary citizens who do not deserve equal protection under the law. The renewal of interest among academics is unsurprising and will likely continue in the decades to follow as states throughout the United States pass laws revoking women’s autonomy and rights. *Muller v. Oregon* was not the starting place for women being treated differently, and the reevaluation of its legacy should not end anytime soon.

**Notes on Author:** Emma Wells is pursuing her Master of Arts in Teaching History. Her historiography was completed in fall 2022 under the mentorship of Dr. Brian Payne. She plans to continue teaching high school history and conducting research in the realm of gender history, socio-politics, and genocide studies.

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Notes
1. For information related to the discussion of Lesson Plans and the way educators approach teaching the Muller v Oregon case, online lesson sharing websites were explored. Below you will find examples of websites explored. Through my research, educators have not professionally published their thoughts and recommendations on how to teach Muller v Oregon, but rather deflect to the standard of reading the court case and analyzing it.

a. https://history.hanover.edu/courses/excerpts/229muller.html


d. https://www.womenshistory.org/resources/lesson-plan/landmark-supreme-court-cases
The Battlefield of the Industrial World: Academic Interpretations of Frederick Winslow Taylor’s Scientific Management

Noah Symynkywicz, Master of Arts in Teaching (History) Candidate, Department of History, Bridgewater State University, nsymynkywicz@student.bridgew.edu

Abstract: Historians and business management scholars have fought about the legacy of Frederick Winslow Taylor for the past six decades. Taylor lived during the second half of the nineteenth century and worked as a consultant to different steel companies during the height of the Gilded Age in the United States (1877-1900). He propagated several different principles of industrial management that guided not only the physical space of a factory, but also the relationship between worker and manager. Historians often identify Taylor as the father of scientific management, so much that they have labeled it Taylorism. While scholars agree on the importance of Taylorism, they disagree on the wider implications of scientific management. Scholars either praise or condemn Taylor’s desire for industrial efficiency. The division of scholarship stems from the types of sources that historians and business scholars use. This article analyzes the historiography and broader scholarship around Taylorism to evaluate the priorities of business today.

Keywords: Taylorism; Scientific Management; Frederick Winslow Taylor; Industrial Revolution; Business Management; Operations Management.

Introduction

In 2001, the fellows of the Academy of Management, an association of scholars who organized academic journals on business management, voted The Principles of Scientific Management as the most influential management book of the twentieth century. The fellows wrote that the book’s author, Frederick Winslow Taylor, had a philosophy on management that was still as valid today as it was in the early twentieth century. Similarly, Jeremy Rifkin, an economist and social theorist wrote that “Taylor made efficiency the cardinal virtue of American culture… [he] has probably had a greater effect on the private and public lives of the men and women of the twentieth century than any other single individual.”¹ Given a century of leaders in management from Henry Ford to Bill Gates, this statement begs the question: What is it about Taylor’s work that still echoes a century later?

Frederick Winslow Taylor lived during the second half of the nineteenth century in the United

States. He worked as a mechanical engineer, but more importantly, as a consultant to different steel companies during the height of the Gilded Age. Taylor propagated several different principles of industrial management that guided not only the physical space of a factory, but also the relationship between worker and manager. In Taylor’s view, managers should oversee the workplace by relying on scientific principles and not by what workers thought was commonly accepted as correct. Thus, historians often identify Taylor as the father of scientific management, so much so that they have labeled it Taylorism.

Historians and business management scholars have grappled with Taylor’s work and its wider historical significance throughout the second half of the twentieth century and early twenty-first century. Earlier historians such as Alfred Chandler provide the general context and goals of Taylorism and the other scientific managers. Most business management scholars have applauded the importance of Taylor’s management style in industrialization. Management thinkers, including David Savino, trace Taylor’s impact on management not just in the past, but also in the institutions of today.

Many historians, in contrast, condemn Taylorism for turning workers into cogs in the industrial machine. Historians such as Elizabeth Esch and David Roediger look at the similarities between race-management and Taylor’s scientific management and apply a Marxist lens to their analysis. Other historians such as Mary McLeod and Karsten Uhl analyze Taylorism’s significance in the international stage.

Scholars either praise or condemn Taylor’s desire for industrial efficiency. Even in the twenty-first century, the idea of digital Taylorism – or the idea of managing efficiency in the world of computers and electronic media – still haunts the fabric of modernity. For many historians, then, Taylorism represents a demon that has yet to be exorcised from American culture. For business management scholars, Taylorism constitutes the inevitable infiltration of science into all facets of the workplace. However, the sources each type of scholar relies on determine their conclusions. Business scholars take the historical success of scientific management at face value. Instead of questioning the effects of scientific management on the worker or the workplace, business scholars largely accept the writings of Taylor or his disciples for their theoretical value. Historians, on the other hand, look beyond Taylor’s writings to the reality of the application of Taylorism to the workplace. Therefore, the split in the interpretation of Taylorism stems from the sources that scholars use to interpret scientific management. If scholars focus on Taylor’s writings, then they will applaud him for being innovative for his time, while those that look at the greater context of how managers or business owners utilized scientific management, then the flaws of Taylorism become self-evident.

**The Historical Method and Business Management Scholarship**

Business management scholars and historians often have two very different goals, even though they might write about the same topic in management. While historians focus on interpreting and evaluating the past, business scholars often look to the past to trace the origin of modern management practices. Modern historians use primary sources from a wide variety of origins to paint a picture of what happened in the past.
Business scholars, on the other hand, look primarily to the theoretical component of past industrialists, like Taylor, to prove their arguments about what management should look like today. Business academia often offers tribute to past business thinkers like Taylor and how their life led to contemporary business practices. Many historians would question whether this academic pursuit is history at all. However, as business scholars cite historians and attempt to argue within the realm of the past, their contributions remain important to the tapestry of management history. Yet, historians go beyond the realm of the theoretical and give a nuanced picture of how industrial managers practiced Taylorism.

**Early Works on Taylorism**

As early as the 1960s, scholars argued about the legacy of Taylor and whether his work should be relegated to the past or used in modern management. In his work, “Frederick Winslow Taylor Revisited,” Jean Boddewyn tries to look at the philosophical ideas around scientific management and what made it novel earlier in the century. When writing in 1961, Boddewyn felt as though scientific management was still very much alive and saw it as being present in the modern workplace. Boddewyn outlines three major arguments that were made against Taylorism by other thinkers of his time: “A. Taylor emphasized the individual worker and ignored the group; B. Taylor sacrificed the worker to the system; C. Taylor stressed the use of financial incentives to induce workers to produce more.” While there was significantly less formal scholarship around Taylorism when Boddewyn wrote, he wanted to “set the record straight” when it came to these arguments against Taylor. Boddewyn goes through these arguments in turn and presents quotes from Taylor’s *The Principles of Scientific Management* that were intended to counter the arguments posited against Taylorism. For example, when countering the claim that “Taylor sacrificed the worker to the system” Boddewyn mentions that Taylor’s writing actually fought against the piece rate system present in his day. Boddewyn does not make any attempt to create further context or research in regard to Taylor’s thoughts or how those thoughts might have been misconstrued by managers who enacted scientific management. Boddewyn does not explain how Taylorism might have been applied; instead he cites *The Principles of Scientific Management* as the only proof of Taylor’s value. Concurrently, the importance of Boddewyn’s work was that it stirred the philosophical debate around Taylorism. While he was certainly responding to arguments already established in academia, many of the arguments that Boddewyn explores became common in the historiography on Taylorism after this publication. Marxist scholars would argue that Taylor sacrificed the worker to the system and other historians questioned the monetary incentives that Taylor propagated. Like Boddewyn, countless later business scholars also defended Taylorism, but did so from a theoretical standpoint that presented almost no data on the impact of these management models on businesses or workers.

Despite the attention scholars give to Taylorism, it certainly was not the only form of labor management.

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In a community study done by Daniel Nelson and Stuart Campbell in 1972, Taylorism conflicts with another managerial system that was popular in the early 1900s: welfare work. Nelson and Campbell illustrate that the two systems competed for followers and had different assumptions about the common worker. Welfare work, an inexact management style, attempted to promote the “physical wellbeing” of the worker.\(^4\) Welfare work included opportunities for recreation, suitable sanitary homes, and educational benefits. Nelson and Campbell state that the two managerial systems were not completely in separate spheres; both systems tried to get as much work out of the employee as possible by offering additional benefits. Through these benefits, both systems tried to create harmony between labor and management. However, Nelson and Campbell make it clear that while Taylorism could be cold and calculating, welfare work was paternalistic and familial. Nelson and Campbell portray Taylorism as “measuring, analyzing and controlling the worker by techniques analogous to those that proved successful when applied to physical objects.”\(^5\) Nelson and Campbell state that Taylor saw the common worker as simplistic in only wanting higher wages.

To prove the differences between welfare work and Taylorism, Nelson and Campbell look at the unique Bancroft Company that attempted to utilize both systems. During the first years of the twentieth century, the Bancroft Company utilized welfare programs at the company in order to prevent turnover, unionization and strikes. Employing a Miss Elizabeth Briscoe, an ex-teacher, to promote the welfare programs and satisfy the employees, Bancroft created a familial atmosphere with their employees. However, as the company grew, bottlenecks in production became more common, so the Bancroft Company decided to hire one of Taylor’s closest disciples, Henry Gantt, to try to increase efficiency. Nelson and Campbell exemplify the difference between the two management styles by showing how Gantt failed in his pursuits with Bancroft. While Gantt tried to institute changes in how employees were managed, the owners of Bancroft did not want to change the welfare-style system that the company had instituted in previous years. This conflict caused Gantt to comment in a letter to Taylor himself: “Bancroft’s mindset toward his employees became the obstacle: he never gives anyone an order, and with us [scientific managers] clear cut orders are the essence of success.”\(^6\) Through this quote, Nelson and Campbell try to reveal the difference between the two systems: while Taylorism demanded the worker to act in a certain way, welfare work created a more humanistic bond between employee and employer.

Nelson and Campbell’s entire work revolves around this one conflict in this one business. Their sources come from the correspondence between the different stakeholders in the community including workers, supervisors, and the owners of Bancroft. While the scope of the work remains limited, it breaks from Boddewyn’s writing in terms of methodology.

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Nelson and Campbell illustrate how Gantt applied Taylorism firsthand at the Bancroft company. They reveal, through primary accounts, how Taylorism conflicted with a “warmer” style of management. Gantt wanted the owners of Bancroft to discard the welfare programs that they had already built. While Taylor promoted financial incentives, he and his followers were oblivious to the greater needs of the worker including autonomy and a familiar work atmosphere. Because Taylorism also led to increased layoffs, the management style resulted in increased combativeness between workers and managers. Written in 1972, at a time when young historians began questioning the foundations of institutions like businesses, Nelson and Campbell question the cold, calculating world of scientific management and embrace the “warmer” management style of welfare work.

Alfred Chandler presents a highly regarded work in his 1977 classic, *The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business*. The *Visible Hand* defines the very heart of industrial management and attempts to get at the true dialogue that happened between industrialists in the Gilded Age and early twentieth century. To Chandler, the value of a factory system came from the speed of production. Industrialists did not necessarily care about the size of their factories, nor the number of employees they had. Rather, industries cared about how efficiently the factory could create a final product, or throughput. In the pursuit of more efficient businesses, not only did industrial capitalists use new automated technology, but they also created new organizational models that included multiple tiers of management. As Chandler argues: “the modern factory was as much the specific organizational response to the needs of the new production technology as the railroad and the telegraph enterprises were responses to the operational needs of the new technologies of transportation and communication.”

Chandler describes countless industries and the systems that they developed in order to increase efficiency and throughput as much as possible.

Taylorism, by definition, focused on the scientific management of workers. Chandler describes in full detail the way that Taylor presented his ideas to American manufacturers. Taylor advocated for high degrees of specialization in the structure of workers. Manufacturers rejected some parts of Taylor’s specialization, but they accepted the basic premise of most of his ideas. Chandler states that while Taylor focused on the analysis of individual actions, other scientific managers of Taylor’s day thought that Taylor did not see “the synthesis of those actions into the fuller organization.” Chandler points out that no factory owner ever fully accepted what Taylor or his disciples promoted. Instead, factory owners changed their operations to conform partially to what Taylor specified. Chandler gives several examples of how Taylor or his disciples changed the operations in different industries and describes how employees were reorganized in each.

In contrast to Nelson or Campbell who focus on smaller community studies or Boddewyn who looks

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only at the broad arguments surrounding Taylorism, Chandler gives the most technical historical picture. While Boddewyn does not utilize any historical sources besides Taylor himself, and Nelson and Campbell have a narrower, community centered approach, Chandler broadens his work to include as much of the industrial system as possible. Chandler gives his reader the technical dialogue that industrialists had. Chandler brings together many sources to support his argument and distinguishes between the needs of different industries including payroll records, sales numbers, and the writings of the industrialists themselves. To an extent, Chandler’s work is devoid of any larger political argument and asks the question: “do we truly understand early American industry at an applied level?” However, even then, Chandler examines how Taylorism applied to day-to-day industry. Chandler underlines that industrialists never fully embraced scientific management. They utilized whatever they found practical. Finishing his work in the late 1970s when the United States entered a stage of stagflation, Chandler looks at what made the industrial United States operate – Taylorism being no small part of that system. For the past four decades, while scholars have debated the questions that Boddewyn outlined about Taylorism, they have looked back to Chandler for the historical reality of how the industrial machine developed. The reason that scholars still regard Chandler as one of the strongest works on industrial management remains his ability to paint the most vivid picture, one that reveals the nuance of Taylorism in practice.

Scholarship in the Era of the Great Recession

Business theorists, such as Daniel A. Wren, look at the impact that Taylorism still has on the business world today. Wren, a professor of management at the University of Oklahoma, has written extensively on the influence of Taylor in business efficiency since 1974. As recently as 2011, Wren argues that “our nation and world continue to encounter the problems of [Taylor’s] period. Taylor’s solution was better management of our natural human resources and he provides ideas that still endure today.”9 Looking back a century after the publication of Taylor’s *The Principles of Scientific Management*, Wren looks to apply Taylorism to a world hit by the Great Recession of 2008. To Wren, Taylor provided “beginning points that have enabled us to extend our thinking [about] the need to think more efficiently.”10 Presenting a cursory summary of the early life of Taylor and the publication of his work, Wren explores the dialogue that Taylor had with his contemporaries in developing his management system. Taylor, in his time, feared workers were “soldiering,” the idea that some workers produced less output than they were capable of. While physical resources remained important to a manager, more important were the human assets that needed to be managed in the workplace. Workers needed the opportunity and incentive to produce more. Taylor propagated the “piece-rate” incentive plan that paid ordinary wages for producers who reached the output standard and higher wages for those who performed above the minimum. Monetary incentive, therefore, became the

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solution to soldiering workers who did not produce to capacity. Wren focuses on the publication of Taylor’s two writings, *Shop Management* and *The Principles of Scientific Management*, which both explained the need of reducing wasted motions, setting appropriate standards of performance, and paying for performance through differential piece rate. Wren does not provide evidence or other sources that prove or disprove that workers were, in fact, soldiering. He takes Taylor at his word that workers were not producing as much as they possibly could be.

Wren explains that Taylorism found “common ground in combining the interests of manufacturers, who wanted lower costs and workers who wanted higher wages.” However, this intersection of goals did not always meet. For example, in the famous Eastern Rate Case, Louis Brandeis argued that the Eastern Railroad Company could save $300 million if they applied scientific principles that reduced the number of workers working railroads, which would reduce rates. Brandeis believed that the company used inefficient systems and should instead operate under scientific theories propagated by Taylor. While these scientific principles could be applied to increase efficiency, they also meant the firing of hundreds of railroad workers. Therefore, the workers themselves often rejected Taylor’s management approach as it sought a leaner model that was often indifferent to the needs of workers.

Wren’s methodology involves taking Taylor’s writing at face value. Wren reviews Taylor’s correspondence with other business theorists of the time but does not go beyond letters or Taylor’s major writing. With the exception of the controversy around the Eastern Railroad Case, he does not examine Taylorism’s impact on the world of the early twentieth century, let alone the world of 2011. Wren does not discuss how Taylorism impacted the companies where it was implemented. While Wren does portray the general rejection of Taylor’s ideas in events like the Eastern Rate Case, he fails to show the success of Taylorism in independent companies. However, where Wren does illustrate Taylor’s impact was on collegiate business education. By 1920, twenty-one universities offered a course in scientific management or engineering. Wren emphasizes that Taylorism strongly influenced how professors taught business management in the 1920s. Business academics today often trace Taylor as one of the progenitors of academic business management.

Niall Piercy, writing only a year after Wren, takes up where Wren left off. However, while Wren ends his article by discussing how Taylor influenced academic business management, Piercy argues that modern operations management has become disconnected from business history. Writing in the early 2010s when business schools became more prevalent on academic campuses, Piercy believed that business schools became too focused on contemporary issues and abandoned the history of how operations management came to be. In his article “Business History and Operations Management,” Piercy portrays operations management as constantly reinventing the wheel and promoting thoughts that have been propagated for nearly a century.

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century. Piercy wants to “emphasize the importance of considering history in operations management and to highlight the generally poor or inaccurate histories being portrayed.” To Piercy, those interested in teaching business management should not leave history to historians, but instead should use the past to better understand contemporary operations management. The works of Frederick Taylor still have much to teach about worker relations. Piercy believes that current issues in “evidence-based management” would be very familiar to scientific managers such as Taylor, Charles Babbage, or Frank Gilbreth. Piercy argues that “the business history community has an opportunity to play a major role in working with colleagues in operations management to reshape the next generation of textbooks and university programs to better integrate historical analysis into operations.”

History and business management, therefore, should be better combined in order to make sure that students have full understanding of the academic management they follow.

Piercy examined undergraduate textbooks on operations management over the past few decades. In the case of Taylorism, while textbooks mention Taylor, they only briefly mention him as one of the fathers of scientific management. Business textbooks overlook “Taylor’s work both in terms of the pre-existing ideas on which he built and the positive, humanistic working environment Taylor tried to build, which stands in contrast to the anti-worker portrayal Taylor too often receives.” Emphasizing the importance of the works of historians like Alfred Chandler, Piercy states that textbooks ignore Taylor’s correspondence with other industrialists like Carl Barthe, Harrington Emerson, or Charles Bedaux. Piercy emphasizes that Taylor’s general impact on operations academics cannot be understated as Taylor was at the right place (the United States) at the right time (the 1910s). Piercy focuses on “the primacy of Taylorist based approaches is an inheritance passed down to the current generation of operational academics, often without an appropriate level of question and consideration.” Since business schools came into being around the same time and place that thinkers such as Taylor and Ford did their work, Taylor’s influence remains ubiquitous throughout contemporary management academia. However, Piercy sees textbooks often denigrating what came before in order to promote the newest fad in business management.

Where Piercy’s analysis falls short is in his solution of the problem he presents. While the separation of operations management and its history becomes apparent, there is no clear way forward on how to directly address the works of thinkers like Taylor. Should everything that Taylor espoused be utilized in contemporary business management? Piercy does not distinguish what exactly in Taylorism or scientific management in general should be adapted and what should be discarded. Piercy does not give specific examples where Taylorism saw success and in what contexts. While Piercy mentions that history

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should not be simply “dry lecture” and that a variety of different methods should be utilized to bring the history alive like case studies or visual media, he does not give specific examples of what case studies should be used or where Taylorism can come alive today. Piercy mentions that Chandler was responsible for pushing business history into the mainstream curriculum at Harvard Business School and applying past works into contemporary applications. However, Piercy does not reveal how business professors can emulate Chandler’s example moving forward. Chandler himself used historical analysis and primary data to craft a complex narrative of how Taylorism came to industry. Piercy instead wants more history in textbooks, but without the questions or context that historians often present.

Unlike Wren or Piercy who largely accept the tenets of Taylorism, historians such as David Roediger and Elizabeth Esch question the purpose and context of scientific management. In their work, “One Symptom of Originality: Race and the Management of Labor in the History of the United States,” Roediger and Esch look at how the concept of antebellum race management and scientific management originated from the same racial assumptions. The factory and the plantation systems separated races into different categories—slave and free. In the management of these two systems, it became necessary for managers to play one race against another. Managers and foremen were not outside of the race system in the United States, and in many ways, “created that system.”

Roediger and Esch point out that past historians have mentioned that managers used race to divide workers during strikes or during similar times of unrest; however, Roediger and Esch state that managers used race as leverage in day-to-day operations as well. Roediger and Esch argue that “race-management came into being long before scientific management, and the two for a time coexisted as complementary rather than alternative strategies for exacting production.” Roediger and Esch portray scientific management as utilizing the apparent weaknesses and strengths of different races in order to create supposed industrial efficiency.

To prove their argument, Roediger and Esch utilize sources from the antebellum period and apply their historical context to the world of scientific management. They analyze the history of how slaveholders managed their slaves and how different racial groups came into conflict with one another, such as African Americans against Irish Americans. Slavemasters gave “scientific reasons” as to why Blacks needed to be managed. While plantation life and the factory seem like different places, foremen and plantation owners managed in similar fashions. To Roediger and Esch, “the brutalities of racism seem to intersect only obliquely with the cold science of management that Frederick Winslow Taylor is credited with inventing in the late nineteenth century US… [however] Taylor wanted to create ‘high-priced men’ by selecting them studiously and regimenting their motions scientifically suggests an overlap between managerial

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science and race-management.”¹⁹ In Taylorism, some were destined to become successful high-priced men while others should be paid less because they were not as fit for work. To Roediger and Esch, this system stems from the same assumption of racial superiority. Some are destined to be slaves, while others should manage over the workers. However, these assumptions were no longer just about race, but were also now about ethnicity. Roediger and Esch utilize some of Taylor’s writings to illustrate the similarities between the systems. For example, Taylor used race to explore the fact that the average worker is more productive in some civilizations but less productive in others. Taylor believed in Black inferiority as seen in his writing, but also portrayed some ethnicities as superior or inferior. “True Americans” could operate machinery, but the “dirt handling [should be] done by Italians and Hungarians.”²⁰ While Taylor never explicitly spoke of race management, many of his followers used race and ethnicity to slot workers of a particular race into certain jobs. Roediger and Esch explain that managers or foremen who promoted scientific management used racial graphs like the one below (see Appendix A) in order to “scientifically” determine who was most optimal for a certain job. Typically the scientific managers that Roediger and Esch analyze did not seek empirical data to prove the value of races, but rather compiled anecdotal assumptions to prove stereotypes. Roediger and Esch also evaluate the work of followers of Taylorism like Hugo Münsterberg, a pioneering psychologist, tried to combine “scientific psychology” with Taylorist scientific management. Münsterberg tried to systemize race and management, but in the end conceded that the best way to find the correct worker for a job was to devolve into racial stereotypes.²¹

Writing in a Marxist publication, Historical Materialism, Roediger and Esch focus on the potential weaknesses and problems of scientific management and Taylorism – the byproducts of unfettered capitalism. Like Wren and Piercy, Roediger and Esch also wrote after the Great Recession of 2008, but drew very different conclusions. Roediger and Esch ask what assumptions of the capitalist system continue to fail a century after Taylor’s time. Racial inequality in the workplace and racial tensions were at the forefront of the world of 2008 and remain an ongoing question today. Wren and Piercy write instead for business periodicals and see the way forward as creating a more scientific workplace that harkens back to the industrial past. The purpose of their work is to not question, but to enshrine the success of early pioneers such as Taylor. Historical analysis, however, cannot accept the past at face-value but rather must evaluate past assumptions to better understand the world of today. Roediger and Esch prove that once managers applied Taylorism to the workplace, racial assumptions became a discriminatory element that plagued the workplace. Neither Piercy nor Wren give their reader any evidence of how scientific management changed the workplace – but rather give a cursory overview of how Taylorism can be applied today.

Taylorism in Europe

While most scholars focus on Taylorism from the perspective of industry in the United States, historians such as Mary McLeod look at the impact of scientific management on industry in Europe. McLeod, an architectural historian, analyzes the impact of Taylorism on the work of Le Corbusier, a French architect and urban planner. Le Corbusier did most of his early work after World War I. McLeod portrays Taylorism as having little impact in France before the war, as critics saw its implementation as “systemized sweating” which caused several strikes in 1913. However, World War I led to the loss of manpower in the factory and the need for faster output. Less skilled workers in French factories led industrialists to be more willing to adopt American management systems like Taylorism or Fordism. A French newspaper proclaimed “the War made Taylor the order of the day. The name of Taylor, which was barely known in France by well-informed people only a few years ago, is now mentioned by everyone: owners, engineers and workers.”

Even prime minister Georges Clemenceau signed a decree that asked for “all heads of military establishments to study new industrial techniques and proposed the creation of a Taylorite planning department in every plant.” Taylorism, then, became a timely tool to assist the French war machine. After the war, the production of many commodities, not the least of which was buildings, caused further need for an increased industrial output. France also had contention between a growing socialist movement and a conservative right. With these factors in place, Le Corbusier saw architecture as a tool of social redemption – a way to moderate the needs of workers while not discarding the old society.

Taylorism offered a way for Le Corbusier to increase the number of buildings being produced while benefiting workers. McLeod states that European thinkers like Le Corbusier largely discarded Taylor’s technical recommendations, but the “the social and political implication [of Taylor’s work] generated European interest.” What interested Le Corbusier was the belief that more production would create higher wages which ultimately would solve many of society’s ills. Le Corbusier mentioned Taylorism in many of his early writings, yet the largest influence can be seen in the development of his architecture during the post-war period. Le Corbusier developed the “Dom-ino” system which was one of the earliest mass production techniques of housing in France using Taylor’s ideas. Le Corbusier wanted to create prefabricated housing for those devastated after World War I. In this way, Le Corbusier saw architecture as a social fixing tool where the problems of society that stemmed from low housing could be fixed by having a huge supply of cheap buildings. Taylorism became “the one way in which an architect could remain relevant in a society faced with destruction.” The destruction, in this case, was France falling to its own form of Bolshevism.

McLeod reveals Le Corbusier’s rather utopian impulse, but she also illustrates that other urban

25 McLeod, “Architecture or Revolution,” 133.
26 McLeod, “Architecture or Revolution,” 133.
planners in France followed Le Corbusier’s example. Le Corbusier mentions Taylorism in his public writing by stating that France needed to abandon old architecture production techniques and embrace a system that included workshops, technical specialists, and standardization. Other thinkers shared their agreement with Le Corbusier in the magazine *L’Esprit Nouveau*. *L’Esprit Nouveau* remains McLeod’s primary source, which she supplements with Le Corbusier’s other letters and writings. *L’Esprit Nouveau* proves that Taylorism had a large impact on Le Corbusier and his followers, but it did not reveal that there was a bigger push for a Taylorist approach in architecture or other industries in France. Taylorism appears instead as a temporary solution to the problems that plagued France during the first World War and the period of post-war reconstruction. Writing “Architecture or Revolution” in 1985 after France had elected its first socialist government earlier in the decade after economic turmoil, McLeod attempts to reveal that the solutions to that economic crisis could not be cured with political division, but rather with economic efficiency. Her work may not manifest these higher ideals, but she does prove that Taylorism did impact Le Corbusier and a subset of French architects.

Similar to McLeod, Karsten Uhl analyzes the effect of American models like Taylorism and Fordism on German industry. Like McLeod, Uhl states that Germans appropriated some parts of Taylorism, but tried to adapt those principles to German culture. Through his work, Uhl argues that “Germany and the United States have differences in industrial labor strategies that still exist and have a history that can be traced to the beginnings of the twentieth century.”

Uhl wrote his work “Giving Scientific Management a Human Face” in 2011 when Germany, as a leading power in the European Union, attempted to distinguish itself from the economic preeminence of the United States. Uhl states that ever since its empire phase, Germany has always been different from the liberal market economy of the United States and instead had a coordinated market economy. Uhl attempts to prove this difference through the way that the workplace was handled as early as the beginning of the twentieth century in Germany.

Uhl’s methodology involves examining the Duetz engine factory in Cologne, Germany. One of the managers of Duetz, Fritz Wolfensberger, went to the United States during the early 1910s to study American industry. Wolfensberger saw how Taylorist factories performed time and motion studies that allowed operations to be fragmented into simple motions. The operations process would be brought to perfection by finding the “one best way.” However, when Wolfensberger returned to Germany, he believed only some parts of Taylor’s model could be applied to German factories. Wolfensberger, as well as many of his fellow industrialists thought that “whereas Taylorism focused on discovering and imposing a fixed pattern of movement from above, team-based

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organizations would instead focus on monitoring and remaking employee attitude.”

Believing that a more humanistic approach would be more fitting to German sensibility, management at Duetz wanted the worker to become his own foreman, unlike the American model which placed managers in place of direct control of each worker. While efficiency was the desired result, Wolfensberger would write that “German engineers [should] study Taylor, but [should] never become Taylorists!”

Instead, German managers empowered their employees to increase output by building a more humanistic factory. Like in McLeod’s work, Uhl mentions that Taylorism was adopted to counter the rise of socialism. As one German engineer stated “a good shot of American individualism could make way for worker’s self–development. In turn, this could be a cure for the all-embracing collective, that is socialist ideas, which made Germans lose their sense of responsibility.”

Uhl mentions that even as late as the Third Reich, Germans appropriated some of Ford’s and Taylor’s work but tried to maintain a human element in the factory.

The European application of Taylorism has similar meaning in both Uhl’s and McLeod’s works. The American model of industrial efficiency might have diffused to different parts of the globe, but it was never fully accepted. Instead, Taylorism represented a possible counter to the growing socialist sentiment that boiled up in Europe after the success of the Russian Revolution. While European industrialists and engineers tried to obtain the efficiency promised by scientific management, they often discarded many of the technical recommendations that Taylor promoted. Instead, Europeans adapted the spirit of American efficiency to their own models of production.

Business management scholars like Piercy and Wren often cite the “international success” of Taylorism in the international stage. They list countries that adopted Taylorism like “Germany, Italy, France… and even the Soviet Union.” However, what these scholars fail to mention was the complexity of the reasons of how or why European companies accepted Taylorism. Taylorism represented not an American export, but rather a shield against the rise of socialism and a way to keep discontented employees working. Industrialists like those at Duetz only took some of the basic structures of Taylorism but diluted the system to their own needs. By looking at how Taylorism was applied internationally, McLeod and Uhl prove that European industrials did not accept Taylorism as readily as business managers would argue.

**Recent Scholarship**

Recent historiography, such as in the work of Diana Kelly in “Perceptions of Taylorism and a Marxist Scientific Manager,” tries to change the general trend of historians to view scientific management as purely exploitative and a product of unfettered capitalism. Kelly focuses on the work of one of Taylor’s followers, Walter Polakov. Polakov, a scientific manager, also

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29 Uhl, “Giving Scientific Management a ‘Human’ Face,” 516.
31 Uhl, “Giving Scientific Management a ‘Human’ Face,” 518.
followed a socialist, if not Marxist, ideology. By studying Polakov, Kelly hopes to prove that the scientific managers of the 1910s were not focused on exploiting the common worker, but instead had a progressive need to change the management of the workplace. Kelly demonstrates that the scientific management of Walter Polakov should be acknowledged as an “accepted part of Taylorism, at least before the 1940s… If that were the case, then ideas that early Taylorism was anti-worker and management control-oriented would also need reconsideration.” The purpose of Kelly’s work is to see the work of Taylorists in a more complex light – a general trend in contemporary history.

Writing in 2016, Kelly presents a counter-revisionist perspective on the history of Taylorism. Kelly starts her work with a summary of the general trends in the historiography of scientific management through the second part of the twentieth century. To Kelly, past historians have portrayed Taylorism as a form of job fragmentation, deskilling and the degradation of work. Kelly mentions the work of historians such as Harry Braverman in Labor and Monopoly Capital, which not only portrayed the entire capitalist system as exploitative and demeaning toward workers, it portrayed scientific management as “ensuring that the worker would sink to the level of general undifferentiated labor power adaptable to a large range of simple tasks [while power] would be concentrated in the hands of management.” Like Braverman, writers like Howard Zinn made Taylor the anti-hero of the management movement in the United States. If historians did not portray scientific managers as exploitative, they portrayed them as stunt peddlers who tried to sell a fad to various industries. On top of the critical approach of historians, Kelly also looks at recent history textbooks that illustrate scientific management as exploitative.

To counter this recent perspective of Taylorism, Kelly looks at the work and letters of Polakov. Polakov was a member of the Taylorist Society who wrote about and debated the works of Taylor. Kelly illustrates that the rules of the Taylorist society were not absolute and there was a plurality of opinions that its members expressed. Those who were close to Taylor showed “that the early Taylorists were genuine in their concerns for making work reasonable, feasible and better for workers.” As a part of the Taylorists, Polakov remained committed to Taylorism his entire life, but also was an expert advisor in Russia, a public servant in New Deal organizations, and a senior trade union official with the United Mine Workers of America. Kelly’s primary evidence remains Polakov’s published writings and debates with other Taylorists. The debates demonstrated the “inextricability for Polakov of his commitments to both scientific management and socialism,” as they revealed that “scientific management would ultimately pave the way to socialism by increasing wages and output.” Kelly then finalizes her work by trying to prove that Polakov’s political views were not necessarily too

34 Kelly, “Perceptions of Taylorism and a Marxist Scientific Manager,” 301.
35 Kelly, “Perceptions of Taylorism and a Marxist Scientific Manager,” 304.
36 Kelly, “Perceptions of Taylorism and a Marxist Scientific Manager,” 311.
distant from that of his other colleagues in the early Taylorist society including Morris L. Cooke. Given this evidence, Kelly believes that we need to rethink the overriding belief that Taylorism was exploitative to workers.

The scope of Kelly’s work remains narrow, as it only presents the work of one Taylorist. There is no evidence to show how Polakov’s beliefs were accepted by other Taylorists. Even if more of the Taylorists themselves were progressive, there is no way to show how factory managers or owners used Polakov’s ideas or shared his socialist ideas. While Kelly does not simply take Taylor’s ideas at face value, she does not exemplify how Polakov’s work applied in industry.

While Kelly might be a historian and not a business management academic, she stays in the realm of the theoretical and does not give tangible evidence of how Polakov changed industry. Kelly’s work, like Uhl’s or McLeod’s, however, does show that a variety of parties did utilize Taylorism in various contexts, but usually adapted Taylor’s work to their own ends. Taylorism was not a monolithic management system that was followed uniformly—rather different industrialists abridged and changed it to fit their own practical needs.

As late as 2016, business management scholars have continued to express the importance of Taylor as a father of contemporary management. In his work, “Frederick Winslow Taylor and His Lasting Legacy of Functional Leadership Competence,” David Savino looks at the legacy of Taylor in various industries. Beginning with a general explanation of Taylor’s life and work, Savino argues that “Taylor not only greatly influenced how work was done in the twentieth century but also had a direct impact on contemporary management practices and management education.” Savino portrays Taylorism as not being callous to the common worker, but rather as part of the greater Progressive Movement that grew during the first part of the twentieth century. Savino states that “Taylorism and Scientific Management made business and industry what it was going to become anyway, only more so and more rapidly.”

Today’s industries that exemplify scientific management’s inevitable victory include management accounting, codetermination, human performance technology, compensation, lean management, marketing, pollution prevention, and human resources. Savino gives few examples of Taylorism’s actual impact in each of these industries. He tries to go into the practices of some companies like Toyota who illustrate some degree of Taylorist influence. For the most part, the benefits of contemporary Taylorism include measurement systems that evaluate how well workers are performing, a more harmonious relationship between workers and management and waste prevention. If anything, Savino’s work proves that Taylor’s impact on today’s industries is far from universal. While it is easy to see the connection between Taylorism and modern efficiency measurements, it is more difficult to see Taylor’s hand in modern human resources and waste prevention. The fact that Savino brings up both “lean management” and “human resources” together reveals

38 Savino, “Frederick Winslow Taylor and His Lasting Legacy,” 71.
a contradiction and conflict in the goal of workers and managers.

Savino’s primary evidence for his portrayal of Taylor as pro-worker comes from the fact that Taylor, in his last days, “promoted the idea that knowledge rather than power should rule the workplace … Taylor basically believed the best way to balance knowledge and power in the workplace was through codetermination.”39 Savino’s thought that Taylor believed in this balance between workers and management came only after Taylor was under pressure by unions who believed that he was anti-worker. The motivations of Taylor were also balanced against his desire for general efficiency, which he sought above all else in the workplace. Savino’s sources for most of his articles are other business managers like Piercy and Wren, proving the circular logic of how business management scholars utilize history. None of these scholars look to actual primary sources in order to prove their arguments, but rather accept the soundness of Taylor’s theories on management.

Conclusion
After nearly six decades, scholars continue to dispute the legacy of Taylor. Boddewyn in 1961 stated that “the phantom of Frederick Taylor is not quite dead.”40 As Kelly states in her writing in 2016, “what’s of interest in the contemporary debate is that Taylor still incites contention so many years after his death.”41 These quotes show that regardless of the decade, scientific management stirs disagreement and division in academics. Though Taylor has been gone for over one-hundred years, historians and business management thinkers have drawn vastly different implications from his work. If Taylor’s work remains valid, then contemporary management principles also have validity. Time measurement and digital Taylorism in the online marketplace affects countless workers across the world. If Taylor’s work proves unusable, then many of the assumptions on the modern workplace need to be questioned. Business management thinkers take Taylor at face value – their legitimacy comes from Taylor himself. Historians remain divided, but ultimately see the more complex side of the industrial world in which Taylor worked. Taylor’s true goal was efficiency, but the academic world continues to ask: at what cost?

Note on Author: Noah is pursuing his Master of Arts in Teaching History under the mentorship of Dr. Brian Payne. Noah currently works as the Coordinator Dual Enrollment & Early College High School at Southeastern Regional School District. His passions include modern history, tabletop gaming, and spending time with his family.

39 Savino, “Frederick Winslow Taylor and His Lasting Legacy,” 75.
41 Kelly, “Perceptions of Taylorism and a Marxist Scientific Manager,” 306.
Bibliography
Appendix A


Appendix B

Abstract: A capitalist fable, “Felix and the Flying Tiger” was one of two “Best Essays” at the 2023 Master’s in English Regional Conference held at Bridgewater State University. After considering the themes and messages of Jorge Luis Borges’s “The Circular Ruins” and “The Library of Babel,” Ferdinand de Saussure’s Lecture on General Linguistics, and Louis Althusser’s “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” I sought in short story form to answer the question: How do humans make meaning under capitalism? My main thesis in “Felix and the Flying Tiger” is that despite their current ability to transcend language, the sign system of brand logos that we adorn ourselves with, that we cloak our children with, that we invest in, and that we identify and communicate with, is ultimately meaningless and non-transferrable to future generations. When the reader recognizes the globally iconic Starbucks, Apple, McDonald’s, and Puma logos, they have unlocked a secret meaning that the narrator in this story never will. But does this really matter? Here, my “Library of Babel” is the ruins of a once-vast shopping mall where citizens, archaeologists, and academics of a future generation attempt to decipher late capitalist iconography.

Keywords: fiction; short story; capitalism; futurism.

The vast dig site extended for several days in every direction. Felix’s recent promotion meant that he was to penetrate and oversee one unruly south-westerly quadrant, which had been responsible for some intriguing finds several months prior, most notably the flying tiger emblem as it had come to be known. The project, from the start, had been a dizzying one; sharp beams and wired nests had coagulated to form a nearly impenetrable labyrinth of metal. The initial excitement of the site’s sprawling discovery had overtaken the free cities, as secrets of ancient civilizations were promised to every man. Academics and consultants from all disciplines hurried to factor the discovery into their findings and methods. It was, as Felix later recalled nostalgically, the best three months of his life. He had purchased two new navy suits and a pair of wingtip shoes in preparation.

During this initial period, the groundbreaking had been stalled as arguments ensued about the optimal techniques and strategies to employ for peak results. The western provinces preferred their massive, hydraulic hoses while the east lobbied for heavy machinery consisting of robotic bulldozers, excavators, and cutting-edge backhoes; the cold-climate, northern academics clamored loudly and honorably for a return to classical archaeology, complete with trowels, sifters, and patience. Contests were soon held in the hopes of soliciting a yet undiscovered but ingenious tactic. Eventually, central organization devolved into local coalitions until it was decided each municipality was responsible for its techniques. Classes of pupils
were schooled in each. By this point aboard a lengthy train, Felix counted himself lucky to hail from one of the more intellectual provinces detached from brute labor, which concerned itself primarily with applying history and philosophy to significant findings. His high appointment made sense.

During the preliminary weeks, his excitement steadily and unnoticeably shifted into a stimulating yet formless confusion that was easy to mistake for childlike glee. With his stately access came new awareness that certain widely accepted theses were increasingly subject to scrutiny pending various discrepancies that had not been discussed at Felix’s local university. First, there was the issue of the flying tiger. A few months earlier, the predominant archaeological theorem had been that the most prevalent symbols, often found adjacent to identical symbols and affixed to some sort of textile or object, were the uniforms and emblems of fallen groups who hailed from those territories some centuries prior. It naturally followed, in papers and in journals, that the flying tiger was one such uniform and held insight into a particular kinship group and its culture. At this, the anthropologists had momentarily rejoiced.

The lack in central management at the site and elsewhere, however, had caused significant communication delays, which prevented Felix’s predecessor from receiving timely word that the flying tiger had also been found in Quadrants 4, 13, 265, 337a and, most recently, the western sea corridor. It was Felix’s first task, then, to use his shiny merits toward repositioning the flying tiger in the current understanding as an ideological symbol that occurred in pockets across a patchwork rather than as a lone identifying badge. A key that unlocks a massive door. The esteem of his quadrant and his further promotion depended on it.

For this, he consulted the widely mined emblems from all dig quadrants and their foremost experts, who were and had been grappling with the same task with varying degrees of success and transparency. Felix began with one of the most prevalent symbols: the smiling sea goddess with her two-pronged tail and star crown, found in better samples imbued with distinct green coloring. She had been discovered so frequently that it was determined she must have been an adored deity, triggering the inclusion of theologians for consultation. The theologians (and their translators) were not able to conclusively determine if she proved the remnants of a monotheistic society as such drastically different signology was also found in rival numbers, suggesting possible polytheism or divergent belief systems. More research was needed for a definitive result. Felix was eventually told this and yet on some evenings, when the clanging, whirring machinery had quieted and he was certain he was alone in the lab, he too knelt and prayed to the smiling sea goddess. In those moments, far from the theologians, Felix was sure she was a god.

Under shifting time constraints, Felix moved to consider the great, once-bitten apple. For this, he approached the philosophers and agriculturists who were not used to mingling and were, at first, reluctant to share their findings. Sometimes found in white, black, and even more rarely kaleidoscope, the great apple had come to represent the duality of knowledge among the southern semi-arid provinces, the yin and yang of nature to the western tribes, and still yet the bounty of autumn to coastal river folk. The philosophers and agriculturists failed to see eye to eye on the great apple’s significance (and its missing piece) and tried
to rectify their understanding with the existence of the equally prevalent golden mountain. Together, it was undeniably determined, the idols suggested a culture that was intimately linked with the natural world. The sea goddess and flying tiger only further confirmed their theory. Felix slept well for exactly one evening after this was relayed to him. By morning, it was still unclear why, though, the flying tiger had been found in areas that were and always had been entirely uninhabited by tigers.

Lastly, Felix arrived at the linguists, his hope worn down with his shoes. While the flying tiger had not yet been found with lettering, a true academic never fails to consider the prevailing discovery in his field. He had wanted to forget it—the ominous, unexplained, and strangely beautiful word that hung over every lecture, summit, and discipline: Amazon. Deciphering it seemed to be the key to his future, and since he was no closer to unlocking its mystery, he had been happy to cozy up to the flying tiger. At least tigers were real.

The linguists had considered amazon as a reference to mazes, in history and in myth, as related to the current usages of “amazing,” and further evidence of reverence, or as the possible surname of a powerful family, whose history and dealings would, no doubt, be significant to uncover. The linguists, too, had considered whether the symbols were caricatures in a picture-based language that, when combined, formed words, sentences, and even complex concepts. What did it mean then for the tiger to jump down from the mountain onto the apple? As Felix neared a year at his post, only one hypothesis had been entered into with complete agreement: The imagery was undeniably revered by whatever fallen culture had created it, and the emblems, widely dispersed across vast geographical distances and affixed to a breathtaking variety of objects, undoubtedly played a crucial role in the culture that imagined them.

By the evening before his yearly review, Felix wasn’t sleeping at all. He was certain his job would be in question in the morning. He spent most of that evening, much like the ones that came before it, ironing his suits and compounding his extensive findings into a presentation that would further prove that, while he was nearly there, more time was needed to unlock the secret of the flying tiger (or had it been a leopard all along?). Surely, further experts from newly emerging disciplines could be approached and he would attempt to argue that he was the best liaison to facilitate that. Still, he struggled to ignore the gnawing urge to refuse presenting at all. Felix wondered what, if anything, it would do. In another part of the evening, a more frenzied part that felt like his own, he composed a third option quickly and out of sheer necessity:

O Smiling Goddess
With your endless tails
Won’t you show me the way
To Amazon?

Note on Author: Maryellen Groot is a writer and educator currently pursuing an M.A. in English (Writing) and a certificate in Writing & Rhetoric at Salem State University. She holds a joint B.A. in Written Arts and American Studies from Bard College. Maryellen studies creative writing, creative writing pedagogy, literary theory, and American literature. Her fiction focuses on themes of capitalist alienation.
and the use and abuse of American mythos. Recently, she presented a short story entitled “Felix and the Flying Tiger” at the 2023 Master’s in English Regional Conference held at Bridgewater State University, which was one of two “Best Essay” winners. She further developed this piece with the mentorship of Dr. Halina Adams. Her non-fiction work has previously been published with Vox. She is currently a writing tutor at the Mary G. Walsh Writing Center and lives in North Andover with her husband, Bobby.
Cherry Stones and Jagged Cardboard

Karen P. Higgins, Master of Arts Candidate, Department of English, Worcester State University, khiggins1@worcester.edu

Abstract: Memoir writing is a deeply personal, but cathartic endeavor. It encapsulates a desire to present an authentic, significant story—one that will engage a reader and infiltrate his or her thoughts. A graduate independent study this past Fall (2022), enabled me to flesh out such an expression. I honed in on an important event in my life—one for which I still bear physical and emotional scars. “Cherry Stones & Jagged Cardboard” explores a life-changing car accident, at the age of seven, and a strange realization of the poverty, and thwarted opportunities, into which I had been born.

Keywords: Memoir; writing; nonfiction.

Cherry stones and jagged cardboard were the tools of my trade, and a plastic fork I found on her bedside table. “Ouch! No, Stop!” she whined.

“You need to stay still. I put you to sleep with the injection I gave you,” I hissed. I had poked her in the upper arm about three minutes before with a tine of the plastic fork. That had been my makeshift anesthesia application. She continued to squirm and moan, despite my efforts to hold her tightly and scrape the inside of her left elbow; I was performing what I thought would be a skin graft. I already had had several myself; her tonsillectomy certainly would not have provided the experience of scraped thighs, which would later morph into ghastly scars. The gossamer thin layers of skin slivered from my left thigh and placed over my right arm, left pitted lumps of flesh where now the blood had dried, welding wads of gauze to my leg.

Tiny red welts were bubbling up on her arm as I dragged the jagged, stiff cardboard back and forth. She finally pulled away with a squeal. Two other beds in the four-bed ward were unoccupied, so no one seemed to notice her discomfort or my demonized play at being a doctor. “You can’t do this,” she sniveled. Her face was pale.

“I just wanted to make it more real, that’s all!” I said, flouncing off then, leaving her to her carping. I flopped onto my own bed, wincing at the pain that shot through my right arm and left leg.

I only knew her name, Miriam, and that she’d had her tonsils removed. Her dark brown, curly hair shone, especially when the sunlight caught it and the curls bobbed and bounced when she left her bed to go to the bathroom. She had smooth peach-colored skin that sported two shiny, pink cheeks. Her mouth was perfectly shaped in a Cupid’s bow and her voice had a posh lilt to it—the kind you hear from British kids who had been sent away to boarding school at an early age. Her nightdress looked fresh despite her being in it for several days: it was bright white with beautifully embroidered flowers around the yoke and hem.

My pajamas were hand-me-downs: grey-looking. Any discernible pattern having been washed out years before with the elbows and knees threadbare. My bedside was barren day after night and night after
day as I witnessed her being fussed over. Having lived
for seven years in the detritus we called home and
laughably family life, I was devastated to have my
eyes widened to what Miriam enjoyed. I loathed her
for it. The stream of visitors, showering her with gifts,
sickened me. I did, however, in that moment upon
my bed, feel a smirk and let out a low guttural giggle
thinking of how, just moments before, I had tried to
force her to swallow a cherry stone as her medicine. I
knew it would be difficult for her, and I knew it would
hurt considering she had just had her tonsils removed,
but I tried anyway. Not only was I insanely jealous of
the kind of “other” life she seemed to have, but the
scenes that played out before me each day, drove the
pain of my own paltry existence deeper into my psyche.
Something that I barely understood then.

My eighth birthday was approaching, with
no knowledge of when I might be released from the
hospital. I had already been there for nearly three
months. I began to look upon the ward as my home,
and the mind pictures of my actual home had become
indistinct. Not that home had ever been a place of
nurturing and comfort, but until this spell in the hospital
had illustrated the posibiliites, I had known nothing
different. The nursing staff had been sweet enough.
They had comforted me when the crying jags came
calling. My heart was heavy, heavy with the weight
of what life had thrown at me thus far: the destitution
of poverty, the fractious grappling of siblings who had
never been taught how to care for each other, let alone
love one another, the instability of a single parent who
could never quite cope and who sought the company
of strange men to overcome her despair. Seeing the
obverse of the coin, of Miriam and her loving family,
was more than I could bear. The green monster
mushroomed and with it came a confusing sadness that
underpinned what I believed to be the unfairness of my
lot in life. I had not the tools, let alone the maturity, to
comprehend the ugliness of my feelings. Not only was
I now physically hurt with a torn-up arm and a scabbing
blood-soaked thigh, but I felt adrift in an unforgiving
sea, acutely aware of being tossed overboard at any
moment. Possessing complex feelings but having no
avenue to healthily work through them, or even realize
there could be such an avenue, haunted me. So, my
doctoring of Miriam ensued. I hated her.

~oOo~

“Okay! Off you go!” Sandra said gently. Several weeks
prior to my torture of Miriam, my sister, Rita, and I
had been playing with a friend in the neighborhood
and having finished our play, Sandra was attempting to
help us across the road to return home. It was this event
that had landed me in the hospital where so much of
my confusion of the world germinated and grew.

“Quick!” my sister shouted. She had already
made it safely to the other side.

I don’t recall a screeching of brakes. No
 crunching of tires on asphalt, not even a sensation of
being slammed into moving metal.

It was the first of May, 1964, at just before seven
in the evening. The sun was slowly going down as the
days were lengthening toward that glorious British time
when it stayed light until around ten o’clock at night.
We children loved those days and took great advantage
of the long hours of daylight to continue our extensive
play away from home. We rarely played at home. We
usually went with a band of siblings or other children in the neighborhood to the ‘wreck.’ Far from being a wreck of anything, it was just a five-minute skip from our house and with its wide-open fields, several trees along the edges to climb, swings and roundabout, we could entertain ourselves for hours: exactly what our mother expected of us. She wanted none of us “under her feet!”

On this particular day, Rita and I had decided to run across the street to play with Sandra, who lived on the adjacent corner. We were just one house in on Holbrook Way from the crossroads, next to the Osbournes—a family that housed an absolutely foul-mouthed mother and daughter: “Keep yer fucking kids away from my gate!” Mrs. Osbourne would hurl at my mother on a regular basis, spitting venom as she did so.

“Don’t worry, deary, I would be frightened what they might catch!” my mother would volley back. Then, usually, a slanging match would ensue where each woman would call each other a ‘saucy bitch’ or ‘dirty cow,’ and that inevitably led to Mrs. Osbourne honing in on my mother’s liaisons with men. Once or twice the daughter would come out of the house and chime in also, but Mum would become frustrated and just a little embarrassed, and would eventually slink back into the folds of the house, chalking up another spiteful encounter with the neighbors. Apart from the Osbournes, the foul-mouthed stuff happened infrequently, but we children were very aware of the shaking heads, and clucking tongues up and down the length of the street and its environs, whenever my mother walked by with one or another of us in tow.

We had been in this house, a three-bedroomed semi-detached abode sheltering one parent and six children, provided by Bromley Council, for about three years. It was what, in America, they call “the projects.” We had moved there when I was four. My father had very much been out of the picture from just after my birth. It was said that his work, as a merchant seaman, only allowed his return home on six occasions during a span of eight years. Hence, there was just an eight-year difference between my brother, Chris, the eldest of the Large siblings—yes, our last name was Large—and me, the youngest.

Sandra, and her family, The Hammets, inhabited the dwelling kitty-cornered from ours. Sandra also lived next door to The Watsons. Lynn Watson was Rita’s best friend and Dawn Watson was mine. Rita and I were often in their house for one reason or another, but they never came to ours, and Mr. and Mrs. Watson were always trying, frantically, to remove us from their abode. Looking back, I am sure she thought that we would deliver some nasty creature into her well-scrubbed home, or breathe several germs that no measure of disinfectant could irradicate. We were unkempt, ragged individuals with deep grime under our nails and lank, greasy hair upon our heads. As the price of heating hot water in our house was beyond what my mother could muster, each one of us were only allowed one hot bath a week. That bath, however, had to be shared in parties of two. My two brothers, Chris and Ray shared a bath, then the two eldest girls, Yvonne and Cheryl, and finally Rita and me. Although, Rita would never let me actually share the bath with her and so I always got her dirty, cold, water after she had finished with it.

Other families in the street became a part of the Large kids’ posse. It was a suburban neighborhood and
there always seemed to be a reasonable camaraderie between the kids, when we were not at each other’s throats that is. The parents, however, boiled another kettle of fish. There was more than a fair share of arguments between one family or the other, either between angry parents who were sick of other peoples’ kids at their house (usually the Larges tended to camp out at other houses as it was too exhausting and too austere at ours), or teenagers arguing about stealing each other’s dates, or little one’s having their usual playground spats. Somewhere in the mix of the spats, a Large kid was usually found. We also encountered our fair share of school hiccups, “If yer teacher wrote that bloody note, then you did something wrong, right?” Mum would spout to a neatly written summons from one of my teachers for Mum to visit the school to discuss my behavior.

“She’s just picking on me, again,” I would shout. “She doesn’t like me because I am one of the Large kids and it’s all the trouble that Chrissy and Raymond have brought to the school that comes crashing down on us,” I added. Later, in high school my sisters and I attended the local all-girls state school, while Chris and Ray attended the boys equivalent just down the road. With girls and boys in different schools, it was difficult for the administrations to link our behaviors.

“What were yer doing, trying to be the class clown again?” she hissed.

“Well, yes, actually.” I realized there would be little point to fabricating the situation. She always found out exactly what had transpired, and we always received the requisite beating for it.

“Miss Elam, the needlework teacher asked me to ‘run round’ the edge of the tablecloth I was making,” by this time I had begun to snigger because I still thought it was tremendously funny. “So, I put it on the floor and ran around it,” I said proudly. “The whole class laugh…” Thwack! I was frozen in mid-sniggering by my Mum’s man-sized hand meeting the side of my face, with full force. Tearing up, I tried to bolt, but she rooted me.

“How many times do yer ‘ave to be told? Yer don’t cheek the teachers. Were yer sent to the Head Master?”

“Yes,” I sniveled, feeling my right cheek grow warm and start to throb. “But, he had already crept into the room while I was playing the fool and whacked me on the backside, which brought me up short!” I declared.

“Well, yer deserved it. I don’t have the time to go traipsing up to that school. They’ve already dealt with it, and now I’ve dealt with it, and I ’ope you’ve learned yer lesson!” That was the end of it. I would go into school the next day, and explain that my Mum would not be coming, and that everybody had dealt with it. They would know, then, and many times besides, that she would have given me a slapping in some way. I was lucky, this time, as I had only met with her angry hand, and had escaped her weapon of choice—the bamboo cane.

The Large family was doubly looked down upon. Not only were we a single parent household with a non-working mother—who was a bit of a floozie by all accounts—but we were crippling poor, dirty, shabby. I remember my sisters and I being intensely embarrassed by our upbringing, mainly because we often hung out at friends’ houses, and saw what little extras an income could provide. My mother tried her best but she was...
limited in her resources, and perhaps, even a little limited in her ingenuity to make things work: deciding on one particular path of an unsavory nature.

~oOo~

Of course, as the years moved on and I grew, I came to understand that Mum had been a spent woman by the time she had married my father. When WWII put the world in a spin in 1939, she had been eager to ‘do her bit for King and country.’ Lying about her age to enlist in the newly formed Auxiliary Territorial Service (which was later subsumed by the Women’s Royal Army Corps after the war) she became a spotlight operator. She would operate huge blinding spotlights along the south-eastern coastal areas and near military installations in England. She was helping to track down enemy air raids of bomber aircraft, V-1 buzz-bombs or doodlebugs, and later V-2 rockets. At 17, and through her formative years, she sacrificed the majority of her teenage life to the carnage, fear, and mayhem of war. Later, when she met and married my father, she hadn’t chosen her mate wisely and suffered through years of mental and physical abuse, endless reams of dirty nappies and a mind-numbing perpetual poverty. What capacity of mind could hold much hope for love, dreams or even just plain kindness? The business of survival was all one could muster on the daily treadmill of life.

~oOo~

How I came to understand an exchange of money for the company of men in my mother’s life, culminated in my spying on her through the kitchen window. I must have been around five when I became aware of no permanent male figure in the household, apart from my brothers. To all intents and purposes, there was no father; I just didn’t have one. I never asked questions, just gullibly accepted that one did not exist. I did become aware, however, of Ernie, a blonde chap, and Bill. Where these gentlemen came from, I cannot say, but Ernie and Bill in particular, were regular visitors to our house, and on such visits, each one of us girls had to say hello and be ‘hugged’ by Ernie, or conversely, make ourselves scarce when Bill came calling.

It’s very difficult, for many people that I talk to, to understand that I dearly loved my mother, but I had trouble, in those early years, liking her. To continue to bear children from a man—my father—who was abusive and a feckless waste of space by all accounts, always puzzled me. Perhaps she was too afraid to tell the man, no, or maybe she simply did not have the energy. Eventually, though, they divorced and these other men trotted by. Sparse conversations with one sister revealed that Ernie not only required favors from my mother in exchange for financial assistance here and there, but he was also allowed to inappropriately touch my sister Cheryl and me. Maybe mother would not receive her rewards if she objected to Ernie’s ‘hugs,’ but his hands would dip and dive to inappropriate places upon our bodies, without restraint.

None of us girls, except Rita, came out of this era of our lives unscathed. Sexual abuse visited itself upon myself and Cheryl by Ernie, on Yvonne by one of our uncles, and in my case, not only Ernie but by one of my brothers. I cannot say whether my mother just shot a blind eye to such shenanigans, or whether...
she was just too fragile to have discovered any of the
terrors that were befalling three of her four daughters.
I tucked it away. It seemed to me, at the time, that
giving my mother one more thing to think about was
out of the question. She could hardly cope with what
she did have. As I learned then, and continued to learn,
I just tucked it away and hoped it would eventually
all go away. What I can say is, when that brother took
his own life at the age of 63, in an incredibly violent
manner, I did not shed a single tear.

When Bill came calling, everyone had to make themselves disappear while my mother and he
connected. On one occasion I pretended that I had gone
to a friend’s house, but instead, I hid down the side of
the house in order to peer into the kitchen window. I was
very young and the image of my mother being slobbered
upon by this man—whom I never really knew—with
his hand up her skirt made me sick to my stomach. It’s
an image that remains etched on my brain to this day, as
does Ernie’s stupid flaccid face and comb-over. If I had
known how mother had come by some of the money we
did have I probably would have gagged on the meals
that the funds provided. Luckily, I was not old enough
to make those connections back then.

Mother attempted to explore more traditional
avenues to drum up finances, but they were not as
fruitful. Begging was one of them. At least, that’s what
it felt like.

“Mrs. Large, I’m terribly sorry, but you
are getting your full benefits for yourself and your
children. They are receiving free school meals, and
free milk. There really is no other money available,”
the condescending, perfectly coiffured clerk droned, as
she tapped newly varnished pink nails on the blotting
pad atop her desk.

“But, that’s not enough to keep a cat alive. ‘ow
am I supposed to keep six kids fed and clothed on what
the council gives me? They’re growing; they need
things,” Mum pleaded, more thinking out loud than
talking to the clerk at the welfare office.

“Mrs. Large, I do understand, really I do, but the
extra check we gave you last month, for shoes for the
two eldest girls, was it, was an extra payment that really
should not have happened. What do you think would
happen if all our clients came in wanting extra payments
each month?” she sarcastically injected. “There is only
so much assistance we can provide. Have you considered
a part-time job to supplement your welfare payments?”
she breathed with eyebrows upraised.

“Oh, not this again! ‘ow can I get a job, part-
time or otherwise with six kids in tow? Every penny I
would earn would be spent on paying someone to look
after them,” Mum hissed at what now appeared to be
a distant, long-suffering stare from the clerk. She was
not allowed to make mention of why someone would
want to bring six children into the world without having
enough resources to feed them, let alone put clothes on
their backs, even though we all knew this was exactly
what she was thinking. Mum upped and left, dragging
us behind her.

~oOo~

Sandra’s mum, Mrs. Hammet, took pity upon Rita and
me. We were the only ones who were allowed into
Sandra’s house, and Mrs. H would smile with an offer
of a biscuit or two. Not even the Watson kids—next-
door neighbors—were afforded such hospitality. True
enough, however, Rita and I appeared to be the only ones on the street who went out of our way to play with Sandra. In our youthful observations we knew that Sandra, despite her seeming lack of want for anything, was still at odds with the world. She was much older than us. Rita was eighteen months older than my seven years, and I would hazard a guess that in 1964, Sandra would have been around thirteen. She was a friendly girl, a little overweight from lack of mobility, long brown hair, brightly colored brown eyes that always appeared distant and dreamlike. Her clothing was what many of us would have called old-fashioned: long pleated skirts, knit twinsets and heavy brown lace-up boots. She dressed more like a thirty-year-old than someone in her teens.

The brown lace-up boots had been medically provided to fit the metal. Sandra had a physical challenge: a stigma that carried an inordinate amount of heaviness in the 50s and 60s. She wore leg-irons as we called them then: braces or calipers on her legs. Nobody ever really got to the bottom of why. Speculation was that as a child Sandra had been the unfortunate recipient of the poliomyelitis virus. Although Salk’s vaccine had been introduced in the UK in 1956, there already had been a massive outbreak of the virus through the early 1950s, with the paralytic strain being the most virulent. To add to this devastation for the Hammets, I also heard (although, some years after the accident), that tunnel vision could be added to the misfortunes that Sandra had to endure. She was not able to see anything clearly to the right or left unless she completely turned ninety degrees in either direction. On this night, in 1964, while assisting us across the road, she hadn’t fully turned.

“OK, we’re off now Sandra. Burke’s Law is on tonight, and we don’t want to miss it!” Rita reported to Sandra who was just coming out of the house to join us again after a visit to the bathroom. We’d had our fill of play and it was time to return home. Getting on for seven in the evening meant that Burke’s Law, a lavish American detective series, from the 1960s, would be playing on our small screen, which served as our black and white television. Despite the poverty, Mum always made sure we had a ‘gogglebox’! We may not have had soles on our shoes, or clean sheets on our beds regularly, but we always had a television. I know that on Friday nights, at seven o’clock, I lost myself in that slick world of Hollywood detectives and their abilities to always solve the case in the nick of time. On this night, however, the smooth boys and their cops’ and robbers’ tales eluded me.

“I’ll cross you across the road,” Sandra said. “NO!” came an ear-splitting shriek through the kitchen window. We all stood, rooted to the spot for maybe five seconds and when no more noise, or action, ensued, Sandra set about encouraging my sister to cross. Rita stood on the opposite side waiting. Within an instant, although reality appeared to don a cloak of ethereal proportions as, after a gentle shove, I went from curb to car to asphalt, tumbling through a series of slow, deliberated moves. I felt no pain. There was no pain, as the scene played out like someone paging through a flipbook of static cartoons; I found myself lying on my back in the middle of the road—a gaggle of sad-looking faces forming above me.

As it was described to me later I had slammed into the front passenger door of a moving car. Like most cars of the time, entry was by a regular door
handle: a tapering grasp of metal that operated up or down to open or close the door. My right arm, at the inside elbow, had become wedged between the door handle and the door. Realizing a small human hanging from the side of his vehicle, the driver pulled up as sharply as he could. The handle, in the impact and as the car rocketed to a halt, had drilled itself into my arm and with gravity pulling me down, the handle stripped back the flesh like peeling a fresh banana. Bones were broken, flesh gouged out, muscles torn, tendons ripped to shreds, blood spattered everywhere, and only a one-inch-wide piece of flesh, on the underside of the elbow, was all that kept my arm from being severed in two. The center of the damage, in and around the elbow, was quickly covered by neighbors who came to assist. Towels, handkerchiefs, and scarves swiftly became tourniquets and bandages. These had been set in place immediately before my mother came on the scene. She had no real understanding of the extent of the damage.

Who can comprehend the reality of the world in those weird moments of trauma? But the scene has played out in my mind from eye-witness accounts over the years.

“Get some towels!”

“Cover that bit up, will ya mate!”

“Oh God, her arm!”

“Get her mother. Where’s her mother?”

“Rita has run home to get her;”

Among the voices I faintly heard my own. Like the scene around me, it felt disembodied. Consciousness seized me and just as quickly avoided me in waves. I saw myself floating above and gawked as my favorite blue velvet dress—one that had been bought at a charity shop just for me, not a hand-me-down (in my eyes)—darkened into a blood-soaked brown.

I remember mouthing, “It’s only a dream, isn’t it?” I cheerfully offered into my mother’s face. “I will wake up in a minute, won’t I?” I continued, all the while feeling dreamlike, without pain, sensing a liminal chaos that I had no control over. “I’ll wake up in a minute, won’t I?” I declared, as shock began sealing a tight bond around me.

Rita had witnessed the entire scene I later discovered, and as far as I can recall received absolutely no assistance for her own trauma—neither of us have ever had any psychiatric counselling around the incident. She had rushed home to rouse the rest of the family. At first, no one believed her, thinking that she was playing an ill-chosen game. My brother Chris came, leaving his half-eaten dinner on the table, but promptly losing that eaten half in the road as soon as he set eyes upon the mess. Mum squatted by my side and held my limp right hand while dripping salty tears onto my face.

The road could not have been more than about twenty-five or thirty feet wide; just enough to have one car, in either direction, squeeze by safely. Parked on our side, half on the curb and half on the road was a small grey minivan. I think this belonged to the Watsons. I was quite small for my age and was unable to see above the parked car, or around it. It really was one of the tiniest vehicles ever to have been made, even to my childish brain, so it would not have been a great sacrifice to walk past it to see the road behind. None of us did that! Sandra scooted Rita across and I remember the last image I had, before hitting the metal and the asphalt: Rita waiting patiently for me to join her on the other side,
probably seeing all in a flurry of surrealism. The car popped out of nowhere, at the very same moment that Sandra offered a gentle push.

Long hours of surgery followed the accident. When I eventually came out of my stupor, I gingerly peered around to see a blood drip in my foot, felt a heavy plaster cast on my right arm and wadded bandages on my left thigh. I knew I had been in an accident, but that was all that had come to mind in that instant—no sounds, no smells, no recollection of pain. My whole body felt like a heavy sack of potatoes and as I lay there, I felt salty streams of tears run down from the corners of my eyes. I was terrified and the floodgates had opened. As I sobbed, the pain eventually came knocking. I wanted nothing more than for someone, anyone, to envelop me in his or her arms and to gently rock me back and forth, telling me all the while, that everything was going to be Okay.

Coming to terms with the knowledge of my mangled arm and ripped apart leg, I had been informed that I had a deep cut on the inside of my left knee, and hefty bandages on areas of my thigh. Skin had been stripped from my thigh to patch up the missing bits on my arm during hasty reconstructive surgery. I was also to learn, after soreness and poking around under my bandages, that more stitches existed in addition to the ones from the cut at the accident. I had a laceration on the top of my left knee—something that, the hospital regrettably informed me, had happened accidentally during surgery. Living in a non-litigious society and coming from a poor family, no mention was ever made of compensation for the ‘slip-up!’

I gradually settled into daily life in the children’s ward at Farnborough Hospital. The hospital, run by the National Health Service was an all-service affair. All walks of life were treated there, from the very rich, to the very poor—seldom did people have private health insurance in those days. During my lengthy stay, I was fortunate enough to find one or two sweet nurses who showed a large measure of concern for my well-being, and who continued to show concern once I had been discharged.

There was the Norland Nanny whom I knew as Nurse Imogen. Norland Nannies are specially trained childcare practitioners who not only understand a child’s needs, but who are also exceptionally medically trained caregivers. Many are required to do a stint in local hospitals as a practicum. The unique nature of their training has seen these specialist individuals rise to the point of elitism today, where the likes of royalty will secure their services. Imogen was a funny looking girl with an enormous heart. She wore glasses, had messy hair that would never be tamed, was short in stature, and although extremely proud to wear her NNs uniform, never seemed comfortable in the ill-fitting garb. She would play with me, but also made a point when she was on shift to help me with my schoolwork. She knew that the visiting tutor—provided by the school department—was generally strapped for time and never quite seemed to have her head in the game. Imogen provided the patience and guidance to help me master writing with my left hand—I am a righty!

I remember Imogen taking me, and another patient—a boy named Stephen who had burned a foot falling onto a live railway line—up on the roof of the hospital one spring day. We enjoyed the beautiful fresh air—a lovely change from the clinical aromas of the ward—and were fascinated with the sights from on
high. Somebody else must have been with us because I have a couple of black and white Polaroids of that adventure. I still smile broadly when I look at them: Stephen standing with one leg aloft, Imogen with her wild hair and me with my right arm, complete with cast, tucked inside my dress making me look like a very portly little girl.

Another two Norland Nannies who were sweet creatures, Jean and Sylvia, kindly took me to the seaside one day: to Bognor Regis, Sussex. The grandmother of Sylvia lived in Bognor and we all went to tea with the grandmother. I just adored being fussed over that day: beach, cotton candy (Candy Floss we Brits call it!), a donkey ride, and a sumptuous afternoon tea resplendent with finger sandwiches, cream cakes, and lashings of orange squash. I was queen for the day! None of this had ever been even a fleeting element in my life thus far.

Then there was Staff Nurse Reader. A professional woman who had worked hard to move through the ranks of the nursing profession—she was just one small hop from being Matron, the highest rank upon a ward of nursing professionals—who possessed a melting heart for small children. She brought me to her house for dinner with her family. She, her husband, her two sons and I had a huge family spread, or it seemed huge to me. I cannot remember what we ate, but recall being agog at the abundance of food. I think that this might have been a time when my eyes truly popped from inside their sockets! It was the first ever real people and conversation-centered meal I had ever experienced. There were no petty arguments, no gibes or accusations and no mother rising in anger, voice accelerating up octaves to the point where one of us would start sniveling. This was such a unique experience for me that I drank it in voraciously.

Staff Nurse Reader treated me like the daughter she had never had and I lapped it up. Here were two adults, and even her two young sons, who were showing genuine interest for the human I was. They wanted me to talk, to offer my opinions, my thoughts, my ideas, despite the fact that I was only eight years old. They showed me, by their actions and their welcome that I had value. The attentions of Imogen, my trip to Bognor, and the many visits and outings with Staff Nurse Reader came several months after I had reigned my twisted vengeance upon Miriam.

While in the hospital, the overwhelming loneliness that had stuck to me like a second skin, was crippling. Visitors were virtually non-existent, a situation that became a trend over the three months of my stay. My Auntie Audrey did stop by one afternoon, but she became angry with me because I would not sit still and chat with her. She had brought me a couple of comics, and some sweets, but she seemed to want me to be immensely grateful of her presence. Seeing as she offered no hugs, no kisses, and no words of reassurance from which I might reap comfort, I was unsure how to deal with this distant woman. She had married twice, never produced her own children, and had always been insanely angry at her sister—my mother—for producing a brood for whom, she knew, my mother had a diminishing capacity for care. This Aunt may well, thinking retrospectively, have understood the trying limitations of what her sister could offer her family, but I never witnessed any effort of assistance and neither do the family talk of such. Of course, Audrey was not
required, obligated, or passionately involved to do so and therein lie deep questions on what family really means to each and every one of us, along with the expectations each of us have of our relatives.

Mum did try to visit, at least once, I seem to remember. I can see now that it must have been very difficult for her to split herself in several different directions: flustered in trying to get the younger siblings looked after by the older siblings—no one was a fan of the chore. It had been a stressful situation, she told me, to make sure that my brothers and sisters were not antagonizing each other—which was something of the norm in our household—and then she had struggled to take two buses to get to the hospital. My Auntie Audrey had a car, but she had never attempted to offer to drive Mum to visit me. It was, however, extremely comforting to see her face, and to have that rarest of rare moments: having her all to myself for an hour. Until I became an adult, this would be the only time in which I had Mum all to myself. I forgot about all the rubbish in our lives, and I concentrated on telling Mum all the stories of the ward, its patients and staff and what life was like in there. I didn’t talk about the accident, and I believed Mum was relieved for that. She left smiling, despite having made sure to scold me for not talking to Audrey much. I brushed that aside as I was so thankful to have been the center of my mother’s attention, even for that all too brief hour.

Gradually, the days went by, and I became a fixture and Miriam arrived. In the few days since Miriam had been admitted for a tonsillectomy, it hadn’t taken long for my hatred of her to consume me. Of course, many years later and throughout my life, I have cringed at the overpowering malice that I delivered upon poor Miriam. Just as I had had no choice in where I landed on earth, she hadn’t either, and she should not have had to be terrorized by the likes of me.

I did—I think several months after I left the hospital, although she had long gone—go to Miriam’s house. My mother had found out about what I had done and insisted that I apologize. Despite all her shortcomings, her drained physical and mental capacity, Mum truly wanted others—especially those that any one of us kids might have wronged—to know that we had principles. Her heart was in the right place despite her daily battles with the detritus of life. They may have been gossamer-thin principles, but she desperately tried to have us understand right from wrong, and understand that making amends by apologizing was part of that deal.

The pain of the accoutrements of a life I believed I would never have, was still smarting; now I had to endure it further—in Miriam’s bloody house. The insanity of it all gripped me tight in the gut. I was the one who had suffered! Yes, I had exacted some cruel moves upon her when she was already feeling poorly. But now, Miriam, in the comfort of her home, was going to reap her revenge and watch me suffer as she and her parents would be able to dish out the “she knows no better, she’s from a poor family” routine.

We went to tea one Saturday or Sunday afternoon. Even though I was already remorseful of my actions, I still couldn’t help being miffed at Miriam’s luck and my misfortunes, knowing where I sat in the economic pecking order. Her house was on the south side of Blackbrook Lane, a smart-looking street of semi-detached, privately-owned well-appointed c.1930s large houses. Each sported beautiful semi-circular leaded-
light bay windows in the front, half pebble-dashed walls, pseudo-Tudor paneling and attached garages. The insides were spacious, comfortable, with Miriam’s—or so it seemed to my young mind—being expensively decorated. I especially loved her couch and armchairs in which one would almost disappear and luxuriate in the softness. Miriam’s wrap-around gentleness was a far cry from our stiff settee where there was never a space to sit because it was always piled high with old newspapers and magazines, along with several suspect stains. Miriam’s house also had wall-to-wall carpeting and that fascinated me. I wanted to roll around every inch of it to feel its bounce and smoothness. I could never had rolled around in my house as we only had wall-to-wall linoleum and the occasional grimy, moth-eaten rug and the filth appalled me.

Her house was only a half mile or so from mine, and I felt that the residents of Blackbrook Lane and other homeowners in the area must have been incredibly upset when, in the 1950s, low-income housing of row after row of joined dwellings all looking exactly the same — same front door, same windows and handkerchief-sized gardens — sprang up as a neighboring community.

That afternoon tea stood still in time, like a stage tableau. The surrealness illustrated my mother and me in what would have been considered our Sunday best attire. We sat in Miriam’s sumptuous living room, mother holding a bone china cup and saucer, which was bedecked in flowers and rimmed in gold plate. Her hands tried to hold onto this dainty crockery without crushing it. I had, over my short eight years, understood the full force of her large, hard-working, hands and now they were accentuated by the delicate china. Those hands had seen many hours of toil, had desperately tried to hang on when all else around her was crashing down, and had, in the early days, held each one of us, cradled. I remembered wishing that the hands were more akin to the cup.

Mrs. Miriam—honestly, I have never known their last name—sat perched on the edge of a deeply-cushioned chair wearing sharpenly pressed slacks of brown, a cream-colored, short-sleeved sweater, a row of pearls resting on her sternum. Her hair was neatly arranged in a bun in the back. She wore no makeup except for bright pink lipstick which left a ring on the cup as she sipped her tea. She held her cup in one hand and the saucer in the other — naturally, the pinky finger on the cup hand was held high, prodding the air.

Miriam sat in her flouncy, pink-flowered dress and we glared at each other—I, in my grey school uniform pleated skirt and a navy-blue sweater that had probably belonged to one of my brothers in the past for the shoulders drooped down to my elbows and there was a stain on one sleeve. Miriam had bright white ankle socks with little frills around the tops of them. My once-white socks sagged at my ankles as the elastic had given up any attempt to grab my calves long ago.

“Mrs. Large, I hope that life is treating you well, and now that Karen is out of the hospital, there are not too many difficulties arising from her accident,” Mrs. Miriam drawled in her ‘oh-so-frightfully’ intonations.

“Wehl,” my mother chimed trying desperately to imitate the Mrs. Miriam’s of this world, but succeeding only in making herself sound ridiculous, and embarrassing me to where I wanted to throw something at her. My mother’s printed dress was shabby and faded. Looking closely, I could see a stain

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or two from where she might have wiped her hands during cooking. Her hair, beginning to grey around the temples but scraped back from her face was left to its own devices. She wore no makeup, never had. What always fascinated me about Mum, though, was her rosy cheeks. She had dozens of little red spider veins in two huge circles around her cheekbones. These gave her face a healthy hue despite the multitude of wrinkles that framed the rest of her visage. I was relieved to discover that she had put her teeth in for this encounter. There was never anything more mortifying than watching my mother try to make small talk, or even engage in an argument, when her gums were gleaming and her lips were left to flap around without the support of teeth.

“We ’ave had to go to physiotherapy,” mother continued, “course, ya know,” she was definitely feeling a little more relaxed as she was unable to keep up the pretense of talking with a plum in her mouth. “Ya know, they plastered her up for two whole months with ‘er ‘and sticking up at right angles to ‘er wrist. I dunno what they were thinking! It’s only natural that something would’ve got stuck, right?”

“Naturally, Mrs. Large. How bad is the damage? Did the doctors explain why they did such a thing? Oh! Do have a slice of cake. I made this Victoria Sponge this morning. I used some of the preserves we made from the fruit of our garden. Do you garden, Mrs. Large?” Mrs. Miriam mused.

My mother shot a quick glance at me to let me know that she had moved from uncomfortable, to semi-comfortable and straight back to downright awkward within minutes. She wasn’t sure which question to answer, or in what order. So, she just plowed in, “Yes, would love a slice of sponge. It’s very good of yer to go to the trouble, dear.” I was angry then. If she had refused the cake, we could have high-tailed it as soon as our cups and glasses were drained. Now, we were definitely trapped for another half hour or more. Mum went on, “I do garden,” she announced proudly, “I mainly do veg, with six mouths…,” she paused, seemingly not wanting to perseverate on the difficulty of raising her brood. “The doctors thought they were doing the right thing … they were worried she would lose the use of that ‘and and wanted to give it support. ‘Course they forgot, somehow, that without movement the tendon is gonna freeze.” She finished and stuffed a huge chunk of sponge into her face. She wasn’t going to pass up this bit of luxury, no matter how much of an act of charity it seemed.

“Miriam, dear,” Mrs. Miriam crooned, “Why don’t you take Karen to play on your swing, outside?” Miriam came across the room and held out her hand. I froze. I wanted no part of it. This girl whom I had hated so vehemently for everything she stood for, even though I knew nothing of her character. I sank further into the back of the couch, and shook my head with vengeance. I just kept shaking my head.

“She’s not feeling a ‘undred percent right now. I’m sorry Miriam,” Mum said almost between clenched teeth. I was obviously embarrassing her again. “But,” mum continued, “she does ‘ave something to say to you, don’t yer Karen?” I glared at my mother, abhorrent that she was going to go through with this. I wanted to shout from the rooftops that I was not to blame, but how could I have even grasped that then? All I did know was that this was embarrassing and intensely unfair.

The apology was a bit of a blur but I do remember sniveling and fleeing from Miriam’s house. I have
absolutely no knowledge of how my mother dealt with my escape and her extrication from Miriam’s household. I do remember the walk home. Mum gripped my hand so tightly that it went numb. She marched, as though she were back in her army uniform. While marching, I wriggled to break free from her iron grip; she let fly a ‘talking to’ that would have made a vicar’s ears curl. I was an ungrateful insolent child who could use a good spanking to make me understand. As I listened, and marched, I imagined Miriam going up to her princess bedroom and playing with more dolls than I could shake a stick at. I thought about how surprised I was that I was going to be returning to school the following week and how eager I was to re-enter Mrs. de Beer’s classroom, back into my old seat and desk. I thought about how one day my arm would be normal again, how life would return to its normal routine, and how I would be able to stop tucking away bad things, and be able to power forward with my little life. I knew that Mum had tried her best in the face of Mrs. Miriam, and I knew, equally, that I had not truly apologized, but rather had shown myself and my mother to be just those people who, ‘knew no better; who were from a poor background!’

Many years later, it was important for me to realize that where I had come from was not something that could, or should, have defined me. Awakening, I considered, most probably began with Nurse Imogen who had taken a shine to me. It continued with the two other Norland Nannies and with Staff Nurse Reader. Each of them appreciated a value within me: a worth, a viability and an intelligence that mattered. So, in the strangest of ways, the accident and my subsequent persecution of poor Miriam, were blessings in warped disguise. How else was I going to be able to wade through the quagmire?

~oOo~

I moved out of my childhood home in my early teens. I was working and had finally decided that I needed the space and independence of my own place. Rita and I initially moved in together but that was short-lived when we realized, just as siblings at home, we lacked the compatibility to make living in the same space possible. Chris, Yvonne, Cheryl, and Raymond had all been long gone: either married or living with girlfriends/boyfriends. We all worked; none of us had taken up further education. I began to understand the difficulties and belt-tightening moves that one had to pull in order to keep one’s head above water. It wasn’t easy running one’s own home and I now understood some of the ‘robbing Peter to pay Paul’ tactics that my mother had experienced trying to raise us and to keep the home running. Although I certainly didn’t have children at this point in my life, making the salary stretch while meeting the rent payments, the utility bills, and finding a few coppers to spend on food, seemed an ever-increasing nightmare. I also tried, as often as I could, to visit Mum on a Sunday afternoon and bring her a few stocks of tea, sugar, milk, bread, and eggs. I don’t know what compelled me to do so, but I knew that I had to do it.

We commonly stayed in touch and many years later when I moved to the United States, I telephoned regularly along with writing letters. These were my favorite. I loved to tell the stories of my life in the US and let Mum know about my husband and his life in the US Air Force. I also sent lots of photographs of our son and daughter and talked endlessly about how
different things were on my side of the Atlantic. Her responses usually spoke of the weather, how she was ‘sick and tired’ of one or another of my siblings, but always sent oodles of love and kisses for the children. She still maintained, as she had done from the very beginning of my relationship with Kevin, that because he was a G.I., he would ‘love me and leave me.’ This was a giant throwback to WWII when many G.I.’s had been stationed in the UK, had dated local women, unfortunately got them pregnant and then returned to the states, leaving the girl and unborn children behind. Not every G.I., or every local girl, found themselves in such a quandary, but several did and obviously—although she had never discussed the issue with me—Mum may have had one or two army comrades who found themselves abandoned in this way. It was this kind of perseveration on tinges of life back in the war, back in the army, that would persistently seep into Mum’s thoughts and expression. This fueled my understanding that that segment of her life had been incredibly important to her and that back then was where she had possessed the deepest passion, the greatest animation she had ever really known.

Making sense of all this, obviously, took time—time, perhaps, that continues. I’m not happy that I can say that I loved Mum, but didn’t like her. It’s disingenuous for me to say so. I try to work on this daily, but I do believe she understood the extent of my love before she departed this earth.

When I received a call from her in her hospital bed grumbling that no one would bring her a clean nightie, I was hurt and shocked but was immediately spurred into action. That one phone call sent me into nurturing mode. I hopped a plane, even though I was in the middle of a graduate program and was student teaching at the time – changing my career much later in life – I had very little money to spare. I arrived at the hospital to find a little, grey-looking, bored lady sitting in a chair beside a bed. The life in her eyes had almost completely snuffed out. At that time, I had had two brothers and three sisters living in the United Kingdom, but not one of them were available to bring Mum a fresh nightie. My relationship with my siblings was not a strong one. I traveled across the Atlantic to do just that, change her bloody nightie.

I spent two weeks with Mum, liaising with her doctors and caregivers to discover that she would not be able to return home after this spell in the hospital. I pleaded with the medical staff to let me take her back to the United States, but I had definitely missed my window of opportunity there, as she was now too weak to make the journey. With limited funds and time, I set about finding a care home for her. I refused to let her go to a government run care home, as having visited a couple, I couldn’t bare to think that she would be propped up in a chair and left to snooze all day long. She was having difficulty getting around by now – her knees had always denied her nimble mobility – and she was suffering from chronic COPD, congestive heart failure and ulcerated legs. Seeing the nurses change her dressings, I couldn’t believe how much liquid could ooze from just one leg! My mind was cast back to the wadded layers of blood-soaked gauze on my left thigh and right arm. I thought about how disgusting I felt then, and now understood how miserable my mother’s existence had probably become.

I moved rapidly. I scouted advertisements, called local authorities, visited homes in several areas
near the seaside in Kent (the county in England where we had all come from) and finally found a superb small home – it only took ten elderly folks – that was family run and perfect. In between these frantic administrative and physical tasks, I spent as many hours with Mum in hospital as I could. We worked on several crosswords (her favorite) and discussed the appalling political situation in the United Kingdom and around the world. We spat our dissatisfaction at rising prices and the diminishing quality of life for the average person. She told me how terrible the hospital food was and said that she would give her right arm for a lovely plate of fish and chips. I smuggled them in one evening despite the fact that they were almost cold by the time I got to the hospital, and we spread them out across her bedside tray table. We gorged with alacrity.

When I left her to return to my family, my graduate program, and my home in the US with the promise that I would be back as soon as I could, she was smiling broadly, was sitting upright in her chair, had recovered some of that gorgeous pinkness she usually wore in her cheeks, and was sparkling in her clean nightie. She was shining in a way that I had never seen her shine before.

On the very first day of my very first, ever, teaching position, I received ‘the’ call. Just two and half months had lapsed – containing many heated conversations with my brother, Chris, the eldest child in the family, and the rightful ‘head of the household’ in which he seemed unable to ‘step up to the plate’ – since I had spent my last hours with Mum. Within twenty-four hours of ‘the’ call, I was at the hospital but declined the doctors’ offer to see my mother in the morgue. So much heartache from across the years ensued, and because I had wanted more for her at the end, which had not materialized, I was devastated. I contacted each of my siblings, letting them know that I had arrived late on the Friday. The following Monday was a holiday and so I could not obtain the death certificate until the following Tuesday. Each one, in their own particular way, responded with a variation of, “OK, tell us where and when to show up and we will!”

Note on Author: Karen is pursuing her second master’s degree under the guidance of Dr. Elizabeth Bidinger of the English Department at Worcester State University. Karen refers to herself as the eternal student as she has earned a bachelor’s in liberal studies from Assumption University, a master’s in education from Clark University, an education specialist’s degree in curriculum and instruction from UMass, Lowell, and hopes to complete this master’s degree, in English, in fall 2023.
The Uncanny Gaze: *Nope’s* Feminine Hero and Monster

Ryan Juliano, *Master of Arts, Department of English, Bridgewater State University, rjuliano@student.bridgew.edu*

**Abstract:** Jordan Peele’s *Nope* is a recent addition to the horror film genre that is jam packed with symbolism and metaphor, but the main attraction, as with many horror films, is the monster Jean Jacket. *Nope* is a spoof on the UFO/alien invasion story, with Jean Jacket standing in as the twist; he is an airborne alien monster that has the flat, round shape of a flying saucer, but otherwise mostly resembles a vagina. *Nope*’s protagonists are set up against and obsessed with Jean Jacket, their main objective over the course of the narrative is to capture him on film. In other words, they wish to capture him with their gaze. In “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” Laura Mulvey argues that women in film serve as visual objects for the pleasure of the male gaze of both the audience and male characters (1998, 62). While Jean Jacket is gendered as masculine by the film’s characters, there is no getting around his uncanny vaginal resemblance (which the characters never comment on). Regardless of the he/his/him pronouns given to him, he is a (literal) giant representation of a woman’s genitals and becomes an object of fixation for the gaze of the mostly male characters and for the audience. On the other hand, Em (*Nope’s* one female protagonist) has the opposite experience throughout the film. Em is never made an object to be looked at; she is an active participant in the plans to capture Jean Jacket and she is not sexualized at any point in the narrative. In fact, Em feels almost like a stance against Mulvey and the final girl trope that is featured in so many horror movies.

**Keywords:** *Nope; film; feminist theory; psychoanalysis; gender studies; Jordan Peele.*

The focus of my article will be the differences in how Em and Jean Jacket are presented throughout *Nope’s* narrative, Em being the opposite of everything Mulvey says a woman on screen is, while Jean Jacket falls under much of Mulvey’s argument, though through fear more than sexualization. To do so I will be looking at Freud’s concept of the uncanny, which he describes as “that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar” (2003, 124), alongside several critics who consider film. Steven Schneider aids in understanding horror movie monsters in relation to Freud, marking how fictional monsters evoke a reconfirmation of surmounted infantile beliefs (Schneider 1999). Cynthia Freeland offers her own framework for giving feminist readings of horror films that “would emphasize the structure of horror films and place special weight on their gender ideologies” (1996, 204). Like Freeland, Barbara Creed looks at horror films through a feminist lens, but she focuses more on how the feminine is made monstrous within the genre. A significant portion of her book, *The Monstrous-Feminine*, focuses on how “[I]n many films the monster commits her or his dreadful acts in a
location which resembles the womb” (1993, 53). Jean Jacket may not represent the womb specifically, but he does represent the entrance to the womb.

In *The Uncanny* Freud explicates a long excerpt from a German text on the terms *heimlich* and *unheimlich*. The connection between these two words interests him because while *heimlich* relates to both what is comfortable and known, as well as what is kept hidden and secret, *unheimlich* only relates to the latter two ideas (2003, 132). Freud concludes that “the uncanny… is in some way a species of the familiar” (2003, 134). The uncanny can induce fear or unease since it comes from what was once familiar but has been repressed. Freud breaks that down into two categories of repressed infantile wishes and surmounted infantile beliefs. Schneider focuses on the latter in his discourse regarding horror movie monsters, writing, “What makes horror film monsters at least potentially horrifying…is the fact that they metaphorically embody surmounted beliefs; to the extent that they actually succeed in horrifying viewers, however, it is because the manner in which they embody surmounted beliefs is invested with cultural relevance” (Schneider 1999). Creatures like zombies, vampires, ghosts, aliens, and more remind us of fantastical beliefs we held as children, such as the possibility of the dead being reanimated. However, their ability to truly terrify an audience is dependent on how relevant a particular horror monster or concept is to society during any given time period, which is why horror films (like any genre) have evolved over time. Schneider refers to older horror tales, like *Dracula* and *Frankenstein*, as “R-rated fairy tales” before stating that, “our overfamiliarity with the fictional worlds these monsters inhabit has rendered ineffective their efforts to horrify, since they no longer engender in us the requisite conflict of judgment” (Schneider 1999). He goes on to say that recent horror films (as of the early 2000s) have made attempts to move on from monsters that audiences are overfamiliar with. I agree with Schneider, *Dracula* is almost a trope in contemporary storytelling and horror filmmakers have consistently been moving away from traditional scares toward more creative terrifying concepts, such as Ari Aster’s disturbing *Midsommar*, which takes place almost entirely in daylight.

*Jean Jacket* is also a new type of horror movie monster, Peele’s clever alteration of the UFO. He is a good example of a monster “whose sheer novelty is supposed to overcome the conventionality of the fictional worlds they inhabit” (Schneider 1999). When it comes to the uncanny in fiction, Freud claims that it needs to be considered separately as instances in fiction that would be considered uncanny in the real world are not uncanny in the fictional world where they occur (2003, 155-56). I disagree with this point. Uncanny instances in fiction can be just as uncanny in the fictional worlds where they occur as they would be in the real world, which is the situation in *Nope*. The world in which the film takes place is seemingly just like real life; outside of Jean Jacket there are no fantasy or science fiction elements to the narrative. The other characters are even caught off guard by Jean Jacket’s existence. They expect to see an alien spacecraft before he is revealed to be a flying monster. Jean Jacket is clearly not a normal occurrence in the fictional world of the narrative, he is as uncanny to the film’s human characters as he is to the audience. The source of his uncanniness (other than his being

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a flying alien monster) is in what he resembles: a woman’s genitals. *Nope*’s male protagonists (and Em) develop a fascination with Jean Jacket. All of them become fixated on him one way or another, mostly in the form of seeing him as a commodity. Freud writes, “neurotic men state that to them there is something uncanny about the female genitals. But what they find uncanny… is actually the entrance to man’s ‘old home’, the place where everyone once lived” (2003, 151). For *Nope*’s cast, and the audience, Jean Jacket serves as an unconscious reminder of their place of origin, which is their mother’s vagina/womb. Mulvey argues that in cinema a woman on screen serves as an object for both male characters and male spectators to look at, unifying the two views without breaking the narrative (1998, 62). In looking at Jean Jacket, the characters and audience become one in being reminded of where they originated from.

There is a level of respect, almost reverence, that some of the human characters have for Jean Jacket. They are not even trying to kill him throughout the narrative (though he does die in the end), just capture footage of him. Two characters have the most respect for Jean Jacket: Em’s brother, OJ, and a renowned cinematographer they convince to help them in their endeavor, Antlers Holst. OJ is a rancher who trains Hollywood horses for movies and we see Holst contemplating what is presumably his own footage of animal predators fighting in the wild. They both recognize that Jean Jacket is a part of the natural or animal world, which is a world they both interact with. Even Jean Jacket’s name originates from OJ’s experiences with animals. The original Jean Jacket was one of the Haywoods’ horses from before the events of the film. Em was supposed to train him when she was younger, but the horse was taken to be used on a movie set before she could. OJ names the flying vagina/womb Jean Jacket after the horse, marking the vagina/womb as another to-be-trained animal.

When it comes to the womb being represented in horror films, Creed states that it is normally shown in a couple different fashions, one of which she calls “intra-uterine settings.” She writes, “These intra-uterine settings consist of dark, narrow, winding passages leading to a central room, cellar or other symbolic place of birth” (1993, 53). At one point in *Nope* we do see numerous people inside of Jean Jacket. It is fleshy, claustrophobic, and does physically resemble the interior of the womb, though Jean Jacket’s victims do not end up in any kind of chamber; they remain in a uterine-like tube that eventually crushes them to death. In regard to representation of the womb in horror films, Creed also states:

The womb is terrifying *per se* and within patriarchal discourses it has been used to represent woman’s body as marked, impure and a part of the natural/animal world… Representations of the birth scenario in these films point to the split between the natural world of the mother and the paternal symbolic which is regulated by a completely different set of rules, rules that reinforce proper civilized codes of behavior. (1993, 49)

A woman’s body, and by extension the womb, is a part of the animal world that has its own rules that are separate from those of civilization. While the human characters are coordinating their plan to draw Jean Jacket out to be filmed, OJ says, “Every animal
got rules.” OJ works with animals every day, so he recognizes that nature and every creature in it has a set of stipulations to follow, from horses to flying vaginal monsters. He sees that Jean Jacket – the womb – has a role in nature, he understands the rules, and follows those rules. One of Jean Jacket’s rules is that if you do not look him in the eye then he will not eat you. There is perhaps a Freudian argument here about avoiding reminders of the repressed and averting the gaze away from the uncanny. Holst, however, stares at his origin head on. During the climax of the film, when the plan to capture Jean Jacket on film is in full swing, Holst steps out from cover to get the impossible shot. The light is perfect as Holst aims both his eyes and camera upward directly at Jean Jacket, holding his gaze as he is eaten. Holst’s career and artistry revolves around his gaze. He has to look, but is not exploitive about it. At this point Holst understands the shot will cost him his life. All that matters to him is that he is in the perfect time and place to capture the perfect shot. Otherwise, he knows he has no control over what he is filming, all he can do is watch. The cinematographer appreciates what he sees and willingly accepts the return to his place of origin.

Another would-be cameraman arrives on the scene of Jean Jacket’s capture who is exploitive in his gaze. As the protagonists are getting prepared, a man on a motorcycle with a mirrored helmet appears; this character goes unnamed in the film but is credited as Ryder Muybridge. Em identifies him as a TMZ paparazzi and he immediately shoves a camera in her face. In a review of Nope, Raiann Bu addresses both Ryder and Holst’s fatal gazes:

As the TMZ reporter drives into the ranch, his face is completely obscured by a mirrored helmet, only reflecting what he is trying to film, and he dies anonymously. Filmmaker Antlers Holst dreams of the perfect shot, which he pays the ultimate price for. Much of the plot is driven by the prospect of winning big and capitalizing on natural phenomena. It questions how much humanity we have lost through chasing the next big thing, the spectacle. (Bu 2022)

While Holst films his subject head on and with some degree of respect, Ryder is only characterized by his gaze. His helmet reflects everything around him that can be potentially gawked at, he has no face outside of what he can see. Ryder is eaten by Jean Jacket like Holst, but as he is being sucked up into the alien’s body, he repeatedly screams for someone to get him his camera. For Ryder the moment is a scoop, it is a spectacle as Bu mentions. Jean Jacket, the womb and its place in nature, is an object to be gazed at in the way that Mulvey describes. With his mirrored helmet and need to look, Ryder is the embodiment of the unification of character gaze and audience gaze. Mulvey says, “The cinema satisfies a primordial wish for pleasurable looking, but it also goes further, developing scopophilia in its narcissistic aspect” (1998, 60). Similarly, in regards to horror cinema specifically, Creed says, “Viewing the horror film signifies a desire not only for perverse pleasure (confronting sickening, horrific images/being filled with terror/desire for the undifferentiated) but also a desire, once having been filled with perversity, taken pleasure in perversity, to throw up, throw out, eject the abject (from the safety of the spectator’s seat)” (1993, 10). Mulvey’s use of the term scopophilia expresses an erotic sense of
viewing. While I would not go that far in describing general film viewing, I do agree that there can be a base level of perverse pleasure that comes in watching cinema, especially horror films. As Creed points out there is an odd thrill that comes with confronting terror from the safety of the audience. In a 2015 reflection on her original argument, Mulvey states how she as a viewer now has more control over a film’s action than any male hero because of the advent of digital viewing technology (Mulvey). Thanks to streaming and the ability to pause, rewind, or fast forward, any audience member has some degree of control over what they see happening on screen. Ryder represents the thrill Creed mentions in his embodiment of the gazes, but he also represents the potential desire for viewer control over what is being viewed. His gaze is his power. While he does not view from the safety of the audience, he does perform his viewing with an air of perverted joy and desires to be in control of his viewership.

Mulvey focuses heavily on how women are viewed in the type of exploitive gaze that Ryder uses. She states that the male gaze projects a fantasy on to the figure of women who are styled in a way meant for erotic impact. Of film in particular, Mulvey says, “The presence of a woman is an indispensable element of spectacle in normal narrative film, yet her visual presence tends to work against the development of a storyline, to freeze the flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation. This alien presence then has to be integrated into cohesion with the narrative” (1998, 62). Women’s traditional role in cinema is to be a visual object, but many modern filmmakers are thankfully moving beyond such a view, Peele being one of them. In Nope, neither Em nor Jean Jacket stop the flow of the narrative, in fact they are both instrumental in keeping it moving. Em is never made an object and outside of a single line of dialogue in which she comments on her sex life she is never sexualized or depicted in an erotic fashion. Jean Jacket on the other hand is treated as an object, though not exactly in the way Mulvey describes. Instead of being a feminine visual object of erotic desire or sexualization, Jean Jacket is a feminine object of fear, which stems from his vaginal resemblance. Creed spends a chapter discussing the vagina dentata (the mythical toothed vagina) and male fears of women’s genitals being a trap or black hole that could swallow them and eviscerate them (1993, 106). In relation to horror films, she states:

The vagina dentata is particularly relevant to the iconography of the horror film, which abounds with images that play on the fear of castration and dismemberment… The horror film offers many images of a general nature which suggest dismemberment. Victims rarely die cleanly or quickly. Rather, victims die agonizing messy deaths – flesh is cut, bodies violated, limbs torn asunder. In films like Jaws, Tremors, Alien, and Aliens, where the monster is a devouring creature, victims are ripped apart or eaten alive. (1993, 107)

If Nope had existed when Creed wrote her book I have no doubt it would be included in the short list of films she provides above. Jean Jacket is a devouring creature. Beyond that, he is a devouring vagina, the very horrific trap of men’s fears that Creed mentions. Two points from the film come to mind when contemplating Creed’s argument. The first being that Jean Jacket is depicted and recognized as a predator.
OJ remarks as much when the human characters’ plan is being discussed, saying he is a territorial predator. When asked how to get Jean Jacket to reveal himself, OJ says, “Ring the dinner bell.” OJ knows they need to bait him out into the open with the temptation of a potential meal. *Nope’s* human characters, and by extension the audience, come to fear Jean Jacket—the vagina—as a carnivore.

The second point is a scene I referenced earlier, which is when the audience sees a number of victims inside of Jean Jacket. This scene illustrates Creed’s argument in a number of ways, the first being that a giant flying vagina literally becomes a devouring trap that brutalizes people. Second, as Creed mentions with many horror films, the people inside of Jean Jacket die a horrible death. When we see Jean Jacket’s interior there are numerous people trapped inside screaming as they are pushed further in while the camera pans upward, going deeper with them. After several moments the topmost person reaches a blockage, one of the Haywoods’ horses that was eaten earlier and looks to be partially digested. Several scenes later the people’s screams we can hear emanating from inside of Jean Jacket suddenly stop as he contracts and everyone inside is crushed. The entire sequence involves several horrific visuals and sounds, but it is immediately followed up by something just as severe. Creed states that, “Menstruation and childbirth are seen as the two events in woman’s life which have placed her on the side of the abject. It is woman’s fertilizable body which aligns her with nature and threatens the integrity of the patriarchal symbolic order” (1993, 50). Jean Jacket being a flying vagina places him on the side of the abject, as Creed would say, and his reverse birth method of devouring people even more so since it aligns him with the womb that can be or is being fertilized. The final nail in the coffin is Jean Jacket’s menstruation. After he has crushed the people he has eaten, Jean Jacket hovers over the Haywood house. Em and Fry’s Electronics employee, Angel, are hiding inside the house when they start to see things clattering to the ground outside. Then they see blood dripping down the windows. Outside, Jean Jacket is releasing the inedible detritus and blood of his victims from his vaginal opening. We are shown an impressive shot of him raining blood down upon the house; the vagina menstruating as a vision of horror. It is as close to a literal representation of Creed’s point about the vagina/womb as a horror movie monster as we could get.

*Nope* is not a film that is about gender roles, but with the combination of Jean Jacket’s form and viewing the film with Mulvey’s argument in mind, gender roles do hang over the narrative. Critics like Creed also remind us that in many films in the horror genre young women are usually the primary victims of killers or monsters. Freeland directly responds to Mulvey and Creed in her essay “Feminist Frameworks.” She first frames Mulvey specifically around horror films stating that women are typically visual objects sacrificed to a film’s monster for the audience’s sake of understanding said monster before a male investigator comes in to complete the story (1996, 96). However, Freeland goes on to describe her own suggested framework for feminist readings of horror films, writing:

> My proposal for producing feminist readings or interpretations of horror films is that we should focus on their representational contents and on the nature of their representational practices, so

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as to scrutinize how the films represent gender, sexuality, and power relations between sexes. I suggest that feminist readings of horror film proceed by looking at various crucial sorts of film elements. Some of these elements concern the representation of women and monsters within films. (1996, 204)

As opposed to Mulvey, Freeland wishes to treat each individual horror film viewed as its own artifact and parse its particular representational concepts, instead of looking at cinema in general terms. If it is not evident by now, I agree with Freeland’s framework. Her suggestion above is to focus on a film’s representational components (a technique that seems unavoidable when parsing any film as an individual artifact), which I have done throughout my reading of *Nope* in regard to the film’s representations of women, monsters, and gaze. Creed also contemplates horror films individually, giving readings of numerous films in her book. However, she and Freeland have differing views when it comes to gender depictions. Creed takes a psychoanalytic approach to her criticism of horror films and of gender she states that in some films, “the monstrous is produced at the border which separates those who take up their proper gender roles from those who do not” (1993, 11). Freeland pushes back against feminist film readings framed through psychoanalysis. One of her objections is that such theories rely on gendered notions of male and female that feminism finds problematic (1996, 204). I agree with Freeland’s point of view on gender, especially in regard to *Nope*, my reason being Jean Jacket. What is Jean Jacket’s gender role? He is gendered by the film’s other characters as masculine, but his form is definitely feminine. Moreover, what makes him monstrous has nothing to do with his gender role.

An additional layer in discussing *Nope*’s gender ideologies stems from Mulvey’s views on male versus female agency in film. Mulvey’s argument is that male characters in film are active while female characters are passive. She writes, “An active/passive heterosexual division of labor has similarly controlled narrative structure... Hence the split between spectacle and narrative supports the man’s role as the active one forwarding the story, making things happen” (1998, 63). Everything I have discussed regarding Jean Jacket thus far already complicates this viewpoint, but if we look at him solely as a masculine identified character then Jean Jacket does fall into the active male slot. His presence and actions play a major role in moving the narrative forward, though he is the antagonist and not a protagonist. Em (who is feminine in both form and identification) easily falls under Mulvey’s updated view of “more-nuanced images of gender and more-complex concepts of narrative” (2015) in film while standing against Mulvey’s original argument based on the male gaze as she is neither a visual object nor an inactive character. Although we do hear about Em’s sexual relationship in passing (and in doing so even learn that she is queer), she is never sexualized. We never see her dress in a provocative way, take part in a sex scene, or even be leer at by any of the male characters. At no point is she made an object of erotic gazing. And at no point is she inactive. Em is arguably the most active of *Nope*’s protagonists, which is highlighted through her relationship with OJ. During the scene when Em is introduced, we see OJ reluctantly starting a safety meeting on a commercial shoot. He is reserved, quiet,
and maybe a little awkward; he is more of an animal person than a people person. Then Em comes in with an abundance of charismatic energy, delivering a rehearsed business spiel and advertising her own resume with no hesitation. She even earns an applause from the crew. Further, after OJ and Em realize that there is something occupying the skies above their ranch, it is Em who does all of the research on UFOs and how much money good footage of a UFO can earn. She sparks the entire hunt for Jean Jacket. When OJ is first threatened by Jean Jacket he does not run until Em yells at him to do so and it is her idea to contact Holst for help, taking the lead on the initial phone conversation with him. Finally, it is Em’s actions that kill Jean Jacket by the film’s conclusion. Freeland states that her framework asks several questions about the film being read, one being, “How do the film’s structures of narrative, point of view, and plot construction operate in effecting a depiction of gender roles and relations” (1993, 205)? Answering that question for *Nope* we see a film that depicts multiple points of view from men and women alike in a narrative that is pushed forward in a major way by a female protagonist who has as much agency as her male counterparts. The male protagonists are active and OJ specifically becomes more active as the narrative continues, but it comes from all his sister’s prompting. Em is the reverse of what Mulvey sees as a woman’s role in cinema, or rather she fills the man’s role that Mulvey describes.

There is one aspect of Mulvey’s argument that does apply to both Jean Jacket and Em, especially the two’s relationship. Mulvey remarks on how the look is inherent to film viewing. She writes, “It is the place of the look that defines cinema, the possibility of varying it and exposing it. This is what makes cinema quite different in its voyeuristic potential from, say, strip-tease, theater, shows, etc. Going far beyond highlighting a woman’s to-be-looked-at-ness, cinema builds the way she is to be looked at into the spectacle itself” (1998, 67). The look or gaze is contemplated throughout much of *Nope* in the attempted visual capture of Jean Jacket, his rules of engagement, how different characters look at him, and in viewing spectacle in general. Even Em comes close to becoming an object during the safety meeting when she makes herself a spectacle by delivering an oral resume in an attempt to commodify herself to the gathered film industry personnel for potential employment, though that is by her own choice. Jean Jacket does not get a choice. He is made a visual object by Jupe (who uses the Haywoods’ horses to lure Jean Jacket to his amusement park as part of a show he hopes will draw big crowds), he is made an object by the Haywoods and company who hope to profit from footage of his visage, and his made an object by Ryder, who cannot film him, but demands the means to do so. This objectification is the main difference between Em and Jean Jacket and by the film’s end it is Em’s gaze that does Jean Jacket in. Em uses a large helium balloon in the shape of a cowboy Jupe to distract Jean Jacket’s gaze, undoing the inflatable’s tethers so it can float into the sky. As Jean Jacket goes after it, Em takes numerous photos with a manual crank camera pointed upward in a desperate final effort to get the footage she and OJ want. She gets the photo, but Jean Jacket dies in the effort, attempting to devour the balloon, which causes both it and him to explode. Jean Jacket’s death by exploitation perhaps runs parallel to Mulvey’s argument of women in cinema. Multiple
gazes (including the gaze of men) make the vagina/womb (Jean Jacket) a monstrous visual object, though it is not the gaze of a man that kills the monstrous vagina/womb but the gaze of a woman. If Nope were a “traditional” horror film that fell within Mulvey’s argument, then a male character, such as OJ or Angel, would swoop in to get the picture and kill the monster. Mulvey’s argument is flipped on its head as Em, the female protagonist, performs those actions instead. She gets the footage and kills the monster in the process, destroying Jean Jacket by enacting her gaze. Looking and the gaze are as integral to Nope as the film’s characters. So much so that some discourse surrounding the film claims Jean Jacket is not a vagina but an eye. Regardless of either reading of Jean Jacket, Nope is a film about Hollywood, showmanship, and the hunt for spectacle. Bu comments how Nope “explores humanity’s ongoing battle between nature and domestication... ‘Nope’ strikes at the twisted, intertwined nature of capitalism and domestication. In each case where nature is brought to be subjugated, there is an underlying capitalist incentive that requires the disregard of nature’s law” (2022). All of the film’s main human characters chase after the natural phenomenon that is Jean Jacket and most of them break his natural rules in an attempt to objectify him, experiencing fatal ends as a result. He is put under a scrutinizing gaze by most people who see him, the kind of gaze Mulvey expects women to be on the receiving end of whenever they appear on screen. Yet none of the women in Nope are subjected to such exploitative looking. Only the animals that appear in the film are looked at as visual objects: Jean Jacket, Gordy the chimpanzee, and the Haywoods’ horses. Perhaps Peele’s main message through Nope is that nature (including the vagina/womb) cannot be domesticated into becoming personalized entertainment. Every animal has rules regardless of who is looking. If you try to break those rules, then all you end up with is what the Haywoods would call a bad miracle.

**Notes on Author:** Ryan is pursuing his MA in English at Bridgewater State University. His essay was completed in fall 2022 under the mentorship of Dr. Halina Adams during her critical theory course. Ryan plans to continue working towards his MA with the hopes of completing more works akin to his essay on Nope.

**References**


Arthur Fleck’s Treatment using Cognitive Behavior Therapy and Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy

Gwenyth Duclos, Masters of Education Counseling, Counseling and Social Behavioral Sciences, Bridgewater State University, g1duclos@student.bridgew.edu

Abstract: The character Arthur Fleck, from the movie Joker, exhibits symptoms that meet the criteria for pseudobulbar affect and psychopathic personality disorder. Both disorders can be treated using Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT). The article will discuss both forms of therapy in terms of possible treatment for Arthur, and specific techniques that can be used to improve his overall wellness.

Keywords: CBT; REBT; Pseudobulbar Affect; Psychopathic Personality.

Introduction
In the movie Joker, the main character, Arthur Fleck, presents issues of pseudobulbar affect and psychopathic personality disorder, which could be treated via two different theoretical orientations, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT). A brief review of the film and a discussion on ways a counselor could treat Arthur by using Cognitive Behavioral Therapy and Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy allows for an academic comparison between these two therapeutic approaches.

Overview of Joker
The film Joker is set in the fictional Gotham City in 1981 and follows the main character, Arthur Fleck, through his psychopathic journey. At the outset of the film, Arthur works for a clown-for-hire company, but he faces bullying and isolation much of his life while also struggling with mental health. Arthur is also an unsuccessful comedian and performs at a local comedy club; an early scene shows Arthur laughing uncontrollably at himself. As an adult, Arthur lives in an apartment with his mother who suffers from depression. The two spend their time together fixated on a popular TV talk show hosted by Murry Franklin; Arthur often fantasizes about being invited on the show.

Early in the film, Arthur is fired from his job as a clown for bringing a gun to a children’s party. On the way home, Arthur again is consumed by uncontrollable laughter while on the subway, and three men begin mocking him and then assault him. Arthur pulls out his gun and shoots two of the men dead right away before chasing down and killing the third. Given his troubled background, the show of force elevates Arthur’s
sense of power. As news spreads about the murders, a wealthy elite speaks out about the crime and refers to lower class citizens as “clowns,” sparking rioters and looters to dress as such. The public reaction to the murder taps into deep-seated class antagonism in an unequal society in which many people feel dismissed by the establishment.

Arthur avoids being identified as the shooter, but his anonymity evaporates after the talk show host Murry Franklin plays a clip of his stand-up comedy performance as a way to mock him. A day later, Arthur receives a call from Murry inviting him on the show. All of this transpires as the audiences gains more insight into Arthur’s troubled past; Arthur discovers that he was adopted and the audience learns more of the abuse he faced at the hands of his adopted mother. In a fit a rage, Arthur smothers his mother to death.

Untroubled by yet another murder, Arthur prepares for his appearance on the Murray show by dying his hair green and wearing clown makeup. The police finally catch up to Arthur but fail to apprehend him as he escapes into the streets, which are crowded with rioting clowns. The powder keg of class antagonism has exploded, and the city of Gotham is overrun by rioter dressed as clowns.

Arthur arrives at the Murray show where he asks to be introduced as the Joker. While on air, Arthur admits to the subway murders. When Murray states he is calling the police, Arthur shoots him in the head on live television. Arthur is finally arrested but when the police transport him to jail, an ambulance driven by clowns crashes into the police car killing the cops and freeing Arthur. Arthur is found unconscious. When he awakes, he is surrounded by a mob of clowns cheering for him. He finally feels a sense of empowerment.

**Arthur’s Diagnosis**

This brief summary of the character Arthur’s trauma, past and present, can be a basis for a discussion of possible diagnosis and treatment. Based on Arthur’s symptoms of sudden onsets of crying or laughing, he would likely be diagnosed with pseudobulbar affect. The specific criterion for this disorder includes emotional episodes that are inappropriate, no relationship between the presented emotional state and what the individual is truly feeling at the time of the episode, the individual’s inability to control the episode or the duration of it, and the expression of the emotion providing no internal relief (Goldin 2020).

Pseudobulbar affect is considered a neurological disease, caused by a disconnection between the frontal lobes (front of the brain) and the cerebellum (back of the brain). The diagnosis of pseudobulbar affect would need to be made by a neurologist as it is a neurological disorder, and it is primarily treated with medication. The connection between the frontal lobes and cerebellum help express and coordinate emotions. When this connection is broken, the result is often a sudden onset of crying or laughing (Engelman et al. 2014), which we see in the case of Arthur Fleck. This neurological disorder can be a result of trauma, specifically a traumatic brain injury (Perotti et al., 2016). As stated in the summary, Arthur suffered from abuse and beatings as a child. Therefore, based on what viewers see, Arthur shows symptoms that could be diagnosed as pseudobulbar affect.
While Arthur meets the criteria for pseudobulbar affect, he also meets the criteria for psychopathic personality disorder, also known as PPD. While PPD is not listed in the current DSM 5th edition, there is some debate regarding the disorder itself. Some argue that PPD does not exist and that the disorder can be used synonymously with antisocial personality disorder. While the two disorders are synonymous for one another, the procedures for assessing and diagnosing the disorders greatly differ (Hart and Cook 2012). Typically, six domains of symptoms exist for PPD: attachment, behavioral, cognitive, dominance, emotion, and self-dominion.

1. Attachment. Symptoms include detachment, lack of empathy for others, and lack of commitment.
2. Behavioral. Symptoms include unreliability, recklessness, and aggression.
3. Cognitive. Symptoms include intolerance and inflexibility.
4. Dominance. Symptoms include deceitfulness, manipulativeness, and insincerity.
5. Emotional. Symptoms include lack of anxiety, lack of remorse, lack of emotional depth, and lack of emotional stability.

In the case, Arthur Fleck has experienced isolation, loneliness, and trauma throughout his life. He has very limited external support, leading to neglect and abuse even as an adult. However, Arthur shows very little empathy for the people he murdered and uses extreme aggression and recklessness toward people such as Murry, his former co-worker, and the three men he murdered on the subway. Arthur feels no remorse for his actions, and lacks emotional stability based on his behaviors. Arthur reaches a point in the movie where he wants to be noticed, as he has lacked attention his whole life. He does this by dying his hair green and wearing clown makeup. Arthur is of a sound mind and experiences no delusions or hallucinations. He knows what he is doing and does so to enhance his power. Criteria for PPD, listed in the DSM includes antagonism and disinhibition. Antagonism can be characterized by manipulativeness, deceitfulness, callousness, and hostility. Disinhibition can be characterized by irresponsibility, impulsivity, and risk taking (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders 2000). Based on his presenting symptoms, Arthur does meet the criteria for psychopathic personality disorder.

**Theoretical Approach:**

**Cognitive Behavioral Therapy**

Based on the criteria discussed, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is a theoretical approach that could be used to treat Arthur, assuming that he would seek such treatment. CBT is founded on the belief that even maladaptive responses can change, and this can be accomplished by individuals learning to modify their cognitive processes (Neukrug 2010). One therapeutic technique within CBT specifically examines behavior. Behavioral techniques can help individual’s change
their automatic thoughts, negative feelings, and dysfunctional behaviors by examining the emotions and behaviors that have resulted (Neukrug 2010).

Although pseudobulbar affect is treated with medication, one study found CBT to be effective at symptom reduction for individuals with pseudobulbar affect (Perotti et al. 2016). To address Arthur’s symptoms resulting from pseudobulbar affect, a therapist could employ a self-control technique. Self-control refers to a response made to control or change a behavior (Perotti et al. 2016). One study reported symptom reduction when a counselor gave self-control instructions to a client (Perotti et al. 2016). Working with Arthur to practice deep breathing in a therapeutic environment, could provide him a tool to use when his symptoms begin to manifest. As a result, he could possess self-control over his presenting behavior.

It would be important for the counselor to teach him to inhale through his nose to the point where his lungs inflate, pause, then exhale through his mouth. This sequence would be practiced and repeated, with the counselor prompting him in the therapeutic session, until he no longer needed such instruction or prompting (Perotti et al. 2016). As a result, if Arthur found himself in another instance where he was uncontrollably laughing, using this breathing method would help mitigate his symptoms and allow him to return to a more controlled state.

As discussed, CBT is an effective approach to treat pseudobulbar affect. In terms of treating psychopathic personality disorder, CBT would also be an effective approach to use. Specifically, CBT is more effective at treating psychopathic personality disorder than other forms of treatment because it can be used to focus on impulsivity and cognitive processing to reduce symptoms (Hecht 2018).

When utilizing CBT, building a therapeutic alliance is an essential technique employed at the beginning of therapy (Neukrug 2010). This can often be hard when working with individuals suffering from PPD, like the fictional character Arthur. Individuals diagnosed with psychopathic personality disorder will often have trouble with relationships (Hart and Cook 2012). In the case of Arthur, it would be important for him to view the counselor-client relationship as a team, recognizing that the counselor would guide him toward more effective ways of thinking and acting (Neukrug 2010). The counselor would demonstrate empathy, caring, and optimism throughout therapy to build and strengthen the therapeutic alliance (Neukrug 2010). Arthur has suffered from neglect, isolation, and persecution much of his life. Having a therapist who demonstrates empathy, support, and care is likely to create a positive atmosphere in which he would feel comfortable sharing and working to improve his cognitive processing and behaviors.

Identifying and challenging automatic thoughts and images is another therapeutic technique within CBT that can be used once a therapeutic alliance has been built (Neukrug 2010). Through this technique, the therapist would help Arthur see how his core beliefs affect who he is, or identify his automatic thoughts and images (Neukrug, 2010). For example, Arthur may believe he is a horrible person. The counselor would work to gently challenge his cognitive distortion about himself resulting in more rational ways of thinking.

Rational-Emotional Role-Play is a technique used within CBT that allows clients to have a role
play or debate between the rational and emotional parts of themselves (Neukrug 2010). This technique would be appropriate to use after identifying and challenging automatic thoughts and images. If a therapist were to employ this technique with Arthur, the therapist would start by role playing the rational part of Arthur’s thoughts, and Arthur would respond with the dysfunctional or emotional part. To counteract the dysfunctional part, the therapist would assume the dysfunctional role. The role play following the first part of this process may look something like this:

Arthur: I am a horrible person; I am always thinking about killing people.
Counselor: I am not! Most of the time, I follow society’s rules and am a good son.
Arthur: Well, I may not always think about killing people, but when I do, I know I am a bad person.
Counselor: I know that these thoughts are not good, but I know it is only a small part of who I am as a person.

Through this process, the therapist will highlight the cognitive distortions in Arthur’s thinking and help him develop ways to become more rational in his thinking (Newkrug 2010).

A specific CBT-based approach known as the “ABC Program” (A: activating event, B: belief, C: consequence) is a six-to-eight-month program emphasizing social learning principles, antisocial attitudes, anger problems, and relationship skills (Hecht 2018). The goal of this program is to increase prosocial skills and reduce violent behaviors that often accompany the diagnosis of psychopathic personality disorder (Hecht 2018). Arthur may benefit from a similar program as he exhibits symptoms of antisocial attitudes, increased anger, trouble with relationships, and violent behaviors. Results from the ABC Program indicate a reduction in violent behaviors and supports CBT as an effective evidence-based approach to treating individuals with PPD (Hecht 2018).

Theoretical Approach:
Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy
While CBT is one possible treatment option for the fictional character Arthur Fleck, it is not the only possible route. Another option would be to use rational emotive behavior therapy (REBT). Albert Ellis created REBT and used it to treat individuals with PPD. This therapeutic approach contends human beings are fallible and have the potential for rational or irrational thinking (Neukrug 2010). Throughout therapy, the counselor would work with Arthur to determine more effective ways of living and help him learn about his psychological self (Neukrug 2010).

Unconditional acceptance is an essential part of rational emotive behavior therapy. The therapist demonstrates acceptance during the counseling session while recognizing that sometimes people exhibit behaviors that are unhealthy to themselves and others (Neukrug 2010). It is important for the counselor to recognize that Arthur may exhibit some unhealthy behaviors, and to normalize any feelings Arthur may have regarding his uncontrollable laughter. Arthur has suffered from isolation, neglect, and loneliness his entire life and working with a therapist who demonstrates unconditional acceptance would allow him to have
a space where he can feel cared for, supported, and accepted. As a result, Arthur would be able to freely discuss his thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.

Therapists who practice REBT typically challenge clients. This would occur by the counselor suggesting to Arthur that he examine his current way of functioning in terms of thinking, feeling, and behaving (Neukrug 2010). If Arthur then believes change would be effective, he would work with the counselor to adopt more rational beliefs and feelings along with healthier behaviors. Behaviors associated with pseudobulbar affect include uncontrollable laughing or crying. While this behavior is typically linked to a broken connection between the front and back of the brain, the therapist can still work with Arthur to process those behaviors along with the feelings and emotions associated (Engelman et al. 2014).

A therapeutic technique within rational emotive behavior therapy includes behavioral and cognitive disputations. Within this technique, Arthur and the counselor would practice behavioral changes, and begin to replace them with healthy ones (Neukrug 2010). Additionally, Arthur may feel a sense of embarrassment by his sudden outbursts. He and the counselor would work to dispute these beliefs and replace them with healthier, more rational ones (Neukrug 2010). The goal, when working with Arthur, would be to look at his current thoughts and behaviors and replace them with healthier ways of living in the world, ultimately improving his overall wellness.

REBT can also be used to treat individuals with PPD. As stated, a common symptom of individuals with PPD is trouble with relationships (Hart et al. 2012). Therefore, it would be important for the therapist to align themselves with Arthur (Ellis 1961). Building rapport is an important aspect of rational emotive behavior therapy and is particularly important when working with individuals diagnosed with PPD (Ellis 1961). Once the therapist has established rapport with Arthur, he is likely to feel a connection and be more willing to talk. The therapist could then discuss his self-defeating behaviors, with the intention that Arthur begins to realize that he is self-sabotaging (Ellis 1961).

Individuals suffering from PPD often believe that their behaviors help them. When approached calmly, and without blame, individuals like Arthur can change their beliefs and behaviors (Ellis 1961). In terms of treatment, improving Arthur’s living patterns and reducing his antisocial behaviors are key to symptom reduction (Ellis 1961). Through this therapeutic approach, the counselor would encourage Arthur to learn a new philosophical orientation and leave behind his past one that causes harm (Ellis 1961).

Through cognitive disputation, the counselor would highlight Arthur’s unrealistic philosophies and self-sabotaging behaviors (Ellis 1961). For instance, Arthur looks at people as pawns in his life. The counselor would challenge this belief and ask questions that would draw out the reasons behind Arthur’s thought process (Neukrug 2010). If Arthur argues that he has no control over these beliefs, the therapist will highlight how feelings are controllable (Ellis 1961).

Role playing or psychodrama is a technique that can also be used with Arthur. Through a role play, Arthur could expose his feelings and attitudes to the therapist (Hecht, 2018). This technique provides the possibility for Arthur to alter his emotions and cognitions and develop empathy (Hecht, 2018). During this process the
counselor would have the opportunity to employ many therapeutic techniques such as challenging the client, demonstrating the ABC’s of feeling and behaving, and disputing cognitions, behaviors, and emotions. Using the ABC’s of feeling and behaving, the counselor would show Arthur how his own beliefs cause him emotional distress (Neukrug 2010). The counselor would be able to highlight the activating event (A), irrational belief (B) and the consequence (C) (Neukrug 2010).

The therapeutic techniques within rational emotive behavior therapy would work to disprove Arthur’s irrational and illogical beliefs and provide him with healthier ways of thinking and behaving (Neukrug 2010). As a result, Arthur’s self-sabotaging behaviors would be reduced and more effective ways of behaving and thinking would be encouraged.

**CBT and REBT**

CBT and REBT have many similarities as they are both considered Cognitive-Behavioral Approaches. The main similarity lies within their core beliefs; both approaches posit that people can change and can develop more effective and healthy ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving (Neukrug 2010). When treating Arthur, working with him to improve his cognitions and behaviors are essential in helping him live a healthier life and cope with stress.

As with almost all forms of therapy, building a therapeutic alliance is essential (Neukrug 2010). Since Arthur has had limited external support as characterized in the film, it is important for the counselor to build a rapport and relationship with him. Providing a positive space for Arthur would allow for an opportunity for change and growth.

CBT and REBT also both utilize role playing as a therapeutic technique (Neukrug 2010). This allows Arthur to be active and engaged during treatment, hopefully break through his defenses, and alter his cognitions and behaviors (Hecht 2018). The therapeutic techniques mentioned, all have the same purpose of helping Arthur improve his cognitions, feelings, and behaviors.

Despite CBT and REBT having some similarities, differences do exist between the two approaches. REBT seeks to replace irrational beliefs with rational ones as a way of improving cognitions, whereas CBT looks at maladaptive emotional responses and ways those responses can be changed through the therapeutic process (Neukrug, 2010).

One technique that CBT utilizes is thought stopping. When one has a negative thought, they are instructed to yell “stop it” to interrupt the thought (Neukrug, 2010). While this technique was not mentioned prior, it would have benefits for treating Arthur’s PPD. After the negative thought was interrupted, it would be replaced with a positive one (Neukrug 2010). For example, if Arthur thought about hurting someone, he would yell “stop it,” and replace that thought with something else, like his favorite place. In contrast, REBT does not try to interrupt the irrational belief, rather it works to replace the irrational belief with a rational one once it has been identified (Neukrug 2010). Utilizing thought stopping may be an effective strategy in interrupting the irrational belief when it begins to manifest in one’s cognitions.

CBT and REBT would both be beneficial to Arthur, as they look to change existing cognitions, emotions, and behaviors and replace them with more effective ones. Additionally, CBT offers self-control
techniques, which would help Arthur cope and manage his uncontrollable laughter, a symptom of pseudobulbar affect. The goal of both forms of therapy encourages the client to change their existing way, in a supportive, encouraging environment.

One could diagnose the main character of the movie, Joker, Arthur Fleck, with pseudobulbar affect based on his presenting symptom of uncontrollable laughing. Arthur exhibits a lack of empathy, recklessness, manipulativeness, and self-aggrandizement, to name a few other key symptoms of the disorder. This is highlighted by his killing spree and lack of remorse. Therefore, he meets the criteria for psychopathic personality disorder. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) are two approaches a therapist could use to treat Arthur. CBT would work to provide Arthur with effective ways to cope, such deep breathing exercises. CBT would also look to change his current ways of functioning into healthier thoughts and behaviors. This could be done through role playing. REBT would help Arthur identify his irrational beliefs and replace them with rational ones. The counselor may challenge his current beliefs in a role play. Ultimately, both approaches work to build a therapeutic relationship between the counselor and client. If Arthur could be convinced that he could benefit from treatment, the hope would be that he would see symptom reduction and improved wellness using these treatment approaches.

Note on Author: Gwenyth Duclos is pursuing her Master of Education in Counseling. Her research was completed in fall 2022 under the mentorship of Dr. Kate Bender. She plans to start her practicum at a mental health agency in the summer of 2023 and hopes to work with adults and adolescents.

References


