Acknowledgements

We are pleased to present the Best Essays Anthology 2017-2018. It is through such an anthology that we are able to honor our finest writers. These pages are the work of students enrolled in the West Valley College’s English department’s English, Literature, and Composition courses. The focus of these courses is mastering several varieties of essays. The WVC privileges and supports good writing; that is why this collection of student essays is so vital. Taken together, they illustrate that students work diligently to understand, master, and hone the skills that enable them to write perceptively and creatively. The panel of judges comprised three English faculty and one student who read and rated the works anonymously.

Front Cover: Alisha Solomon, “Earth”
Table of Contents

Narrative

Julia Hardy, “What Do You Think?”
Neal McGinley, “School is Not for Me”

Textual Analysis

Noah Cooter, “A Lass and A Lack”
Emily Sanderfer, “Idleness: The Salvation of Society”
Kian Lechner, “Gun Reform: America’s Dying to Meet You”
Jackie Lyons, “How the Internet Can Ruin and Save a Life”

Researched Argument

Collin Bartolomei, “Profiteering the Video Game Industry: Dismantling the Foundations of Entertainment”

Literary Analysis

Yuezhang Qin, “The Faded Glory and the Withered Rose”
Evan Brown, “Remembering Your Roots”
Angela Harb, “Colonized Mind”
Although I am pursuing a degree in Finance, writing has always been a passion of mine. With one more year left before I transfer, I am grateful for all the opportunities West Valley has given me to further understand and question myself and the world around me. Before writing this essay, I never had to analyze something about myself as an individual. Written for Cathy Jones’s English 1A course, this essay challenged me to identify and analyze a habit using the assigned reading material. In the first stages of writing the paper, I struggled to think of what I could write about; however, after careful thought and reflection, I was able to identify something that created a large burden on my life. I am so grateful to have had the opportunity to explore my life from a different perspective. Writing this essay allowed me to learn, grow, and make changes to how I approach situations in my everyday life.

What Do You Think?

-Julia Hardy-

For the average person, deciding what to wear, what to eat, or whether to go out on a Friday night, is a simple task; however, since I said my first word at 10-months old, I have become accustomed to talking through all my decisions with someone close to me. Like most kids, when I was young, my parents made most of my decisions for me. Not until I got older and gained more independence did my habit of talking through decisions emerge. Simple choices turned into unnecessarily long conversations in which I’d go back and forth between options like a game of ping-pong. Getting someone else’s input and affirmation proved an effective way to not only make a decision, but also feel confident that I made the right one. My habit of always seeking counsel when making decisions follows a clear three-step loop of cue, routine, and reward as described in “The Habit Loop.” Based on the findings in “The Neurology of Free Will” and “Rat Park,” both my physical and emotional environment influence this habit. Shifting my habit when counsel is not needed would require a conscious decision on my own and alter my response when cued to act out the routine.

When faced with a decision, I automatically feel the need to talk through the options extensively and receive feedback and affirmation before coming to a conclusion. This habit does not occur when making simple decisions, such as when to brush my teeth, when to shower, or
whether or not to bring a towel to the beach; rather, it occurs when more complex decisions are required without a straightforward answer (e.g. shopping for groceries, buying clothes, deciding what to eat, making plans with friends and family). The process involves comparing the costs and benefits of each option and trying to anticipate their long-term effects even when unnecessary. A recent example is when I was at Office Max buying school supplies; I couldn’t decide how many notebooks to buy for each of my classes. After a few minutes of going back and forth in my mind, I began to feel incapable of making a decision, and I called my mom; she listened while I named all the options, compared the prices, and expressed my concerns. I eventually came to a decision which she affirmed. As shown by the preceding example, my habit of seeking counsel often makes seemingly simple decisions complicated and time consuming. I find myself dwelling on some decisions so much that it inhibits me from moving on to another task. If counsel is unavailable, I delay making the decision in order to avoid the stress of making it on my own; therefore, the decision remains in the back of my mind, and I become obsessed with coming to a conclusion. This minor fixation puts a strain on my ability to move smoothly throughout the day. Because my habit is well-established, it is possible to analyze it in terms of its step-by-step process.

Based on the concepts presented in Charles Duhigg’s chapter “The Habit Loop,” my habit of seeking advice involves a distinct cycle of cue, routine, and reward. Duhigg explains the three-step loop when he says, “First, there is a cue, a trigger that tells your brain to go into automatic mode and which habit to use. Then there is a routine, which can be physical or mental or environmental. Finally, there is a reward, which helps your brain figure out if this loop is worth remembering for the future” (19). This explanation accurately describes the three-step process of my own habit. My habit’s cue is having to make a complex decision that does not have a straightforward answer. In response to the cue, I go through both a mental and physical
routine. The mental routine takes place when I begin to feel incapable of making the decision on my own; before making a decision, I experience doubt, and I begin to second guess myself. I then automatically seek out counsel by calling my mom, texting a friend, or having a face-to-face conversation with someone close to me, which is the physical routine. My reward is coming to a final decision and the relief that ensues. The formed association between counsel and coming to a final decision tells my brain that this habit is worth remembering in order to make future decisions efficiently. Because of this association, whenever a decision must be made, I automatically feel that counsel is a necessary component. Duhigg addresses this phenomenon saying, “The cue and reward become intertwined until a powerful sense of anticipation…occurs” (19). This “anticipation” explains why counsel seems necessary before I can settle on a final decision. Since making decisions is part of everyday life, my habit’s cue, routine, reward loop is constantly reinforced through repetition and the environment in which I live.

As shown by Angie Bachman in “The Neurology of Free Will” and the rats in “Rat Park,” the emotional and physical environment work together to influence my habit’s three-step loop. Angie Bachman, a pathological gambler, attributed her gambling habit/addiction to her emotional environment. In “The Neurology of Free Will,” Duhigg addresses the impact of Bachman’s emotional environment; he writes that Bachman “went [to the casino] whenever she fought with her husband or felt unappreciated by her kids. At the tables…her anxieties grew so faint she couldn’t hear them anymore” (250). The effect Bachman’s emotions had on her gambling habit parallel the impacts of my emotional environment. For my habit of seeking counsel, emotional influences include overanalyzing the impact of my decisions on myself and others, feeling the need to always have a plan, and worrying that making the wrong decision will blemish my character. This emotional environment contributes to the mental “routine” that takes place in my habit's three-step loop; for example, when I have to choose between spending
time with my family or spending time with my friends, I worry that my decision might offend somebody or compromise my relationships. I worry that if I choose to hang out with friends, I’ll miss out on quality family time that I’ll never get back; alternatively, if I choose to spend time with my family, I fear that my friends will think I don’t want to put effort into seeing them.

Although choosing between family and friends is a common dilemma, I take it to another level by overanalyzing it as a life altering decision. In these situations, I feel the need turn to my mom, tell her all of the previously mentioned concerns, get her input, and make a decision from there. This overanalysis stems from an exaggerated fear that my decision might hurt a certain group or blemish my overall character. Talking through a decision with someone distracts me from feeling anxious and incompetent, and it lessens my fear of negatively impacting myself and others. If I can hear someone affirm my decision, my feelings of uncertainty turn into confidence; I no longer feel incompetent, because someone else has told me that whatever I chose was smart. The impact of the physical environment is demonstrated in Lauren Slater’s chapter titled “Rat Park.” Slater discusses an experiment which showed that rats living in Rat Park, a temperature-controlled rat utopia complete with toys, fresh cedar shavings, scenic surroundings, and a sense of community, were less inclined to drug use than rats living in isolated laboratory cages. After studying the results of the experiment, Slater writes, “The cramped and isolated caged rats loved the morphine-laced water…The rat-park residents, however, resisted drinking the narcotic solution” (166). These results demonstrate the power of the physical environment, as shown in my habit of seeking advice. In contrast to the unfavorable physical environment promoting bad habits for the rats, my habit of seeking unnecessary counsel is encouraged by a healthy, favorable environment. I am surrounded by a community of friends and family able to provide guidance; as a result, I can easily receive advice and affirmation when making decisions, which reinforces my habit of seeking counsel. When I’m around people whose opinions I don’t trust, I choose to
make decisions on my own instead of getting their input. I avoid getting advice from my coworkers because I feel that their decisions do not promote a healthy and desirable lifestyle; therefore, it seems that when I find myself in an unhealthy environment lacking respectable role models, my habit of seeking counsel subsides. If I did not have the favorable environment provided by my close family and friends, my habit might not have formed. The influence of my positive physical environment is not inherently harmful; it only has negative effects because my emotional environment takes advantage of it by using the easily accessible counsel to avoid anticipated feelings of anxiety and incompetence. Instead of coping with the emotional stress that occurs when I’m faced with a decision, I rely on the many respectable role models in my life to walk me through my choices. Although I can work towards bettering my emotional environment, my physical environment would not need to change for me to adjust this habit.

In order to shift my habit towards only seeking counsel when necessary, I would need to change my cued routine and improve my emotional environment. Seeking counsel is healthy and beneficial in many circumstances, so I don’t want to completely eliminate my desire to receive guidance; however, this habit becomes a burden when I seek counsel out of want rather than need. This habit causes me to second guess myself even more when making decisions, which leads to lower self-confidence; I have become so dependent on the affirmation of others that making complex choices independently seems daunting. In the Office Max example presented earlier, I was completely capable of deciding how many notebooks to buy, but because it was easier and eliminated the stress of making a decision on my own, I called my mom. Had I paused, resisted the urge to get help, and told myself I was able to make the decision by myself, I might have avoided this habitual routine; therefore, in order to shift my habit and only seek counsel when necessary, I must stop to evaluate the importance of the decision and try to make it on my own rather than immediately turning to someone. Additionally, my mental environment
could no longer revolve around routine emotions of ineptitude and anxiety. In response to the
cue of having to make a decision, I would need to remind myself that I am fully capable of doing
it on my own rather than succumb to feelings of self-doubt. Through shifting this habit and
making more decisions on my own, the feelings of incompetence and stress should lessen,
allowing me seek counsel only as needed.

Works Cited


Slater, Lauren. *Opening Skinner’s Box: Great Psychological Experiments of the 20th Century*.

      Bloomsbury, 2005.
I wrote this essay in my English 1A class. The summer before second grade I was diagnosed with dyslexia and dysgraphia. Throughout my 13 years of education, it was very difficult to get the support I needed, which made me understand that our education system is tailored to a very specific type of student. This allows many students with learning differences to slip through the cracks, which leads to a growing dislike for education and the extra work needed to catch up with one's peers. I saw this not only in myself but in the students around me who were struggling in the same system, and in some cases, with more severe learning disabilities and without the support I had at home. David Sedaris' short essay “A Plague of Tics” and his experiences through school inspired me to write about my own schooling in a similar style.

School Is Not For Me
-Neal McGinley-

My kindergarten teacher calls out, “Ok class, time for free time,” my favorite time of the day. I get a break from the horrible addition tiles. My teacher comes over to me as I'm walking to go color. “Not you, Neal. You should have been done with those problems an hour ago. Go finish them.” Sitting cross legged at my half-foot high desk, I beg my brain to figure out the answers to the endless addition problems so I can have fun with my classmates. Way too soon, free time is over and I have made no progress. I pray for my mom to come pick me up. My teacher tells me to pay attention and try harder. She is too busy with all the other kids to help me with something I should have finished hours ago. Time slowly moves on with no progress made, and eventually my teacher finds time to help me. Finally, I can move on to the next thing I need to practice, but once again I am behind all the other kids. Piling up piling up piling up. Every day, kindergarten is like this. Soon come the parent-teacher conferences, trying to figure out ways for me to keep up with the other students. Every day, I arrive, knowing this is the day it all works out. Every day, I leave, knowing it didn’t. I’m 5 years old, and already frustrated and falling behind.

First grade starts, and I realize I have to survive six hours of not being able to work fast enough, not being able to focus long enough. I do well in reading, but my handwriting and
spelling are just as bad as last year. Memorizing multiplication and division is impossible. I learn how to cheat to succeed, reading the answers backwards through my math papers. My parents and teacher cannot figure out why my handwriting is not improving and why I do so poorly on spelling tests, why I cannot remember simple multiplication. When I try to spell, I write down what I believe spells the word, but I can tell it’s not right. For me, spelling will never happen. It is impossible and completely incomprehensible.

My teacher gives me a piece of paper: “100 non-phonetic words.” “Memorize these spelling words. We have a test next week.” To me, every word is not phonetic, so having to memorize 100 or 1000, it doesn’t matter. Every day, my mother and I practice 10 words a day, adding 10 more to yesterday’s words. I spell the words out loud, I write the words in the air, I write the words with my finger on the table. And by the next day, I forget nearly all of them and start over. The morning of the test, we review one last time. I go to school, ready to spell. But by the time the test arrives, I try my best, and my best gets me through only a small amount of the words. I’m six years old and feeling like my best isn’t good enough.

Second grade, and my teacher wants me to work on focus. The incentive is a Cub Scout overnight on the U.S.S. Hornet. The obstacle is I have to finish all my “must-dos” every day. My teacher tapes a photo of the ship on my desk. I hate it. I feel I am trying, but it won’t be enough. I must do too many must-dos. I am really good at talking to my friends. I am really bad at my assignments. Instead of doing long division, I pick at the tape holding the Hornet to my desk. Instead of writing sentences, I make eraser worlds in my desk. I’m seven years old, and I dread the school part of school.

Third and fourth grade, and I now know I am dyslexic and dysgraphic, whatever those are. I like my teacher a lot because she is kind and teaches us with hands-on work, which makes
it easier for me to focus. I think this year might be different. On your birthday, she lets you play with silly putty and other toys in class with one of your friends for part of the day. This is way better than math facts and reading, and I wish it were my birthday every day. But my birthday is September 2, only two weeks into the school year, and the rest of my days are work. I don’t feel like doing problems out of my math book. I decide to stick a piece of paper in my ear, to see if I can get it out. I can’t. I pretend it isn’t there, till I get home and tell my parents.

My friend Max and I are the same. We both don’t like school. We talk a lot, and play games when we should be working. Tech Decks are cool, but they are outlawed. Our teacher gets upset at us when we talk too much and don’t finish our work. We won’t get our Tech Decks back until the end of the year. “The Montessori method isn’t for everyone. Some children need more structure. Have you thought of transferring Neal to a more traditional school?” my teacher asks my mom. I don’t think that will be better. I’m nine years old and acting out in class.

Fifth grade, and my teacher hates me. She slaps my hand when my sweatshirt sleeve is too long. The work is harder, and mostly worksheets, and my teacher yells all day. I don’t take tests in class any more, and this helps me focus on them, but I still have problems in the classroom. My teacher doesn’t understand that focusing is hard for me, and thinks yelling and punishments will fix this. I only like school because I see my friends. I have no interest in what my teacher yells at us. Max and I have to stay after class to have a talk with our parents. Before my mother shows up, my teacher says “You two are going to go to prison for robbing a bank when you are adults.” I’m ten years old and I hate that teachers expect me to learn in a way I cannot learn.

Sixth grade, I am in middle school, and I like it better. Everyone learns the same things at the same time. The structure helps me. I have six periods and six teachers. This means I need to
tell six people I'm dyslexic and apologize for my bad handwriting. I do well in math; I can use a calculator. Kids complain, “Why does Neal get a calculator and I don’t?” My face turns red. Do I try to explain that without it, I can’t even start? I hate being singled out.

I understand what we learn in English class but I’m not good at putting it on paper. I still get spelling tests in middle school. I thought I was old enough not to need them. I don’t do well on them but my teacher understands why. She says “Try your best and I’ll only grade you on the first ten.” I do better in school, but I am embarrassed by my accommodations and learning differences. My classmates make fun of my handwriting. I’m eleven years old, and wish I were like everyone else.

Seventh and eighth grade, and assignments take longer. I can’t work as fast as my classmates, and don’t want to use my accommodations. My Grades are B’s and C’s, not A’s anymore. But the work is harder. I try to keep up on homework but I just forget about assignments. “Can you write them down at the start of class? Or take a photo with your phone?” the resource teacher suggests. But that’s just another thing I forget. My teachers talk about advocating for myself and the transition to high school. It all overwhelms me. Even simple assignments that take other kids no time take me hours. I now have a class called guided studies; I get to work on my homework in it and get help. It gives me more free time after school. But some kids call it retard class. Teachers see what I do wrong, not what I try to do right. I’m thirteen and my success is up to me, but putting in the extra effort is exhausting.

Freshman and sophomore year, these kids are big. I join the water polo team and I make a lot of friends. Sports are way better than school. I do well in classes I’m interested in like Media Arts and Biology but the rest suck. I have little interest in what I'm learning. I'll probably forget it anyway. It is harder to get my accommodations high school. “What’s dysgraphia?” the
resource specialist asks during my I.E.P. meeting. “Isn’t that something you outgrow?” she says, while looking at her blue and gold painted nails. “Uh, no…” my mother trails off. I think school isn’t for me, and I think the school thinks school isn’t for me. I’m fifteen, and I’ve lost interest in my education.

Junior and senior year I take A.P. classes, which are supposed to look good on college applications. I don’t try. The notes are too much work. The reading assignments are horrible. Mr. Davison, my APUSH teacher, yells at me, “Sit down and stop talking to Brandon!” I go back to my seat and stare at the PowerPoint as he lectures. I doodle on my paper. But I have to keep my grades up to play water polo, so I do the bare minimum to get a C. There are too many rules and assignments I cannot do. Class does not engage me and the day drags on. Friends and girls make it survivable. I do not fit the average student mold. I am seventeen and school is not for me.
“A Lass and a Lack” was written for an Honors Classical Mythology course administered by the incomparable Leigh Burrill. Conveyed with an emphasis on Gender and Queer Studies, this class juxtaposed the traditional cannon against retellings from modern upstarts such as Margaret Atwood and Ali Smith. It was the latter’s concise masterwork, Girl Meets Boy, from whence my inspiration for this essay was born. At that particular time, Smith’s novel could not have struck a truer mark than my own beleaguered imagination. Never remiss of a cathartic opportunity, I found in this paper a repository for at least a few disquieting apprehensions.

Noah Cooter earned an AA in Liberal Arts from West Valley College in 2018. He transferred to Stanford University where he now studies Creative Writing. His children have since elected to live with their mother in a town named after its hypothetical fauna. He hopes someone will answer when he calls tonight.

A Lass and a Lack
-Noah Cooter-

Yesterday, an upstanding American looked me square in the eye and yelled, “Faggit!” His intonation carried the last syllable with an i, as opposed to the traditional o. Immediately prior to this, the young man had thrown his extra-large fast-food fountain drink at me through the open window of my car. Before that, he had executed a series of illegal roadway maneuvers in order to drive the wrong way down a San Francisco alley and pull up alongside me, oriented in the opposite direction, so that his face was near enough to mine that I could smell the chewing tobacco on his breath. He was really a very adept road-rager, and obviously rather intuitive. I’m not sure how he knew I was a faggit, since we had only just met. It may have been the compact hatchback I drive that tipped him off, which trembled in the imposing wake of his behemoth of a truck. Perhaps I should pick up an oversized decal emblazoned with the logo of the leading energy drink so as to avoid such encounters in the future. Or maybe he had my number because I was clean-shaven, looking decidedly effeminate next to the machismo of his bitchin’ goatee. Either way, he had me pegged. It wasn’t so much a commentary on my sexuality that this astute motorist was making. In fact, I’m actually straight, though I don’t usually admit to it openly. No, I’m not a faggit because the politeness with which I drive, or because I hug my buddy Dave at work; I’m a faggit because I outwardly reject the violent, misogynist bro-culture this man
embodied. I am his antithesis, and he hurled at me the most fitting anathema he could muster, the word that best elucidated the seething hatred my countenance elicited from the bowels of his emphatically heterosexual soul. That is why his insult solicited in me, not outrage, but pride. I am exceedingly proud to be that man's opposite. As he weaved his way in and out of 19th Avenue traffic, hunting for sissies to accost whilst making easy work of his Taco Bell dinner, he must have spotted me, knowing at once that I didn't drink Coors Light; that I couldn't regurgitate the home team's statistics. As he careened toward the sports bar, he must have understood that my trajectory was leading me to the art museum, that bastion of faggitry, where I was planning to earn some extra-credit points for my Classical Mythology with an Emphasis on Women, Gender and Queer Studies course, a class fit only for chicks and sissies. Or, maybe I have it all wrong. After all, I did have Daphne in the car earlier that day... Maybe that goateed stallion was simply picking up on some residual gayness which Daph had left behind.

When my daughter came out, I found myself considering some curious, and admittedly bigoted internal notions. Specifically, I experienced a sense of relief, as well as an irrational excitement. Positive as these sentiments may be, I was acutely aware that my reaction was not the neutral indifference of a truly unbiased observer. In theory, my inclination to greet this news as a blessing implied that I might have been less supportive of a pronouncement of heterosexuality. To that end, it's probably important that I recognize the subtle, and distinctly Bay-Area-flavored prejudice I was projecting. At the very least, I feel it's important to acknowledge the implicit privilege we modern Californians enjoy in the prerogative to celebrate our gay community. In my parents' generation, if one's child came out of the closet, the protocol was to writhe in shame, asking one's self, “What did I do wrong?” Just a few decades later, I found myself asking, “What did I do right?” Was it the feminist subtext of all those Patti Smith and Bikini Kill records playing in the background? Or was it simply my general disdain of the accepted male paradigm? Is she
gay because I'm such a proud sissy? Yet, there again, I display a sort of photonegative prejudice. Surely, thoughts such as, “Now I'll never have to chase off horny boys!” or “So much for birth control!” are not the musings of a truly woke dad. At least my bigotry is of the naïve, privileged order, and not the goateed, Pepe-the-frog-tank-top sporting sort. If nothing else, I am at least cognizant that human sexuality is so much more than a learned behavior or some hereditary marker, despite my jests to the contrary. Nonetheless, there was already an irony taking shape in regards to my daughter's preferences even before she was born.

Like any fledgling parent, I obsessed about the decision regarding my child's name, endlessly turning over options in my mind, searching for the one that sounded just right. For all the energy I spent attempting to anticipate any potential problems with the name Daphne, I never imagined the epithet might become a portent of sorts. What's in a name, you ask? Quite a lot, actually. Especially when a name is thousands of years old. As it turns out, the Daphne of mythological lore is remembered for her piqued aversion to men; or at least one man. We will never know her true sexual preference, for she was stripped of her humanity before she could adequately explore her romantic inclinations. You see, Daphne was being sexually harassed by godly Apollo, and an all-out assault appeared imminent. Upon appealing to her deific father, Daphne was transformed into a laurel tree, thereby desisting Apollo's dogged advances. Far be it from Peneus to rescue his daughter by some less lethal means, such as informing Apollo that rape is bad, for example. Rather than contesting the will of the Delphic god, Peneus chose instead to ostensibly bring his daughter's life to a screeching, leafy halt. No wonder teenage girls can't stand their fathers. Perhaps there is some noble moral in this story I am missing. The fault must be all my own, for I am too dense to perceive the objective justice that must underlie this patriarchal archetype. Hell, it's all Greek to me.
The exposure to Greek history that I gained from my Classical Mythology course has only bolstered my hypothesis that this lauded society was no friendly place for women generally, and lesbians specifically. For a culture so renowned for its celebration of homosexuality, ancient Greece appears to have engaged in a wholesale delegitimization of gay women. Unchallenged as the premier academic textbook on Greece's literary record, *Classic Mythology* offers but three explicit references to lesbianism in its sprawling 800-plus pages. The compendium's opening chapter, for example, contains a brief introduction to the theme of homosexuality in the ancient world. This section achieves rather admirable posterity by informing the reader “Female homosexuality in Greek and Roman mythology and society is as important a theme as male homosexuality, but it is not nearly as visible” (Morford 23). Driving the point home, the section continues “Lesbianism is not so readily detectable in the mythology generally. Sometimes it can be deduced as a subtext here and there” (Morford 23). This enthralling motif is picked up again much later in the text, where readers are treated to a full six-sentence paragraph under the heading *Lesbian Themes*. Here, the authors make passing reference to a few female-centric myths in which “Lesbianism is a latent motif” (Morford 237). Regarding the Jupiter/Callisto/Diana story, for example, readers are bestowed with the revelation that this myth is “fraught with Freudian overtones and makes one wonder” (Morford 237). That pregnant-to-term utterance is followed by the deliciously opaque “Athena, another virgin goddess, has close female companions” (Morford 237). Cue scandalized gasps! And the text's final allusion to the subject appears as a nod to Sappho, the prima-lebiana, herself. Even an unskillful dolt who begins sentences with the word *And* can appreciate the admirable overttness with which lesbianism is treated when the authors say of Sappho and her love-interest “The literal details of their relationship may be open to endless, subjective interpretation” (Morford 222). Makes one wonder, indeed....
A delving into classic Greek philosophy reveals that gay women are treated with as much ambiguity outside the mire of mythology as within. In his revered *Symposium*, the god-like Plato has bequeathed the scholarly world a veritable gold mine of queer theory. Page after page of this concise epistle wax thoughtfully about the varied nuances of homosexuality. Dismayingly, however, virtually all of this discussion applies exclusively to homosexual males. The sole exception lies in Aristophanes' speech, wherein lesbianism is discussed specifically, if succinctly. Plato employs the voice of this much-admired playwright to divulge an admittedly provocative cosmogony of gender and sexuality. In the olden times, tells Plato via Aristophanes, humanity consisted of three genders. Besides male and female, this third gender boasted the sex organs of both the aforementioned. Now, before we go praising Plato for rejecting a gender-binary construct, it must be noted that his third gender was strictly confined to the past-tense, having long since vanished from the face of the Earth, according to the narrator. We can imagine the discomfort this detail must have elicited from any intersex people who may have been present at the Symposium. Nonetheless, Aristophanes persisted with vigor: Each of these three genders was cleaved neatly in half, he tells, creating contemporary humankind in the process. As each resulting being inherently longs to reunite with its estranged pair, the subsequent halves of the progenitive intersex gender account for heterosexuality. The two halves of the original male, moreover, begat homosexual men, whereas the halves of the primordial female explain homosexuality among females. With this broad stroke, our beloved Athenian champion legitimizes lesbianism as, at least, 'a thing'. However, one cannot ignore the manner in which references of gay women in the text contrast with that of gay men. “His reasons for doing this,” Aristophanes proclaims, telling of how Zeus outfitted fledgling humanity with conveniently located genitalia, “were to ensure that, when couples embraced, as well as male-female relationships leading to procreation and offspring, male-male relationships would at least involve
sexual satisfaction, so that people would relax, get on with their work and take care of other aspects of their life” (Plato 27). Heterosexuality, then, is attributed a biological significance, while male homosexuality is lauded for its potency of physical pleasure. On the legitimacy of female homosexuality, however, Aristophanes neglects to comment. Perhaps fearing the inference of his silence might be overlooked, he elucidates “While they're boys, because they were sliced from the male gender, they fall in love with men, they enjoy sex with men and they like to be embraced by men” (Plato 28). Tellingly, the playwright fails to mention whether gay women fall in love, enjoy sex or like to be embraced. Instead, he says flatly, “Any women who are offcuts from the female gender aren't particularly interested in men; they incline more towards women, and therefore female homosexuals come from this group” (Plato 28). Plato has thereby gifted lesbians with the privilege of existing. Tragically, they apparently are not capable of romance or sexual satisfaction. They are simply... there. A dirty trick on the part of the gods, I say. Lesbians got the gay part right, but they forgot to line up in the penis queue—a lack which denies them the right to pleasure. Anecdotally, Plato attributes adultery to heterosexuality in this same passage. It might be remotely possible that, just maybe, we can intuit the slightest, most subtle and wholly inoffensive hint of bias.

Now that we've adequately scrutinized the subtext of golden-era mythology and philosophy, we may as well complete the trifecta. Not unlike its aforementioned counterparts, epic poetry also offers us some discomforting insight into how the classical world approached gender and sexuality. Considered a canonical poet of Latin literature, Ovid composed an absolute compendium of material. His poetic interpretations of earlier Greek myth offer fascinating glimpses into the societal perspectives of ancient Rome. Not surprisingly, the celebrated poet has not avoided criticism regarding his handling of gender issues. Among the most inflammatory examples of his work is Ovid's rendering of the Iphis and Ianthe myth. To be
fair, this particular tale was already rife with problems long before Ovid took up the cause. In short, Iphis was a gender-queer lesbian who fell madly for her true love, Ianthe. Due to the inherent inadequacies of lesbianism (according to ancient Greeks, then Romans, and finally, far too many contemporary Americans, to name but a few) the distraught lovers could only reach a happy ending by way of Iphis growing a penis, shedding her femininity and basking in the implied superiority of heterosexuality. For his part, Ovid's bombastic interpretation has only intensified discontent among feminists and their advocates. Deborah Kamen, Associate Professor at University of Washington, is among the many to weigh in on the myth's gross inequities. Adjunct in Gender, Women and Sexuality Studies, Kamen applies shrewd scrutiny in her article, “Naturalized Desires and the Metamorphosis of Iphis”:

What makes Iphis's love unnatural—in the sense of 'against an external nature'—is the fact that consummation without penetration is inconceivable. Although anatomy is underplayed in Ovid's telling of the myth, the problem of two vaginas (and no penis) is likely hinted at when Ovid says that Iphis and Ianthe had an aequum / vulnus (720-1) — a phrase primarily referring to their equal wounds of love, but also to their matching genitalia. (Kamen 27)

In his pointed rendering, Ovid has erected an outright monument to the archetypal phallus, implying a crucial deficiency wherever one is lacking. Indeed, the culturally sensitive reader might feel a little prick at perceiving the firmness of the poet's bias. There can be no mistaking as to which direction his long-winded literary endowment has blown the preferential weathercock.

As cathartic as the craft of a well-honed criticism may be, this may not succeed in affecting a sea change in the well-established waters of patriarchal heteronormativity. What more might we do to change our present state? For journalist, scholar and celebrated gay novelist, Ali Smith, the answer begins with changing the past. In her masterful retelling of the Iphis and
Ianthe myth, *Girl Meets Boy*, Smith weaves a modern context around an ancient bigotry. As the title implies, Smith turns the antique myth upside down and inside out, leaving no taboo unexplored. Instead of tiptoeing around the tale's touchier connotations, Smith shines a white-hot spotlight on what feels like every injustice, every intolerance, every single demeaning insult a woman has ever endured for being a lesbian, a feminist or just simply a female. Yet, whereas the original Iphis was stricken with the lamentable condition of being “a lass with a lack” (Smith 76), Smith’s heroine is lacking in absolutely nothing. She suffers not loneliness, nor is she locked in a tower, nor in need of rescue from yonder knight in shining armor. From the onset of the book, our protagonist is confident, tenacious and quite content with her anatomy just as it is. There is no want of a phallus separating her and her lover from their well-deserved happy ending. Still, *Girl Meets Boy* amounts to so much more than a feminist revision, chalk full of insightful recasting and clever wordplay. Remarkably, Smith also employs the narrative to address a myriad of social issues besides misogyny and homophobia. The pristine veneer of antiquity is shattered by Smith's contemporary inclusion of racism, classism, consumerism and even eating disorders. A ribbon of civic protest is woven throughout the story, inciting the reader to question one's own role in such matters. Even more important, however, is the honest palpability Smith has bestowed on the theme of love. Abandoning the flowery verboseness of tradition, the author describes romance in a manner that must be poignantly familiar to anyone who has ever found themselves drowning in the stuff. Responding to a depiction of truest love, the novel's heroine playfully interrogates her lover: “Did their hearts hurt?” inquires the aptly named Anthea, “Did they think they were underwater all the time? Did they feel scoured by light? Did they wander about not knowing what to do with themselves?” (Smith 94). With tender and candid humanity, Smith offers a story that is immersive to anyone with a beating heart. Yet, as engaging as all these themes are, there
remains an underlying motif that is perhaps even more important. To me, *Girl Meets Boy* is a story about family.

When I picked up my kids at our custody exchange last night, Daphne chose to stay with her mom. That decision marked a first in this screwed up arrangement, and the blow hit me hard. Our relationship has been strained this year, and I can't pretend I didn't see the writing on the wall. She's an angsty teenager; I'm a neurotic head case; I suppose the floodwaters of our miscommunication were bound to spill over at some point. I just hope she's okay over there; she won't answer my phone calls. Somehow, I find reassurance in the fact that she has my copy of *Girl Meets Boy*. Fortuitously, I finished it last week while we were still amiable and had suggested she borrow it. I know the wry narrative will resonate with her, and I feel good about the message contained therein. I want her to know that, though she's been feeling empty as of late, she's not lacking a damn thing. So, with my apartment a little emptier and my mind a lot fuller, I sat down this morning to rewrite the conclusion to the final essay for my Classical Mythology class. I did manage to type what you read here, but mostly I sat around anxiously, engrossed in a melancholic reverie. I kept imaging that Daphne would arrive soon, ready to talk out our grievances. Instead, it was her brother who broke the spell, crashing through the front door in all his sweaty, adolescent boisterousness. Today, however, his playful energy was discernibly subdued.

“Hey buddy,” I offered, “something wrong?”

“My friends wanted me to play guns with them,” he replied tentatively, “but I was reading my book and I didn't feel like playing with them.”

“And?” I coaxed.

“...And they called me a sissy.”

My eyes stung as I pulled him into an embrace.

“I am so, so proud of you, my son.”
Works Cited


Hello! My name is Emily Sanderfer. I’m a second year student at West Valley, and I’m an engineering major. In English 1A, with Mr. Davis, we read an article detailing the importance of idle acts—acts that provide no real accomplishments or process in work or school. Just plain and simple, idle acts are being present in the moment. (Think of riding a bike for fun, reading a good book, enjoying the weather outside.) This article, with quite the simplistic message, revived memories the intense AP Biology I took during my junior year of high school. While in this class, I not only observed my own, personal stress but I also discovered the majority of the class pushed themselves to be perfect. They were worked to the brim, stressed, with little sleep. As a result, they did not enjoy very many idle activities—activities that could protect themselves from their very own stress. Allow my essay to be a reminder: life doesn’t always have to be go-go-go, and sometimes you need to prioritize idleness.

**Idleness: The Salvation of Society**  
-Emily Sanderfer-

Junior year of high school, my AP Biology teacher informed the class, with her typical monotone voice, that we would be calculating how fast our metabolisms worked. To know our metabolic rate, she said, we must record what we eat, how often we eat, but more importantly, our sleeping habits. Henceforth, my classmates and I recorded our sleep, and, exactly three weeks later, we all shuffled to the front of the classroom to report our habits. A senior, a man who was accepted into UC Berkeley, was first. “I get four hours of sleep pretty consistently,” he said. We all nodded and helped him calculate his metabolic rate. Next, another senior, a girl who was accepted into USC, admitted she got six hours of sleep. Once again, we calculated her metabolic rate. So on and so forth this cycle continues. Six, eight, seven, three, five, hours of sleep every night. By the time I cleared my throat, my classmates have zoned out in space, utterly bored. “Nine,” I said. “I get nine hours every night.”

My classmates blinked, suddenly snapping out of their boredom. Did they hear that correctly? Nine hours of sleep? “B-but,” I clearly remember one said. “How? How do you have the time?”

How do I have the time to sleep? How do you not have the time to sleep? They worked, I realized. They worked and worked and worked. They forgot to sleep and free time. Even worse,
they are not alone. Society has normalized this constant working attitude, forcing children to sacrifice sleep for work and adults to spend long hours in the office. People never idle; they never endeavor to save their already deteriorating mental health. If only these workaholics knew the healing powers of idleness or even their self-destructive nature of their actions. After all, the constant pressure to work continuously in our society damages mental well-being. Idleness, therefore, saves mental health and promotes a healthy lifestyle.

The pressure to work continuously is inescapable and remains etched into the very structure of society. Children from a young age are pushed to school, where they are given homework. As the years progress, more work is piled on: clubs, sports, volunteer time, chores, family obligations, etc. As Mark Slouka, in “Quitting the Paint Factory: On the Virtues of Idleness,” puts it: “Today we, quite literally, live to work.... We begin to see “hobbies… as either ridiculous or self-indulgent” if they “interfere with work” (Slouka 281-282). Students focus more on their studies, and the ones who work continuously are given tickets to elite universities (like many of my peers in AP Biology). Soon, former students enter the working world, where they use endearing words like ‘workaholic’ or ‘rat race’ to describe their life. Working longer hours become the norm, and employees are expected to send emails and answer phone calls at home. Without a doubt, society nowadays demands its inhabitants to constantly work.

This continuous pressure to work is crippling to individuals’ mental health. Stress naturally flourishes under pressure and heavy workload. I, just like any other inhabitant of society, figured “in order to be successful [I] must not only work but work continuously” (Slouka 284). I poured much of my free time into AP Biology, reading the massive textbook and memorizing carbon structures. I limited my time engaging in my hobbies--swimming and writing--simply to study more. Any time I did engage in my hobbies, a sense of guilt clung to me. Inevitably, my anxiety became overwhelming, harming my mental well-being. I certainly noticed
my mental health deteriorate because of the constant pressure to work. I then began to notice
other peer’s mentally unhealthy obsession over the pressure to constantly work. Students limited
their sleep to finish more homework (like many students in AP Biology). They carried around
pencil boxes full of flashcards, profusely studying its contents. They spent lunch studying instead
of actually eating. Stress builds; soon, the stress becomes too much, crippling mental well-being.

This pressure most certainly isn’t specific to students either; Adults feel the overwhelming
pressure to work too. As Mark Slouka puts it: “the continent of invisible possessions from time to
talent to contentment… [is] rendered unclean, or translated into the grammar of dollars and
cents” (Slouka 279). Unlike children, adults must work for money, which determines how often
they eat, where they sleep, and how comfortable they are in life. Adults must, therefore, face
large amounts of anxiety, or at least a mentally unhealthy obsession, to work, for if they don’t
then basic necessities are not guaranteed. Stress builds. Employers then take advantage of their
employees’ fear, demanding employees to commit more time to work. Stress increases, just like
the number of emails that must be read before the morning, the number of phone calls that must
be made. Just like students, that stress becomes unbearable, crippling mental well-being.

Idleness, by contrast, restores mental health and promotes a healthy life style. Idleness,
especially, is avoiding work and obligations. Refraining from folding the laundry, cleaning house,
finishing a paper, reading the textbook, and any work-like obligation classifies as idleness. Think
of idleness as being “in the present moment” and away from responsibilities (Slouka 288).
Idleness is walking in a park or enjoying a cup of tea or listening to good music; it’s having an
“uninterrupted conversation” or just plain “contemplating our lives before they are gone”
(Slouka 288). Idleness saves mental well-being and promotes a healthy life.

Logically speaking, of course idle acts restores mental well-being. Idleness allows an
individual to not participate in the continuous working attitude and to instead focus on whatever
they find pleasurable. Doing something pleasurable, by its very definition brings pleasure to the individual. Stress, therefore, diminishes, allowing the mind to relax and saving mental well-being. For example, I put aside time every day senior year to write. Just spending an hour a day participating in this idle act reduced my stress over the societal demand to constantly be working. I was relaxed. Soon, my anxiety diminished substantially and my mental well-being improved. I was happier. Of course, writing is just an example of one idle act. Any pleasurable idle act, logically, will restore mental health.

Meditation--the very definition of idleness--absolutely heals mental health. As mentioned before, idleness is being “in the present moment” (Slouka 288). Meditation and mindfulness are often referred to as being in the present. Quite literally, mediation is silently sitting in a room, focusing on breathing. This is as far as one can get from executing work. Nevertheless, mediation has always been praised for its mental healing powers. Before I began meditating, I was profusely anxious. Since I have begun meditating, my anxiety and stress have diminished, allowing me to live a much happier life. Meditation has also been scientifically proven to reduce stress, which, in turn, heals mental well-being (Davis). Meditation--the closest act to pure idleness--clearly improves mental health. Any idle act, therefore, must help mental health too.

Idleness also promotes a better life style. Recall the exact definition of idleness--it’s living “in the present moment” (Slouka 288). Idleness allows an individual to attend to their own needs in the present moment, with no fear of future or past work. Sacrificing just an hour a day to idle allows one to keen in on their own needs, thereby making one happier and one’s life style better. By having an uninterrupted conversation (and idle act), an individual experiences a lighthearted social interaction, making him happier and his life better. By contemplating her life (an idle act), an individual understands her true goals in life, making her happier and her life more focused and better. Walking in a park or enjoying a cup of tea or listening to music all reduces stress,
making life better. Clearly, executing an idle act refreshes an individual, making life more relaxed and better than before.

Many of the students in AP Biology exemplify the horrendous effect of society’s constant pressure to work. They rarely slept, always worked, and were surprised by a healthy sleeping schedule. Sadly, many adults and children alike mirror this detrimental behavior. The pressure to constantly be working is edged into the very structure of our community, leading to an annihilation of individual mental health. Luckily, though, idle acts restore mental well-being. So take a break once and away from the rat race. Your mental health will thank you.

Works Cited


My motivation for writing this essay was to tack the issue of gun reform in the US in a new way. I had written three other essays on gun reform which for one reason or another didn’t work out. What they did do, however, was grow my already sizable appreciation for the need of some sensible, hard to argue with, public safety laws. By applying terror management theory to a widely controversial issue, I sought to explore where the pushback to these otherwise sensible laws is born. I felt edified by the information I gather and opinions I explored and developed in the course of this assignment. Rather than a push for policy, I’d like this essay to be seen as an analysis as to why popular ideas go unlegislated, and why the most powerful country in the world keeps letting its citizens be harmed in such a predictable, preventable way.

**Gun Reform: America’s Dying to Meet You**

-Kian Lechner-

I had always feared IV’s. The idea that one day I would most likely need one terrified me. This fear lasted until I was lucky enough to train and become an EMT. My paramedic friends taught me how to administer one, and immediately my fears disappeared. Working in the medical field has exposed to me to many things which once scared me. I’ve found that being forced to face them and better understanding how they work helped shed their intimidating qualities. As someone who was once afraid of things I wasn’t exposed to or didn’t understand, I’ve become quite good at spotting that fear in others. Of these fears, the one I’ve observed to be most prevalent is American society’s widespread fear of death, and its avoidance of dealing with its inevitability. This has unfortunately translated into a lack of action to stop some of America’s biggest threats and forced a socio-political arrested development. One example of this political stagnation is shown in America’s relative inaction regarding gun reform. Gun reform in the US has been thwarted by American society’s proclivity to terror management.

Terror Management Theory (TMT) posits that our actions are driven by a subconscious avoidance and denial involving our inevitable deaths. This has become so widespread in first world countries like the US, where people live in such relative safety, that it has become a part of our “culture” to “den[y] death. We’re taught that death is something we should shy away from, and try to forget about” (Taylor). When we are aware of our impending doom, we “become
anxious and depressed” therefore, we work hard to avoid that thought by pushing out reality and busying ourselves (Taylor). This is likely due to the fact that death has become almost a sterile process in the first world. In other countries when a family member passes (a term we use to avoid saying “dies”) the body is managed by the family; here it is immediately whisked away, made up to look like it is still living, dressed, and only then presented momentarily before burial. Even in traumatic situations such as car accidents, which could serve as a reminder to drive more carefully, we (first responders) are told to hold up sheets to block the view from the road, and cover every body with tarps or cloth. All this to avoid someone else from witnessing the sobering reality of death’s imminence. So instead the citizens of the first world carry on blissfully, and purposefully ignorant.

In a similar fashion, it seems to be human nature to be in total denial about our personal vulnerability. My experience working on an ambulance has exposed me to many people as they go through some of their worst and highest stress days. While most situations are unique, one common mindset can be found in many of them. The idea that “this doesn’t” or “won’t happen to me” is prevalent. Every day the news is filled with tragedy and calamitous events, but until one happens to us directly, it’s easy to develop a sense of distance from it. A great example of this reaction can be found in an episode of the British EMS documentary show, BBC Ambulance. After watching their loved one suffer a heart attack and receive CPR, two shaken up women are put in a second ambulance to follow the patient to the hospital. The show’s cameras (mounted inside the ambulance) capture their discussion. As they wait to leave, one of the ladies says to the other, “This doesn’t happen to us does it? This happens to other people” (BBC Ambulance). This represents a situation where a family is genuinely in denial about their vulnerability. It’s easy to

1 To view the clip, go to YouTube and search “BBC Ambulance S02E01 720p” and play the video from 9:42 through to 10:35. Alternatively, you can follow this link: https://youtu.be/QXZREboizk?utm=9m42s
empathize with them as they are forced to quickly shed denial and meet reality. The fact that a
clip taken from a British show so accurately represents my experience in the US, suggests that
perhaps this denial is prevalent in all first world countries, rather than just America. This false
sense of mortal safety, regardless of health or habits, is most likely caused by the fact that the
women in the video, much like most first world citizens, are so well shielded from death. This is
so deeply ingrained that when it is occasionally brought up for them, they are left in a state of
disbelief. Despite the fact that statistically, their loved one had all the traits of a high risk person,
they believed they were the exception simply because they’ve never been the victim of that
situation before.

People’s false sense of security in a wildly dangerous world is driven by a subconscious
defense mechanism. The security the two women felt, prior to their emergency, is supplied by a
variant of Terror Management Theory. Instead of just being the cognitive dissonance allowing
people to avoid the fear of death, TMT has become a crutch many of us use to avoid fear of
danger in general. We feel that we and our immediate community are safe from calamities
simply because our collective denial hasn’t been challenged yet by disaster. It is only after
moments when our fragile mortality is proven to us that we develop “a much more appreciative
attitude, a sense of gratitude for aspects of [our] life [we] had taken for granted before” (Taylor).
It should be a testament to our mental primitiveness that we can intellectually recognize this
phenomenon, but still require a by chance brush with death to incur that paradigm shift. It has
been proven time and again however, that those of us who are forced close to death, shed its
burden and enjoy their life more fully.

It is in this pragmatic and enlightened perspective that we will mobilize to take action and
protect ourselves. Calamities haven’t discontinued in America. If we all wake up in the morning
thinking we will be safe and healthy that day, some will be wrong. Threats to Americans’ lives,
like gun violence, which killed 33,594 Americans in 2014, remain unresolved (BBC World News). Unfortunately, it’s often people who have power and influence in our government who work to guarantee we never see a solution. Industries like firearm manufacturing, stand to benefit from a more armed and less safe society. The more gun deaths, the more they can convince people they need to protect themselves. They prey on the fact that we’re scared to face the truth of mortality. They make up specious arguments like “guns don’t kill people” in an attempt to separate their product from the ugly reality. They take advantage of the fact that the argument against their industry is married to an unpleasant thought: people die. People are so afraid of confronting their mortality that they shy from anything that invokes those fears. The ironic truth is, America is so afraid of death, it won’t get rid of what’s killing us.

Stagnation of gun reform in the US is driven by each and every citizen’s terror management. If they woke up with the realization that they, a loved one, or even their community, may be the victims of gun violence, they would vote differently. It is only when we see the world realistically that voting in self-defense becomes synonymous with voting empathetically. Somewhere in the US right now, a citizen is completely unaware that they are the next victim of gun violence. It’s the terror managers today that become the victims of gun violence tomorrow.

Hiding from violence will not stop it. If we can understand and come to terms with the reality and possibility of our imminent dangers, we can begin to effect change. While this level of change and effort may seem impossible, it's not. America is bleeding. We have a duty to preserve life, stem the bleeding, and never give up. Whether that’s through backgrounds checks, age limits, or bans, we should do whatever is ‘necessary and proper’ to help our country adapt, and help create the safer world our children, citizens and global onlookers deserve. It is in this way
that we will begin to heal and show the world that we will no longer allow ourselves to be the victims of our timid complacency and inactivity.

Works Cited


My name is Jackie Lyons, and I am a part time student at West Valley College. I chose this topic as part of an English assignment. I really related to how the internet has made me into the person I am today. I was first introduced to the internet during my pre-teen years. It has affected my life both, positively and negatively. At first, I believed everything that I saw on the internet. Later on, I came to realize that not everything on the internet is true. In this essay, I explore how I was influenced by what I read on the internet and how family and friends were also impacted by it. I also researched how the internet has affected obese people, negatively and positively.

How the Internet Can Ruin and Save A Life
-Jackie Lyons-

In middle school and high school, my life consisted of school, sleep and basketball. I was not into video games or the internet and I was pretty fit. I had a cell phone but it really was not good for texting or social media. I was focused more on sports, fitness and real life than being on my phone. Once I got an iPhone, I was able to go on the internet, but still didn't go on it that much. Then the iPhone started developing apps like Snapchat, Instagram and Facebook. I was glued to my phone. I started to care less about fitness and how I ate, and cared more about what people were posting and texting. I gained a lot of weight because I was always watching tv and being on my phone constantly. I started to buy diet pills, buying into fad diets and waist trainers which never helped with my weight. My weight in particular was negatively affected by my increase in screen time. One day, last November to be exact, I woke up and actually started to look at workout videos online. I read articles and blogs online about what to look for when buying food. Using the internet helped me to become healthier. Based on my experience, I hypothesize that the internet can be a positive tool to help people get healthy, but it also can have a negative impact that can keep individuals from living a healthy life. Apps, fitness videos, and health plans on the internet have a lot of positive effects by helping people plan out their workouts and meal plans. It also provides videos that can target specific problem areas. On the other side, constantly being on your phone, looking at and buying into advertising about diet fads doesn't make or improve your physical health. It actually impacts people's lives negatively by
making people purchase the products that are based on false claims and can possibly be harmful. I interviewed one individual, developed and administered a survey to Facebook friends aged 20-65, and read the article “I’m Searching for Solutions’: Why are Obese Individuals Turning to the Internet for Help and Support with ‘Being Fat’?” by Sophie Lewis et al. I found that there were equal amounts of positive feedback with screen time and physical health as well as negative feedback which makes my hypothesis correct. The internet does affect physical health, negatively and positively.

In order to prove my hypothesis I set out to discover if other people were affected by the internet positively and negatively while obtaining health information. My interviewee is a 60-year female who has always struggled with her weight. I chose her because she was readily available and was willing to talk to me. I sat down with her and asked the questions face to face. I asked her how the internet affected her health and how much time she spent online. My interviewee was very open in answering all the questions and answered them thoroughly. I found out that she spends about 4 hours a day on the computer or phone. Most of the time she is importing data, writing lessons, researching, writing emails, teaching lessons and monitoring student work for her job. The rest of the time she is looking at her apps, messaging, and looking at Facebook and Twitter. She spends about 1/2 hour out of the day walking for exercise. Just as my hypothesis predicted, the internet has impacted her life both positively and negatively. She has been able to gather more information about health recipes and exercise programs. She uses the health app to count her steps and monitor sleep habits. She uses Weight Watchers to track her food intake and record weight loss. Screen time has affected her negatively because she spends too much time on the internet, reading, and not enough time doing physical activity or cooking healthy meals. She was disappointed to read an “article” that promised to explain how Melissa McCarthy had lost weight. It ended up being an advertisement for a weight loss pill and there was no evidence that
McCarthy had even used the stuff. My interviewee noticed there is a lot of advertising about diet fads on the internet which are not always healthy. She has found that using the internet and apps online can be beneficial but that you have to make sure to check references and be aware that not everything you read online is accurate. This can have negative consequences.

My family and friends on Facebook experienced positive and negative health effects on the internet. I sent out my survey to all my friends on Facebook and family members, ages 20 to 65. Ten people responded. Two people answered the questions with short answers and did not elaborate. The rest of the people gave thorough answers. I asked how the internet positively or negatively impacted eating habits. A lot of their answers were similar. Most of them said that the internet positively helped them because they could find healthy recipes online. The internet also taught them how and why to eat right. This proves that the positive side of screen time in my hypothesis is correct due to people using the web to find meal plans and recipes to help with their physical health. On the other hand, people would say eating while watching tv, or watching endless amounts of YouTube, impacted their lives negatively. Doing this would cut into their time to work out or doing something productive with their lives. A Facebook friend also said, “It is easy to get discouraged when the image of the “perfect man” is portrayed as a bodybuilder or a muscle head type.” Others agreed with his point of view. They understood that spending too much time on Instagram and comparing themselves to models did not help them live a healthy life. As a result of my data collection, nine out of ten subjects found that the internet affected their lives positively. Four out of ten do not use online health apps. Seven out of ten felt that the internet affected their health negatively. The majority of the people I surveyed felt that the internet did affect their health lives both positively and negatively. This also seems to be the case with the obese test subjects who were interviewed by Sophie Lewis et al in a study that questioned
why certain people were more inclined to use the internet to gather ways to get healthy over other venues.

Lewis et al also discovered that obese people found the internet affected their lives both positively and negatively when searching for information about health and dieting. The authors studied the ways obese people find information to help themselves lose weight. This study found that people who are very overweight tend to use the internet for health information because it is an easy way to get the help they need without being embarrassed. Because obesity is a highly stigmatized condition, many obese people do not participate in exercise programs at the gym. Sophie Lewis et al. explained that obese people use the internet because “Physical exercise programs may be socially challenging in public spaces, whereas diets can be applied in the privacy of individuals own home” (340). The internet provides information and support for these people without the fear of being embarrassed by the outside world. There are many types of websites geared towards weight loss which include commercial diet options, medical sites, online chat rooms, and blogs. Individuals who searched for diet information on the internet were often so desperate, they were willing to try any type of diet, even if it was unhealthy or unproven, so Lewis et al. said: “Most of these participants stated that the claims of amazing weight loss in severely obese individuals encouraged them to search for these specific types of diets” (343). Unfortunately, the study found that many obesity-related websites and diet programs were not medically proven. These programs, without a doctor’s supervision, can cause illness or more severe medical conditions. Sophie Lewis et al. designed the study to discover what information is searched on the internet, what their motivations are, and how they apply this information to their daily lives. After 142 interviews, the authors found two key findings. One finding was, “Individuals repeatedly searched online for weight loss information in a desperate attempt to find a solution to their overweight” (347). In the second finding “Participants had a strong desire to
connect with a community of others to share experiences for support and accurate health information” (Lewis et al. 348). Obese individuals are not only desperate to find solutions to their obesity which sometimes causes them to follow diet fads, but they also desire to participate in online support groups which allow them to find more accurate weight loss information. The internet was used positively when individuals were able to search for diet information in the privacy of their own homes. They were not subject to embarrassing looks or comments from other people. Without the internet, these individuals may not have sought health information at all. A negative aspect of internet use was many of the participants were so desperate to lose weight that they were willing to follow fad diets. The study found that many obesity-related websites were inaccurate and misleading which could cause dangerous health risks. Use of the internet by obese individuals had both a positive and negative effect.

People of all shapes, sizes, and ages use the internet to find information about healthy living and nutrition. I noticed that the article showed how obese people use the internet for health information and my survey results showed that my family and Facebook friends do the same thing. The survey people use the internet for help with health information and different types of work outs. This is significant because the study that was taken in the article was accurate for not only obese people, but for regular sized people in my survey. People who took the survey and the people studied in the article both talked about the negative side of screen time, which is seeing advertisements about diet fads trying to get their attention. The people in the article and the people I surveyed and interviewed knew that they could find healthy recipes, diet plans, and workouts online. All three groups thought alike, even though the article was written in 2009 and the survey was done in 2018. Everyone who uses a phone or a laptop noticed that they used the internet a little too much. This affects their physical health by wasting time that could be used doing physical activities. I also noticed that the older people I surveyed were not online as much
as the younger people I surveyed. The older generation used the internet to find information but most did not spend endless hours on Instagram or Snapchat. Using the internet to improve health can be a good thing, if used wisely. I have found that the people in the article and the people I surveyed found that the internet was positive because they were able to find workouts, healthy nutrition and diets. The people in the article and my interviewee saw the negative effects of fad diets and quick weight loss gimmicks that are advertised on the internet. Both groups realized that screen time had a negative effect on their lives because it can waste too much time, some information is inaccurate and advertising gives people a false sense of reality. So far, my hypothesis has been proven correct by the data I collected.

In conclusion, the internet does affect physical health, both positively and negatively. Personally, too much screen time affected my health and it was encouraging to discover that others were affected in the same way. The internet does provide a lot of positive information and applications that can improve health. The information seeker needs to be wary of unproven diets and programs that seem too good to be true. The problem is that many people believe everything that they find on the internet. There needs to be a more accurate way to determine if a plan is medically proven and safe. One solution would be to verify websites to make sure they are designed by the medical profession and complete with research to back up all claims. This might assure users that the information they read will positively affect their health goals.

Works Cited

RESEARCHED
ARGUMENT

BEST ESSAYS
Hello, my name is Collin Bartolomei, and I wrote the paper you’re about to read, or skim through if you prefer. I was 18 years old at the time of this paper’s completion and taking my first semester of college at West Valley. I was also working part time in retail which, mind you, was its own headache on top of the long hours spent researching, developing, and editing this essay. A year later and here I am writing this prelude, still not quite sure how I am where I am today. It’s unimaginable to me that this might accurately convey who I am as a writer, or a person for that matter, but hopefully it will suffice.

This essay was a cumulation of many hours of frustration, confusion, and self-loathing. So… you might be wondering why I chose my subject. To put it simply: I’m a member of the gaming community, a community that I am exceedingly dedicated to not only as a player, but as you’ll read - someone determined to follow it as a career path. I wrote this essay to confront and condemn what I believe is the single greatest issue within the industry. Many long nights were spent writing and rewriting each and every line, character, and space you’ll see in this paper. I remember sitting and staring dead-eyed at my laptop, my dinner waiting patiently beside me, cold long before I ever considered eating it. Despite the lasting memory I have of this essay, I still consider it a positive one. I’m proud of what I accomplished with this paper, and I hope you’ll see why while reading. Thank you.

Profiteering the Video Game Industry:
Dismantling the Foundation of Entertainment
-Collin Bartolomei-

Since its inception in the early 70’s the video game industry has gifted the public access to revolutionary and limitless entertainment, but it seems those days will soon be past and forgotten. Microtransactions, micro-payments, and in-game purchases are the three most common terms used to define the biggest problem facing the video game industry today: predatory profiteering of players. Microtransactions are deals available for purchasing in-game virtual currency, experience points or buffs, and other advantages to gameplay in exchange for real money. The rewards gained from each purchase prove to be a strong incentive for consumers, and because of this companies have reaped additional profits that otherwise wouldn’t have been feasible if not for the creation of games around this system. As a gamer, I’ve seen this shift in the industry and worry for the future of games less suitable to the pay-to-win design such as single-player and story-focused games. My future is tenuous because of this as well because I’ve focused my career path on creative directing/narrative design in games. If microtransactions continue to alter game design in the foreseeable future, then it’s possible that there might not be any games for me to
write. Microtransactions may be beneficial for the creators, but in some cases they’ve created serious real-world consequences. In fact, in December of 2015 a news report, “How Video Game Players can Protect Themselves from Microtransactions” explains how a man by the name of Lance Perkins’ credit card was charged nearly eight thousand dollars by his son unbeknownst to both of them through purchases of microtransactions (Li). The sheer existence of microtransactions makes their necessity worth questioning, and if they actually provide any service to the consumer rather than solely the creator. The role microtransactions play in the video game industry has largely become widespread and as of now shows no signs of change.

With the creation and implementation of microtransactions in the video game industry becoming common practice, the purpose of video games is gradually being warped toward the sole purpose of profit. This is extremely troubling for the future of the industry and mustn’t be condoned nor accepted by consumers if we’re to expect the platform to maintain the goal of providing sincere entertainment.

The birth of microtransactions has been a relatively recent outbreak in the industry with early adaptations only appearing within the last five or so years. When first introduced they were much more reserved and confined to cosmetic or other purchasable additions that didn’t affect gameplay. At that time they were moreso a prototype, or proof of concept for companies to test and refine over the years. Now in 2017 microtransactions are hard to avoid in the mainstream as they’ve become a crucial tool for game companies to create long-term revenue on individual games. The vast majority of the gaming community has not reacted positively to the incorporation of micro-payments in the industry, but microtransactions are still profiting from those that did. I myself have been adamant against them and refuse to resort to purchasing them. For the gaming community, microtransactions have become the most polarizing issue in the
history of the industry. With that in mind, it’s important to understand why microtransactions are harmful to games and the people who play them.

Microtransactions themselves are not inherently damaging to the quality of video games, but their existence has opened a gateway to exploitation and profit. In “Microtransactions are Good, Pay to Win is Bad” Chris Chenard argues that “It’s a model that works flawlessly when done correctly. However, pay to win remains a problem in the industry” (Chenard). It’s true that if microtransactions were used “correctly” as he suggests for cosmetic purposes than they could very well benefit both sides, but his argument fails to take in to account why and how pay-to-win systems exist to begin with: microtransactions. If not for microtransactions companies would have no means or reason to create games in the pay-to-win design. The pay-to-win structure of locking away content behind paywalls hinges entirely upon a company having a system established for currency exchange of real to virtual and microtransactions provide that opportunity. With that accomplished companies that choose to implement in-game purchases can and will do so. This creates division in a game's player base for both single and multiplayer between the players that can’t or won’t pay and those that do. A study was taken to confirm this division in “The Hidden Cost of Microtransactions: Buying In-Game Advantages in Online Games Decreases a Player's Status” and it found that, “For functional benefits, players were much more ambivalent about this… [and] players respected those who buy in-game functional advantages less…” (Evers 24). For players that don’t pay for in-game purchases this creates an unfair and frankly disinteresting experience which may genuinely affect their willingness to play or even enjoy the game. It’s this possibility that calls into question the current state of games that feature micropayments and if these companies are guilty of creating unbalanced design with predatory practices to exploit players.
Regardless of the PR narratives companies and their publishers have built to assure gamers of the benefits of microtransactions it’s clear that they’re motivated by greed and self-interest. One of the biggest name publishers in the industry -- Take-Two Interactive: parent company of Rockstar North: creators of the Grand Theft Auto franchise -- has been one of the strongest advocates and abusers of microtransactions in mainstream gaming. The release of *Grand Theft Auto V* in 2013 was a tremendous success for both companies, and according to Take-Two Interactive’s fiscal quarter report approximately 85 million copies were sold (both physical and digital) as of November of this year (“Take-Two Interactive Software, Inc. Reports Results for Fiscal Second Quarter 2018”). But this seemingly wasn’t satisfactory to them, and so with the release of the multiplayer mode microtransactions were included. These microtransactions named “Shark Cards” offer deals ranging from $3 for $100,000 in-game all the way up to $100 for $8,000,000 in-game. Without further investigation there are no red flags, but the in-game prices of content does cause concern. Grand Theft Auto, known for its violence offers rather “colorful” choices to the player’s arsenal such as a broken bottle melee weapon. In *Grand Theft Auto V* Online the broken bottle can only be bought for $300 in-game. To be fair earning the $300 doesn’t actually take very much time at all, but the price still encapsulates the exorbitance of the economic design used to incentivize in-game purchases. A few weeks ago a more problematic example of this was shown when Rockstar enabled an original base-game jet to be purchased and owned. Before now players had no way of legitimately keeping the aircraft, but now they can buy it for the low cost of only 6.5 million in-game dollars. To afford this jet with microtransactions you must buy the most expensive option available for $100 dollars and be left with 1.5 million dollar in-game surplus. To put it into perspective, for the exact same cost of that microtransaction you could alternatively buy the full game for its current price of $40 twice and still have around $20 left over. By making the cost of the jet just out of reach for a cheaper
microtransaction they not only guaranteed themselves additional sales, but in the process waived any reasonable deniability they still had. In a 2014 article titled, “Grand Theft Auto Parent Publisher Defends Microtransactions” the CEO of Take-Two Interactive Strauss Zelnick spoke in defense of their use of microtransactions by saying that Take-Two is “... not in the business of erecting toll booths along the way of gameplay… [but are] in the business of delighting consumers… we want them to feel like they got more than they paid for, not less…” (Makuch). Realistically his words don’t seem to reflect their actions, and if anything reveal a complete disregard for the players they claim to delight. It doesn’t bode well that Zelnick also stated that 70% of the company’s 2013 net revenue was the result of microtransactions from their multiple standing titles at the time including Grand Theft Auto V (Makuch). The precedent set by Take-Two and others in the industry are blatantly predatory, yet people still try to defend the indefensible without basis.

Microtransactions may technically be “optional” but based on how companies have designed the alternatives it’s clearly not much of one. The Grand Theft Auto franchise is once again a perfect example of this practice. The online mode in Grand Theft Auto V refined the microtransaction formula in more ways than one. To maximize profit they carefully priced their in-game content and microtransactions to severely limit rewards earned from legitimate gameplay. One of the most profitable single-player missions that’s existed since the game’s release has a maximum payout of around $22,000 in-game only if played for at least 16 minutes. The aforementioned 6.5 million dollar jet would require you to play that mission approximately 295 times for 3 days and 7 hours to earn that jet alone. This is exactly what drove me and countless others away from this game years ago. Grand Theft Auto V became a grind for players like myself who are unwilling to pay to win because it simply isn’t worth wasting the limited leisure time we have to enjoy games. It doesn’t help that Rockstar has chosen to lock away all of the
additional content that’s been added since 2014 to the multiplayer mode. So if players want the additional content they have the “option” of buying it through microtransactions or spending actual days just to earn one thing out of hundreds more. Not only is this unbalanced, and blatantly predatory, but it is borderline extortion. The loud minority that argues this “optional” stance doesn’t look beyond the face value of microtransactions and naïvely accepts what companies like Take-Two want them to believe.

We as the consumers have enabled companies to exploit us through complicity and blind acceptance of their actions. Business is a constant push and pull, give and take relationship between companies and consumers. A company can only survive if they provide for and meet the expectations of the consumer, and the consumer depends on the company to provide the products and services they need and want in life. It’s a fragile balance that only works if both sides maintain equal pressure on each other. What’s happened in these past years with companies like Take-Two is an attempt at disrupting the balance for profit, and it’s working. Enough of the community has been fooled into accepting microtransactions and because of it ever since we’ve been exploited. There’s a reason that while 2008’s Grand Theft Auto IV received story expansions its successor Grand Theft Auto V has since seen no such treatment, and it’s because we’ve accepted “free” subpar micro-additions over the past four years. Instead of demanding Rockstar and other companies to provided polished and meaningful content we stood idly as microtransactions swept through the industry giving more power to the companies, and they’ve willingly and joyfully received it. During a conference reported on in early November by Alex Wawro in “Take-Two Plans to Only Release Games with 'Recurrent Consumer Spending' Hooks,” Take-Two Interactive’s CEO Strauss Zelnick confirmed that they have every intention to release games only with “recurrent consumer spending” in the future: “We've said that we aim to have recurrent consumer spending opportunities for every title that we put out at this
company. It may not always be an online model, it probably won't always be a virtual currency model, but there will be some ability to engage in an ongoing basis with our titles after release across the board…” (Wawro). This puts into question the entire future of the industry and if we the consumers have enough power left to stop it.

The video game industry is one of the most valuable and engaging mediums for entertainment, but microtransactions are negating this fact. And it’s not just the video game industry that could do this; industry and business of all forms have the capacity and motives to take advantage of consumers and it’s by mere luck they’ve not discovered ways to do so yet. If we as consumers continue to turn a blind eye to these unethical practices then we’ll have nothing left to protect. Video games as we’ve known them were built to suit our desire for entertainment, but because of microtransactions they’ve been warped to be repetitive revenue generators with little regard for quality. We cannot continue to condone the exploitative actions companies are taking against us. To send a clear message that their actions haven’t gone unnoticed we must all stop buying in-game purchases for any game: no exceptions. This won’t be easily achieved without first educating the uninformed of the facts and establishing a united front against the issue. With enough time and dedication, we can spark the change we wish to see and end this before it’s too late.

Works Cited


TakeTwo_plans_to_only_release_game_with_recurrent_consumer_spending_hooks.php.
My name is Yuezhang Qin. I’m an international student from China. In Chinese, my name means “music,” so I also go by the name of Viola. I am currently attending my third year at West Valley as a Biological Science major, and I want to pursue a health-related career. I love writing, and writing has become a part of my life; just like breathing, it is a natural thing. As long as there is an inspiration, reflection, and insight, I will write it down. When I finish an essay, I can find that I am so small and limited. I believe that the ultimate goal of writing is to share valuable thoughts or sentiments and to let the mind break free from the limitations of time and space.

"A Rose for Emily," set in the period of the American Civil War, tells the story of a Southern noble lady, Emily, from bloom to wilting, and her fate uncovers the danger of creating an icon.

**The Faded Glory and the Withered Rose**  
-Yuezhang Qin-

"A Rose for Emily" is one of Faulkner's best-known short stories. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century U.S., the nobles of the South enjoyed a wealthy life by the exploitation of slavery. They believed that their noble blood was born naturally; however, after the Civil War broke out, the slave economy on which the Southern people relied heavily was completely destroyed. Although the Southerners realized that the bright and beautiful life was gone with the wind of industrialization, they stubbornly insisted on their superiority. Against the background of the fall of the southern nobles, "A Rose for Emily" came out. The protagonist of this short story, Emily Grierson, is a microcosm of the historical transformation of Southern nobles. Set in the fictional town of Jefferson, the story tells of her ill-fated love for Homer Barron. Due to the intangible shackles of the old traditional values on Southern women, Emily endures living as an icon of the past glory of the South, and her experience reflects the cultural conflict between the South and the North.

The end of the American Civil War marked the fading glory of the South; however, many Southern people still clung to southern tradition and refused to accept the reality that their tradition had been replaced by the Northern civilization. Emily is a typical representative of this group of people. Although times have changed, Emily is immersed in the past glory of her family,
and she stubbornly sticks to the past noble lifestyle and privileges and resists any new changes. For instance, when the town implements the free postal delivery system, only Emily refuses to fasten a metal house number at her door and to attach a mailbox because she thinks that a noble need not follow the society’s rules (83). Moreover, when she goes to the pharmacy to buy arsenic, she refuses to explain the purpose of her purchase of poison despite the law requiring her to declare it (82). Her tone and attitude to the druggist are extremely arrogant, showing she believes her privilege is above the law. Emily's behaviors represent how the South was desperately resisting all changes after the Civil War. Even though Emily hopes to maintain the glorious nobility of her family, personal honor, and dignity as a noble lady of the South, her wish is broken by the rapid development of the capitalist industrial civilization. After her death, she is buried together with the unknown soldiers of the South and North who were killed in the battle of Jefferson during the Civil War (79). This detail symbolizes that the old tradition of the South is buried by the river of U.S. history.

The American Civil War contributed to the downfall of the Southern plantation economy which was inevitably replaced by capitalist industrialization. The nobles of the South tried to stop the loss of their wealth and social status, so they eagerly hoped that someone would be able to prevent the progress of society. Emily, who is a noble descendant, then becomes an icon of the tradition in the Southern society’s eyes under this situation. The townspeople think that Miss Emily is always an embodiment of the glorious past of the South, a symbol of obligation, and a center of attention. Her death is like the fall of a "monument," proclaiming the end of the Southern glory (79). Emily is respected and admired by the public because she has undertaken a crucial mission to function as a cultural icon of the tradition of the South. Creating an icon not only meets the psychological need of nostalgic people but also establishes a spiritual cornerstone that supports the South which is on the verge of collapse. Emily’s father’s contemporaries even
send their daughters and granddaughters to take Emily’s china-painting lessons "with the same regularity and in the same spirit that they were sent to church on Sundays" to show their respect to Miss Emily (83). When the supporters of the past South die as time passes, the new generation still regards Emily as a cultural symbol of the traditional values of Southern society, so people still acquiesce to her behaviors and privilege. Therefore, when Emily falls in love with Homer, a typical Northerner, the townspeople consider that Emily is "a disgrace to the town and a bad example to the young people" because the love of Emily and Homer poses a threat to their traditions and this is something that townspeople do not want to see (83). To protect their "icon," women force the Baptist minister to visit Emily and even call upon her relations to settle this matter (83). When people see Emily buying poison, they all say that she is going to commit suicide and also say that this would be the best thing. They are more willing for Emily to kill herself than be alive to destroy the icon in the hearts of people, showing that people have never treated her as a flesh-and-blood human being but only as an icon of the old Southern tradition.

The reason Emily subconsciously adheres to her aristocratic status and maintains her family's honor and dignity is because she cannot get rid of the spiritual imprisonment of being a noble. This intangible shackle is not only derived from the stereotypes of a woman in Southern society but also comes from Emily's upbringing. According to Cash’s study, Southern society highly prizes "gyneolatry," adoration of the Southern lady (97). In addition, he points out that some traditional literature of the Southern upper classes implies a gender stereotype; for example, Cash provides a typical image of the Southern woman: a "shield-bearing Athena gleaming whitely in the clouds" (97). Society requires that women have no desires and considers them only as a tool for procreation. This traditional idea of womanhood gradually becomes a constraint around Emily's heart. At the same time, Emily’s father’s control also has a profound influence on Emily's thoughts and personality. Mr. Grierson is a personification of "patriarchy"
in Faulkner’s novels, which means men have the primary power and take the predominant position in the society (Easterbrook 63). In the townspeople’s minds, Grierson’s family always appears with " Miss Emily a slender figure in white in the background, her father a spraddled silhouette in the foreground, his back to her and clutching a horsewhip" (81). The position that Emily stands behind her father shows her dependence on her father and also reflects that Mr. Grierson does not have the will to treat his daughter on an equal footing. In order to preserve the noble ancestry of the family, his father spraddles to show his authority and holds a "horsewhip" to drive away all his daughter’s suitors. In this arrogant and selfish father’s eyes, his daughter Emily, just like the old house behind them, is nothing more than his private property. This almost pathological upbringing leaves Emily with a negative attitude toward the outside world and unprepared for modern society. Even though she is physically liberated after her father’s death, she still cannot forget the aristocratic status and the outdated thoughts she has inherited from her father. Therefore, Emily forces herself to become the ideal icon that society and her family wish her to be.

During Emily’s long life, due to the stereotype of the Southern women caused by the traditional culture and morality, she struggles to live as an icon of Southern tradition, making herself inevitably become a victim of Southern male-dominated society. Emily’s tragedy reveals the destruction of human nature by the traditional thoughts, the family upbringing, and the social forces of the South. Emily is representative of the suppressed women of her time, and their pain, disappointment, and loneliness flow across the ruins of the Southern tradition. In "A Rose for Emily," Faulkner grieves for the lapsed Southern civilization. The rose is not only his tribute to Emily, but also a forever rose for the past South.
Works Cited


I had much to glean from Christopher Buckley’s “Leaving the West Coast.” His words are painfully beautiful; his contrition is authentic and relatable. As a fellow California native, I am drawn to his descriptions of the coastal landscape unique to the West and I can empathize with his difficult choice to depart. “Leaving the West Coast” afforded me an opportunity to explore Buckley’s intent and thoroughly develop the rhetorical devices he employs. To complement direct textual evidence, I integrated a documented interview in which Buckley further explicates the “gleaming” prospects in the East around the time of his departure. This supplementary source better informs the poem, providing readers with Buckley’s retrospective evaluation of the choices he made. If any of us has ever left home— even temporarily— we can likely all relate to Buckley.

**Remembering Your Roots**  
-Evan Brown-

In his poem “Leaving the West Coast,” California native Christopher Buckley reflects on a time and place in his life during which he was more satisfied. His tenure growing up and living in his favorite California province, Santa Barbara, offered him a sense of belonging that, as the reader discovers, he has not found elsewhere. Buckley’s 1987 work is more than just a retrospective lament, however; this poem speaks to a universal sentiment many people may recall when they feel a decision was executed in rashness or ill judgment. “Leaving the West Coast” hones in on memory associated with a particular location, and resulting mental affectedness that comes from being displaced. By means of his imagistic, specific characterization of the Santa Barbara landscape and his reactions to sensory stimuli, Buckley creates movement such that the reader can come to a discovery alongside him about his decision to leave.

Buckley implements universally accessible objects in nature together with California’s diverse topography in order to give these entities the subtle yet influential capacity to prick the speaker’s conscience about leaving the West Coast. Unable to sleep in the early hours of the morning before his move, Buckley opens his poem with observations of common natural elements:

> Just as there are always the unaccountable clouds, dull silverware of the moon, shunting
over the hills, so too there is something
tuneless in sun-burned eucalyptus leaves,
in stars salted obliquely over the sea. (6-10)
The above-mentioned articles were familiar sights for Buckley in Santa Barbara. His curiously unflattering depiction of these elements, however, introduces the first undertone of conflict. While Buckley ruminates his impending departure from his beloved town, he finds himself displeased with the dun, lackluster appearance of unshapely eucalyptus leaves, and the equally unexciting glow of the moon muted by “unaccountable” clouds. The characterization of these clouds suggests not only their unpredictable passing through the sky, but also a foregoing of responsibility for Buckley’s intent to leave. His first tendency is to accuse the objects around him – objects holding no rational responsibility for his choices. It may be his attempt to cope with decisions he now regrets, perhaps trying to convince himself of unattractiveness in West Coast scenery to make his destination more appealing, because he realizes “it is too late to mourn for plans gone / wrong” (4-5). Although Buckley has premeditated his departure from the West, the reader has yet to unearth why Buckley holds such strong reservations over giving a new place of residence a fair chance.

Buckley’s point of view shifts from natural objects overhead to more tangible things in his immediate vicinity, providing more context for his feelings toward his forthcoming move. He records what he sees on his driveway: “a rented truck [gleaming] / like the promise of riches in the east” (16-17). The reader now knows his projected destination: the East Coast. This is not some cross-town move, nor is it a move to a neighboring Western state. Buckley’s move, undoubtedly taking many days by car, involves a major displacement from his customary West Coast comforts. Buckley awaits drastic changes in the East: unusual weather and climate; unfamiliar community; and, perhaps the biggest of Buckley’s worries; occupational and financial
uncertainty. His moving truck simile does not convey the vehicle’s glint as riches “guaranteed” in the East; it is merely the “promise” of riches, insinuating its potential to miscarry. In a 2006 interview with fellow poet and Georgia State University English instructor Chad Prevost, he wonders how Buckley finds success as a writer living primarily in California, far removed from the bustling publishing world of New York. Buckley reveals what his brief time in the East provided: “One of the only bonuses of being exiled to Pennsylvania [where I taught English] … was that I was close to NYC and could drive up for events … However, going up to NYC never helped my career [as a writer]. You have to be willing to work at meeting and greeting … and it’s hard at any level …” (91). Buckley does not explicitly indicate why he makes plans to leave the West Coast in his poem, but his reflections with Prevost illuminates a viable reason for self-doubt about abandoning Santa Barbara. He explains to Prevost the role of his time teaching as the means to support himself because his more strategic position near the mecca of eastern publishing failed to generate forward movement in his career as a poet. Buckley’s audience may not all be aspiring writers, but anyone can relate to the insecurity expressed in “Leaving the West Coast” at the thought of leaving for a new, strange place. At the time, Buckley likely anticipated the possibility of vocational fruitlessness in the East, and though he does not address these worries explicitly, the reader detects his subdued trepidation through his fixation on the West’s irreplaceable ambiance.

Burdened by the East Coast journey looming ahead in the morning, Buckley continues to record California’s flora beyond his sense of sight to emphasize the tension between his well-known western locale and the obscure mysteries in the East. It seems Buckley’s observations in the first stanza come from inside his dwelling, surveying nature through his window. The reader can surmise his movement from indoors to outdoors as he further absorbs the essence of Santa Barbara: “Take your courage out on the balcony while / the star jasmine still breathes for you /
into this dream-deep sky” (26-28). Some of the strongest connections to memories form by way of olfactory senses, and Buckley finds aromatic star jasmine filling his lungs, combined with “… the violet air of jacarandas above the streets, / [and] lemon blossoms riding a salt breeze” (31-32). These smells (and tastes, by extension) now combine with those aforementioned nearby sights he determines to dismiss, intensifying the sting he feels for carrying out his parting with Santa Barbara. Buckley displays inklings of a fight against his initial inclination to discount the West Coast’s splendor by asserting to himself not to call his time in California a “dream” (29). Since the atmosphere’s fragrances have engulfed him, it spurs him to interject acquired understanding of his situation among his observations. As Buckley reveals understanding through his voice as a learning speaker, the reader increasingly recognizes Buckley’s deep connection to the landscape. Buckley relays to Prevost just how integral the West Coast remains in his life: “As a child, I could walk out my door and find the natural world – creeks, woods, hills, long and empty beaches … The older I become, the more my work then turns toward that transcendent time and place. My metaphysics is sourced in the natural, everyday world” (97-98). No matter where Buckley may reside, he acknowledges value in not forgetting where he comes from; his collective West Coast experiences have shaped him into his current self. As a speaker in “Leaving the West Coast,” he has not come to terms with the above idea as he has nearly 20 years later in his conversation with Prevost; his departure from the West was too fresh to acquire that perspective in his 1987 poem. The reader will find, however, Buckley’s “everyday world” encompasses more than his interaction with Santa Barbara’s naturally scenic elements.

Buckley leaves his reader with images – more artificially physical, human-oriented images – that both complement his unique bond with the West Coast and articulate a personal expression of how his memory will affect the relationship with his native territory. He awakes to
outside commotion in the first three lines, and he takes the final stanza to explicate what he hears and sees:

… the extravagant procession

of the night – a two-toned ’59 Bel Air idling

at the light …

[the] streets full of European cars

the colors of money or champagne … red and white

umbrellas, the Mexican beach cafes …

even … the generally drunken noise downstairs … (46-53)

Buckley realizes he will not soon experience the social excitements he so enjoys on the coast again, so he bids a farewell to the vigorous atmosphere below him. Evidently, he partook in the exhilarating nightlife he felt he was “worthy” of (39-45). The shimmering, glamorous automobiles and the establishments in which to revel will no longer be a part of his life, and he seems to realize how sorely he will miss all of it. He notes those contributing to the “drunken noise” will not “remember a thing, come morning” (53-55). Besides describing the venues Buckley will no longer be involved with, he investigates a contrast between Santa Barbara residents’ feelings toward their place from his own view of the place he will soon go from. The merrymaking crowd is there to stay, so they have no need to become sentimental about where they live. Buckley’s inspective voice at the end of “Leaving the West Coast” implies the people partying beneath him can afford to forget their night in Santa Barbara; for them, it is just another night. Because of the imminent move, Buckley yearns to take in every last bit of the West since being roused from sleep. He finds it imperative to remind himself of all that has made the region so special to him – and so painful to leave – evidenced by his portrayals of the natural and man-made landscape, taking in every possible sight, sound, smell, and taste.
Many would not dispute the tremendous amount of mental and emotional fortitude it takes to brave the journey to an uncharted destination. “Leaving the West Coast” channels the mixed feelings that come with leaving home: hopefulness for increased opportunities, and dread for risking the forfeiture of domestic security. Buckley authentically expresses the unknown variables that come with a cross-country move, as it underscores legitimate concerns about the future of housing, occupation, and quality of life, and stresses the skepticism of seeing the decision through. Near the end of his interview with Prevost, Buckley expounds on the deeply personal nature of his poems: “The risk and willingness to … give yourself over to your obsessions and see where they might lead you, gave me the confidence to just investigate who I was … and so … the poems [became] more personal” (97). Buckley’s “Leaving the West Coast” exemplifies his comment; this work feels realistically vulnerable. As if present with Buckley on the balcony, the reader can recollect his painful departure from home, sampling the unique West Coast makeup through the extensive appeal to senses and concrete images, feeling what it is like to leave the West Coast.

Works Cited


This research essay is about the ways we normalize racial discrimination subconsciously or without ill intention, and the ways these slights illuminate the foundational discrimination of America. I wrote this essay for my English 1B class in response to the short story “The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven” by Sherman Alexie. Alexie is an Indigenous American writer and his work has a thread of analyzing his identity, history, and culture as an Indigenous man in the USA in relation to post colonization, rampant racism, and police brutality / surveillance. I was touched by this short story because he highlights the pain that commonplace, racially denigrating comments produce and the fact that the impact of our words often matters more than the intent. My goal for this essay was to address our country’s political climate and history in an honest way while referring to Alexie’s poignant words as a framework to begin to further understand the systems of power that are at the root of these injustices.

**Colonized Mind**  
-Angela Harb-

Institutional racism is ingrained into every aspect of western society, including subtle but dangerous racial microaggressions that serve to marginalize people of color in insidious and historically normalized ways. The manifestation of microaggressions is especially present in heterosexual, interracial relationships between white women and men of color. This is portrayed in “The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven,” through the narrator’s experiences as an Indigenous American man navigating the commonplace degradation and criminalization throughout his relationships and the simplest activities of his everyday life. Throughout Sherman Alexie’s depiction of the emotional, spiritual and cultural outlets that indigenous people are forced to take for solace, it’s apparent that the structural consequences of colonization are crucially necessary to address, as they hold a central presence in maintaining white supremacy and the oppression of people of color.

Racial microaggressions are a continuous reality in the daily lives of people of color throughout everyday interactions with peers, coworkers, teachers, friends and employers. These slights of denigrating and culturally insensitive comments are perpetuated through their invisibility because they go unquestioned amongst those in privileged groups - due to the lack of direct effect it has on them, as well as its tendency to become normalized. The awareness of the
privilege it takes to sustain these dehumanizing beliefs is a psychologically draining onus that’s placed onto marginalized groups. It produces fear, confusion and a constant battle to survive as a person of color amidst especially these frameworks, dangerous because of their embedded social acceptability and historical presence. In “The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven,” Sherman Alexie depicts a common experience of microaggressions towards people of color when the narrator states, “I gave him a half wave as I headed back to the freezer. He looked me over so he could describe me to the police later. I knew that look” (Alexie 478). By this, the narrator is describing the patterned responses from white people as a person of color and his integral awareness of white people’s prejudicial biases and internalized fear. This is an example of everyday microaggressions that people of color are exposed to, as it also depicts the blurred lines of what constitutes racial discrimination, as nobody can attest to the “feelings” of criminalization, hypervigilance and bigotry--except for the people who experience it on a daily basis. The denial and disbelief of the relevance of these subtle cues of racism is a necessary component in the sustenance of white privilege and the interpersonal, systematic oppression of people of color.

The presence of often unintentionally hostile indicators of racism are specifically emphasized in heterosexual, interracial relationships between men of color and white women, as they hold historical significance in the preservation of white supremacy and institutional racism through the active criminalization of men of color, and the perception of purity in relation to whiteness and white femininity. The intersections of misogyny and racism are fundamental aspects in understanding the dynamics between white women and men of color because they both have pervasive roles in upholding structures of objectification and oppression. According to Jolie Sheffer, “white women have historically been regarded as proof of power for men of color to obtain, to elevate themselves in masculine status while simultaneously protecting themselves from
violent racism” by acting as extensions of white privilege and establishing solidified “American identification” through their proximity to white women. This highlights the intersections of racism and misogyny, as it also affirms the paradox of this notion because of the historically stratifying prejudice that occurs when men of color are with white women. This dates back to colonial America, during the instatement of Jim Crow laws. In this time period, white women were viewed as a trophy for men of color to obtain, and they would use this social status and privilege to tantalize and then criminalize men of color, almost as a pastime. While men held patriarchal stature over women of any race, white women simultaneously held racial stature over men of color. This aligns with Sherman Alexie’s highlight of the abuse paradigm that exists within relationships, as well as the presence of racial microaggressions in interracial relationships when the narrator states, “One of my girlfriends said I started looking at her that way, too. She left me not long after that. No, I left her and I don’t blame her for anything. When one person starts to look at another like a criminal, the love is over. It’s logical” (Alexie 478). Here, the narrator is describing the subtle microaggressions of criminalization that exist in his relationship, though he also highlights that he doesn’t blame his girlfriend for the end of their relationship because when criminality is placed onto someone due to their race or culture, it imperatively creates an unhealthy environment for a relationship. However, this is understandable, because the systematic racism that shapes and effects relationships presents an interwoven and unintentional criminalizing bias toward people of color, even without malicious intent.

America is governed by structures of imperial colonialism, hegemony, institutional racism, xenophobia, and power complexes of misogyny that serve to maintain historical practices of oppression in modern day. These systemic frameworks are perpetuated and solidified through predominant institutions in society, such as law enforcement, which relies on the discrimination, profiling and demonization of people of color to preserve the capitalist, prison industrial
complex. Furthermore, racial profiling is a driving force in sustaining white supremacy by targeting people of color based on their race, ethnicity, religion and socioeconomic class. This is represented in “The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven” when the narrator is describing an encounter with a police officer and the police officer states, “You’re making people nervous. You don’t fit the profile of the neighborhood. -- I wanted to tell him I didn’t fit the profile of the country, but I knew it would just get me in trouble” (Alexie 479). With this statement, the narrator is alluding to the reality of the rampant racial profiling in America and its infiltration into everyday life for people of color. He’s also illuminating the hypervigilance, scrutiny, dehumanization and the direct effects of colonization that are powered by institutional racism and covert microaggressions. The narrator is also depicting the casual humor that is expressed by marginalized groups as a coping mechanism and a survival method to conceptualize and psychologically protect themselves from the reality of bigotry and violence.

Class disparities in America are solely associated with the financial displacement of people of color, which illuminates the intersections of racism, classism and the oppressive limitations of resources for marginalized people. These disparities are fueled by racist stereotypes, which limit any constructive discourse on class dynamics as it confines American discussions to be narrowly focused on the correlation of poverty and being a person of color. While this is a good start, a wholesome discourse will include a multifaceted conversation on the effects of hierarchical socioeconomic class frameworks on everyone as well as an acknowledgement of the intersections of racism, classism and misogyny. White privilege exists throughout all realms of American culture, as well as through class inequalities that disenfranchise everyone through capitalist consumerism. This continues to be a difficult concept for western culture to grasp because of the denial of white skin privilege existing amidst oppressive structures that affect everyone through varying identity intersections. Sherman Alexie depicts the psychological indifference when
interacting with people of color and the extensive effects of class imbalances when the narrator states, “He swallowed hard like a white man does in those situations [...] But he wasn’t ugly, just misplaced and marked by loneliness. If he wasn’t working there by night, he’d be home alone, flipping through the channels and wishing he could afford HBO or Showtime” (Alexie 479). By this, the narrator is addressing the internalized fear of people of color that’s incited by the historical criminalization of men of color as he also juxtaposes the relatability of the class struggles that he knows are present for everyone, even privileged, racist white men. This corresponds with the reality of people of color’s awareness of the influences of institutional oppression, and their understanding of the effects of systematic racism that dehumanizes oppressed people, as he is also identifying the feelings of empathy that exist alongside feelings of frustration, anger and turmoil towards oppressors that are experienced by marginalized groups.

The criminalization of indigenous men is explained through the intersections of racism and toxic masculinity as they produce expectations of violence that are emphasized by the direct effects of colonization and the pressure on young men of color to act and respond in an “adultified” and “professional” way, to protect themselves from prejudicial violence and imprisonment. There are subconscious tones of guilt amongst white people that suggest their limited understanding in their complacency in the perpetuation of the demonization of people of color and this is present when the narrator states, “He realized his mistake but it was too late. He stiffened, ready for the gunshot or the blow behind the ear. When it didn’t come, he turned back to me. [...] I’m sorry, he said” (Alexie 479). Here, the narrator describes his awareness of these “subtle” microaggressions and the expectations of physical violence that are projected onto men of color as a result of systematic discrimination and hypermasculine gender roles that maintain surveillance and immobility amongst marginalized groups. Furthermore, the narrator is commenting on the reality of white liberal guilt and white fragility. While white liberals are
unwilling to acknowledge the part they play in the perpetuation of white supremacy through ingrained racial biases, they continue to attribute violence and criminality onto people of color and use this to falsely construct their identities as criminals, while denying that it’s related to race so they can uphold their appearance as “open-minded” and “inclusive.” In reality, their guilt and fragility lead them to overcompensate for their part in people of color’s oppression, producing even more racial microaggressions in social and public spaces.

Interpersonal power dynamics are a central component in reinforcing white supremacy, and prejudicial microaggressions serve to validate people of color’s systemic inferiority. According to Jared F. Edwards’ article titled, “Microaggressions in the Context of White Privilege”, “individual racists engage in intentionally aggressive behaviors against those of other racial groups, [...] the actions that add up to institutional racism are not intentionally malicious or even consciously directed at those that they negatively impact.” Edwards is explaining the factors of oppression that frame themselves as structural components of society, as they sustain the non-malicious perpetuation of racism and the refutation of the harmful significance of entrenched racial microaggressions. In essence, he’s implying that it isn’t as much the direct, aggressive racism that we immediately think of that creates our race dynamics. More so, it’s the subtle comments we don’t notice and acknowledge as racist that perpetuate and ingrain discrimination deeper into our society. This parallels the interpersonal power dynamics in “The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven”, when the narrator states, “He laughed loudly then told me to take the creamsicle for free. He was the graveyard shift manager and those little demonstrations of power tickled him” (Alexie 480). This corroborates the social power dynamics that exist between white people and people of color and the extent to which white supremacy is perpetuated unknowingly. The underlying forces of these subtle signals of establishing superiority are incited by the effects of institutional racism and post colonization as they’re central
components to the interactions between white people and people of color. The patronizing
essence of microaggressions intends to emphasize the historical, disparate and stark separation of
interpersonal power that’s ingrained into western society’s foundation, that relies on the
condensation and infantilization of marginalized groups to acquire and maintain power through
normalized modes of dehumanizing communication.

According to Jared Edwards’ article called, “Microaggressions in the Context of Racism
and White Privilege,” “the strong image of the individual racist in society, as opposed to
institutional racism permeating society, complicates our discussions of race and prejudice. [...] Our usual view of racism committed intentionally by individuals in specific and identifiable
situations may distract from the institutional racism that is more harmful to members of
marginalized groups across situations.” Edwards is explaining the detrimental effects of covert,
systematic racism manifesting itself into racial microaggressions as he aligns his analysis with the
western cultural phenomenon of “color blindness” which serves to overlook the perpetuation of
discrimination through subliminal messages of prejudicial bias towards people of color, as well as
the active denial of the experiences that oppressed people endure through systematized racism.
Additionally, he’s alluding to the widespread belief and denial that implies that racism exists as a
negative personality trait and not an institutional framework that is powered through the
dehumanization, commodification, exploitation and oppression of marginalized people.
Microaggressions are incited through the history of imperial colonialism that has resulted in the
subconscious expectancy of assimilation, as well the negligence of recognizing slights of
discriminatory comments as valid components of the reality of bigotry. Furthermore, the
American facade of inclusivity and “accepted” diversity sustains itself as an evasive barrier to
producing effective communication about the consequences of rampant racism existing in all
public, political and academic spaces.
The detrimental psychological effects of colonization are distinctly pronounced in indigenous people’s lives from the erasure of their culture, values, traditions and ancestry that have been indoctrinated throughout history. These internalized effects are often manifested into emotional, subconscious and spiritual outlets as a way to cope with the reality of oppression which is demonstrated in “The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven” when the narrator states, “The vivid image of that dream stays with me. Three mounted soldiers played polo with a dead Indian woman’s head. [...] I thought it was just a product of my anger and imagination. Even more terrifying though is the fact that those kinds of brutal things are happening today” (Alexie 481). This highlights the historical brutalization of indigenous people’s bodies and minds and how the effects of colonization manifest into the subconscious psyche, as it also illuminates the intimate connection between dreams and reality. Correspondingly, the narrator is articulating the historical and modern-day significance of this horrific violence and the pain, anger and visceral surreality that is expressed in response.

The pervasiveness of racial microaggressions is a direct effect of institutional discrimination powered through the criminalization of people of color and the structures of white supremacy that govern western society. Prejudicial biases are normalized due to the historical and modern-day oppression of marginalized people as they are unquestioned and justified through casual dehumanization, objectification and degradation. These internalized biases are infiltrated through systematic and interpersonal social dynamics that create a reality of the constant battering of indigenous people’s spirits through colonialist oppression, erasure, and appropriation by American society. This in turn creates deep rooted psychological effects that linger in each locality for indigenous people and are emphasized every time a “subtle” microaggression is made. Reflexivity and critical thinking are necessary components to the
convalescence of human rights in America as it is crucially necessary to address the subconscious complacency and normalization that is powered through structures of oppression.

Works Cited

