

Writing

*Writing*

*Writing*

Writing

*Writing*

**Writing**

WRITING

**writing**

*Writing*

WILLIAM PATERSON UNIVERSITY

**Celebrating Student Writing  
Across the Curriculum**

**Prize Winners 2020-2021**

TWENTY-FIRST ANNUAL EDITION



# Introduction

---

Now in its 21st year of publication, *Celebrating Student Writing Across the Curriculum* publishes undergraduate student writing from many disciplines. This magazine offers a space to celebrate student achievement in writing and to highlight exemplary written work from across William Paterson University.

On these pages, diversity in writing is celebrated. Some entries are thoroughly researched and deftly worded, others provide analytical exploration or make a compelling argument, and still others are imaginatively creative or superbly designed and arranged. Writing is often mistakenly assumed to be merely a skill that, once learned, can be applied formulaically for any situation. But effective writers, such as the ones featured here, know that continuous development of one's writing knowledge and practice is the way to becoming better at it. Today's employers report that a key attribute they seek in an employee is the ability to write clearly and effectively, which makes the writing our students engage in increasingly important. Nurtured by our faculty, the student writers featured within this issue have worked hard to understand and develop writing most suited to its occasion.

For this contest, William Paterson faculty nominate student writing from across a wide range of courses. Whether a written work is nominated for its creativity, insights, analysis, or well-crafted prose, each entry has first intrigued a faculty member and earned a nomination. After the submission deadline, a panel of judges from across the William Paterson faculty gathers to discuss and consider each entry, and the winners are selected for publication in *Celebrating Student Writing Across the Curriculum*.

This year's winners represent a wide range of majors: nursing, history, philosophy, literature, anthropology, and

more. The excellent writing featured here represents upper division courses from various disciplines and lower division courses in general education, demonstrating that great writing comes from everywhere and anyone. Regardless of the course for which they were initially written, all of these student essays provide us with insights into their topics and appreciation for the hard work and dedication of their writers.

*Celebrating Student Writing* would not be possible without the continued support of those who are integral to its success. Special thanks to Provost Powers, who was instrumental in helping to solicit entries for this year's magazine. Thank you to Associate Provost Sandra Hill for continued support of the Writing Across the Curriculum program, which publishes this magazine. Special thanks to Wartyna Davis, Dean of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, whose vision and assistance in all initiatives of the Writing Across the Curriculum program are vital. And finally, thanks to the many faculty who support student writing every day in their classrooms and who nominate the best of what they see to this contest, and to the students who are willing to share their work – without your commitment we would be denied this wonderful opportunity to celebrate your writing.

Write on.

*Chris Salerno*  
*Professor of English*  
*Director, Writing Across the Curriculum*

For more information about the *Celebrating Student Writing* contest, refer to the back page of this magazine or visit: <https://www.wpunj.edu/cohss/departments/english/wac/index.html>



# Table of Contents

---

**Jazmin Celeste** \_\_\_\_\_ **page 5**

*Afro Latino Representation (Lack of)*  
Latino Cultural Studies  
Professor: Rosa Soto

**Julie Alvarez** \_\_\_\_\_ **page 9**

*The Historical Role of Education and Social Control*  
History of Modern Education  
Professor: Thomas Fallace, Teacher Education

**Precious Modupe** \_\_\_\_\_ **page 13**

*Health Disparities: COVID-19 and Black Americans*  
Cultural Foundations of Nursing  
Professor: Dr. Lizy Mathew, Nursing

**Nicole Mejia** \_\_\_\_\_ **page 23**

*Dear Mama: Single Motherhood During the Coronavirus Pandemic*  
Interdisciplinary Senior Seminar  
Professor: Maria Kromidas, Community and Social Justice Studies

**Ian Stafford** \_\_\_\_\_ **page 35**

*Clinical Undiagnosis*  
Creative Nonfiction  
Professor: Martha Witt, English

**Christina Burdick** \_\_\_\_\_ **page 41**

*Toward Final Participation*  
Theory of Knowledge  
Professor: Daniel Kolak, Philosophy

**Erica Albino** \_\_\_\_\_ **page 51**

*How Public Narratives Impede Reproductive Justice: Reform for the Chemical Body Burdens of Children*  
Interdisciplinary Senior Seminar  
Professor: Maria Kromidas, Community and Social Justice Studies

**Steven Siragusa** \_\_\_\_\_ **page 59**

*A Burning of Freedom*  
Indian Literature  
Professor: Rajender Kaur, English

**Yazmin Johnson** \_\_\_\_\_ **page 63**

*Who Would Have Thought Women Had Lives?*  
Nineteenth-Century Women's Voices  
Professor: Barbara Suess, English

**Cortney A. Pruden** \_\_\_\_\_ **page 67**

*Weber, Capitalism, and Asia*  
Honors Seminar in the Social Sciences  
Professor: Neil Kressel, Psychology

---

**Brenna Moran** \_\_\_\_\_ **page 73**

*Acis and Galatea Review*

Vocal Literature

Professor: Christopher Herbert, Music

**Shaina Lacap** \_\_\_\_\_ **page 77**

*Agricultural Practices and Zoonotic Diseases*

Environmental Determinants of Health

Professor: Marianne Sullivan, Public Health

**Christopher Hall** \_\_\_\_\_ **page 85**

*Dear President Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris*

Anthropology of Social Movements

Professor: Lilian Milanés, Community and Social Justice Studies

**Leonardo Lupidi** \_\_\_\_\_ **page 89**

*The Importance of Moral Resilience Illustrated*

*Through Ling Ma's Severance, Among Other Literary Pieces*

Experiences in Literature

Professor: Kara Rabbitt, Associate Provost in Academic Affairs

**Veronica Bratsos** \_\_\_\_\_ **page 93**

*"Designer" Babies: A Look into Procedures and Ethics Behind CRISPR Technology*

Human Biocultural Evolution

Professor: Tj Gundling, Community and Social Justice Studies

*Note: Student entries are reprinted as submitted, with original content that has been formatted to fit this magazine.*

# Afro Latino Representation (Lack of)

---

*Jazmin Celeste*

**Course:** Latino Cultural Studies

**Professor:** Rosa Soto

**Student:** Jazmin Celeste

**Essay:** *Afro Latino Representation (Lack of)*

---

## **Assignment:**

In this assignment, students were asked to examine the constructions of Racialized Identity politics in the representations of Latinx characters in film, television and popular culture.

---

If it is one thing we have learned throughout this course, it is that Latinos are not one size fits all. We have different experiences in terms of education, linguistic abilities, race, and ethnicity. These varieties can be subtle such as the many ways that each ethnicity speaks Spanish (ex: Dominican Spanish vs. Colombian Spanish), education (those who choose blue collar jobs vs. Those who attend college), and race (those who identify as white vs those who identify as black). There are so many factors that go into play when someone is deciding what a Latinx person is supposed to look like. Oftentimes, the Latinx people they choose to represent us all, only represents a small portion. This being the case, Latinx folk who fall in the “other” categories are ostracized or made to feel as though they do not fit the mold society has constructed and this is most certainly the case for those who identify as Afro-Latinos. Though different shades of Latinx folk exist, it is still a “shock” to people



when someone on the browner or black side is Latino. This shock and disapproval from non-Latinos, and colorist Latinos alike, diminishes any opportunities for Afro-Latinos to be given a platform.

The roles in film or television for Latinos are limited as is. Latinos are always given roles where they stick to a specific stereotype. “Most studies on Latinos and the media, have tended to focus on mainstream media, such as Hollywood films, and network TV, repeatedly

reminding us that Latinos/Hispanics are too often excluded, and that when they are portrayed, appear as narrow and simplistic stereotypes.” (Davilla, p209) This is even truer for those who fall into the category of “Afro-Latinx” because they simply do not fit “the marketable look.” These features include long wavy or loose curly hair, the light but not white skin, the brown or occasional green eyes, the “exotic” appearance. In other words, there is no room for the “Dark skin,” the “dark eyes,” the “kinky curls.” The demands in the media for Latinx folk to look one specific way demolishes any chance other Latinx folk having of receiving those same opportunities. Not only do these stereotypes of what a Latina/o is supposed to look like create erasure for those who do not look the same, but it also makes it harder to advocate for Afro-Latinos because to many, the issue does not exist.

In a January 23rd, 2018, interview, the hit radio show “The Breakfast Club” brought on recording artist Amara La Negra, who identifies as an Afro-Latinx woman. During her interview, Amara shed light on the biases and favoritism shown to Latina women of a lighter skin tone vs. Those with a dark complexion. Though all the hosts of the radio show are black, Amara was asked questions such as “Are you sure it’s not all in your head” by host Charlamagne. He also went as far as stating that if colorism exists within the Latin community or Latin Market, Cardi B would not be as successful in the Latinx market. Amara responded by saying that starting off in the English platform for an artist is easier because realistically, she is marketed as a woman who happens to be Spanish, whereas in the Latinx market, Amara is seen as just another black girl who does not fit the mold of a “Latina.” These responses just further prove that because there is not enough representation for Afro-Latinx people, their issues are minimized and considered to be far less important.

Being that the Afro-Latinx community is far less represented than white-passing Latinx folk, and they are not typically given the roles that other Latinx folk

are privy to, Afro Latinos oftentimes are forced to choose between being black or being a Latino/a when trying out for roles. This is the case for most Afro-Latinx because although they may not be considered for roles in the Latin market, they do find a place when targeting African American audiences. A plethora of actors who are of Latino descent are not even marketed as such, and their Latinx background is never mentioned, and if it is touched upon, it is brief and irrelevant to the plot of the show or movie they may be featured in. This is seen with actors such as Lala Anthony, whose birthname is ‘Alani Nicole Vazquez’. Lala has appeared on red carpet events as a host for networks such as BET (which was a platform for black actors/artists), as well as in films, and television shows. Up until a few years ago, I had no idea Lala was born to Puerto Rican parents because whenever I saw her featured in anything, she was cast as a black woman, and although that is a portion of her identity, her Latin roots are never acknowledged.

Most recently, Lala Anthony was cast as “Lakeisha Grant,” a recurring character on Starz network’s hit series “Power.” As someone who was an avid watcher of the show, I quickly realized her character was written to be solely black and although having the option to play solely black characters is great, I wonder why including some of her real-life ancestry was not thought of. The show features many Latinx characters, including Lela Loren’s character “Angela Valdes.” In the show, Angela is a Puerto Rican FBI agent who made it out of the hood and becomes a main character due to her love triangle with the main Character “Ghost”. Right away I noticed how often Angela spoke Spanish or Spanglish, so much so, that “Ghost” who is a Black man often brought up how she went out of her way to teach it to him. This however, made me wonder why the extra effort was put into Angela Valdes to show that she is a “true Latina” who speaks the language and knows the culture, but Lala’s character Lakeisha could not do the same in her own right. The fact of the matter is that Lela Loren’s



fair skin earned her the role of the token “Latina” of the show because she fits the image that society is immediately drawn to when thinking about what Latinas should look like or sound like. In an interview with “Latina Magazine”, Lala Anthony said “They are imagining a different look, a different vibe. People still tell me, ‘You speak Spanish? You’re Spanish? You’re Puerto Rican?’ They can’t wrap their minds around it.”. Lala Anthony also went on to say “A lot of people don’t realize that I’m Puerto Rican or when they do, they think that means I can’t be black..”

In addition to not being cast in roles as Latinos in the media, many times Afro-Latinx folk face serious criticism for identifying as black as well. Many people cannot connect being a Latina(o) with also being black. This criticism comes from both the Latinx community as well as from the African American community. Being that black actors are often demonized or discriminated against in comparison to their white counterparts, issues do arise when a role that could have gone to a solely black actor goes to an Afro-Latinx one instead. For instance, Zoe Saldana was cast as ‘Nina Simone’ in the biopic film of the late singer’s life and times. To say the least, audiences were highly disappointed that she was cast rather than a black actor who “looked” the part more. Granted, a better representation of Nina Simone should have been found, however, the hate Zoe received for simply doing her job was baffling. She was constantly attacked on social media and told she was not “Black enough” or black at all and that she “stole” the role from a black actor who could have brought the role to life. It was understandable why the black community felt cheated as many times Latinx folk themselves deny their black roots, however, for those who do own their heritage, it becomes unsettling as they do not feel that they fit in with either community.

The fact of the matter is Afro-Latinx folk oftentimes receive the short end of the stick because the media has a different perception of what a “Latina/o” is.

These issues date all the way back to slavery because realistically it all comes down to whiteness being preferred or desired more than blackness.

Giving out roles to Afro-Latinx people would dismantle the idea that “whiteness” is superior to blackness and in a world where power is given to those who fit the mold, that simply is not acceptable. More representation, more voices heard, means more equality and less oppression. “Once minority representations are seen and understood for what they are, the invisible architecture of the dominant-dominated “arrangement” comes to light, presenting a chance for a structural rearrangement. The very persistence of such imagery revelatory of deep-seated problems within the system” (Ramirez-Berg, p 186). Not offering roles to those who could pose a “threat” to white supremacy is one of the many ways in which Black folk and Afro Latinx folk are kept ostracized. Another tactic that has been used in the media for decades is offering roles that fit in to the idea of what all non-Latinx folk think Latinos are. This applies to Black and white passing Latinos alike. The roles of the prostitutes or strippers such as Cardi B in the movie “Hustlers”, the role of the maid such as Jennifer Lopez in the movie “Maid in Manhattan,” the role of the thugs or drug dealers/drug users such as in “Scarface”, the role of the male buffoon such as “Fez” in “that 70’s show” or Fernando in “Fuller House”, the list goes on and on. Latinos are discriminated against and dehumanized at every turn by Non-Latinx folk, specifically White people and are strategically taught to be divisive within their own communities as well based on color. This being the case, it can be extremely difficult for Afro Latinx folk to find common ground with Latinx folk who are white passing. We have seen the injustice towards black Latinos and the favoritism towards those who closely resemble and have Eurocentric features so much so that many of them start to believe they truly are the better of the two.

As I have stated in the past, growing up there was a

clear distinction between White passing Latinx folk and Afro-Latinx folk. Those who had more African features were heavily criticized and made to feel like the lesser of the two, whereas those who had Eurocentric features oftentimes were led to believe that they were better than their darker counterparts. This dynamic was discussed in the article “Mejorar La Raza” where the author acknowledges just how deeply rooted self-hatred is in Latinx communities for their melanin. I vividly remember wanting to straighten my extremely kinky curls until my hair fell flat on my face to avoid being called “nappy headed” or buying foundation in the 7th grade that was far too light for me to avoid being called “burnt or crispy” as I had been in the previous summers. There was a lot of learning

and unlearning that came with adulthood for me as an Afro-Latina because growing up, there weren’t many representations or people who I felt resembled me. That is precisely why it is extremely important to break the stereotypes, stop accepting subpar roles, and teach those around us that Latinos come in all shades and colors. Doing so will spare many feelings in the future as well as create a more unified front for all Latinos, not just the Jennifer Lopez’s of the world.

---

## Works Cited

*The Latin Look and “Walter Cronkite Spanish,”* Arlene Davilla

*“Hispanic Stereotyping,”* Charles Ramirez Berg

Latinos Inc. *“The Marketing and Making of a People,”* Arlene Davilla

Amara La Negra Interview: <https://thegrapevine.theroot.com/can-we-talk-about-amara-le-negras-appearance-on-the-bre-1822318099>

Lala Anthony Interview: <https://www.yournextshoes.com/spanish-la-la-anthony-nuyorican/#>: In an article written for raised in New York City. I am incredibly proud of my Puerto Rican heritage. I speak Spanish fluently

Zoe Saldana Backlash: <https://www.vox.com/2016/3/4/11161980/nina-simone-saldana>

Light Skin Privilege: LIGHT SKIN PRIVILEGE | HOW ZOE SALDANA RUINED HER REPUTATION

# The Historical Role of Education and Social Control

---

*Julie Alvarez*

**Course:** History of Modern Education

**Professor:** Thomas Fallace, Teacher Education

**Student:** Julie Alvarez

**Essay:** *The Historical Role of Education and Social Control*

---

## **Assignment:**

For this assignment, students were asked to write an essay answering the essential question of the course: Has public education been a fount of enlightenment

and liberty, or has it been a vehicle for social control and political socialization?

---

With Enlightenment thinkers like Rousseau who depicted education as merely an instrument for the liberation of the self and mind, it is easy to accept this clear-cut objective and disregard the weaponization of education throughout history. While public education can be viewed as the effort of unifying the masses to become free-thinking individuals, historically it has been used as a tool for social control, oppression, and inequality. The early goal of education was not intended for self-fulfillment but rather for the enforcement of traditional religious values for the individual to accept without question as the belief was, as Thomas Hobbes explained, “the common people’s minds... are fit to receive whatsoever by a public authority shall be imprinted in them...” (Hobbes, 1651). In the *Leviathan*, Hobbes emphasized that individuals were bound by discipline and higher authority, and therefore teachings of religion would

remain unquestioned to maintain law and order. The idea of education during the 1600s remained as a way to discourage critical thinking and encourage fixed religious instruction that tied into maintaining the monarchy which was a form of social control.

The Industrial Revolution fueled the spread of public education to prepare people to become successful in the new economy that required people to work in factories. The intention to provide education to those of the lower class was to train them for future living which consequently decided their fate as factory workers. As Marie Montessori noted, “the principle of slavery still pervades pedagogy....I need only give one proof— the stationary desks and chairs” (Montessori, 1912). Factory owners needed compliant, punctual employees, and sitting in a classroom with a teacher all day was preparation for that. An impersonal and

standardized public education was promoted by industrialists to control future working-class people for the sake of the economy. The United States government's lack of concern for education to uplift citizens is also shown in the *Nation at Risk* Report of 1983. Rather than education being seen as an enriching tool, it was used to "improve on the slim competitive edge....in world markets" (National Commission on Educational Excellence, 1983). Public education reform was employed to engage in economic competition with other nations and, as historian Diane Ravitch (2013) argued, "shifted the blame from shortsighted corporate leadership to public schools." Education was used as an excuse to explain the declining manufacturing industries and it served as a scapegoat to pin American mediocrity in industry to mediocrity in schools.

With the spread of public education came the threat of denouncing native language and traditions ingrained in different societies. When ruling India, British official Thomas Macaulay argued, "to form a class who may be interpreters....Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect" (1834) to support the establishment of English as an instructive medium for the British agenda. The enforcement of public education was a way to create a submissive population in which Indigenous Indians would become Westernized and therefore civilized to serve as go-betweens for the British and the colonies. As Indigenous Indians learned to immerse themselves in English teachings, the use of traditional language was minimized as Indian culture was thought to be outdated, falling behind in modern European scientific, and lacking in intellectual thinking. In many ways, education in India was, as Mohandas Gandhi pointed out, molded to "answering those of an imperial exploiter" (Gandhi, 1973). Gandhi found that absorbing Western education was a way for the British to confine Indigenous Indians to Western ideologies which disconnected them from their native values.

This fear is also illustrated with the peasant educator's response to Meiji reforms in Japan, who opposed compulsory education and believed "the peasant school should be built on "the foundation of traditional customs" (1920). Amidst the modernization periods which sparked educational reform, public education entailed accepting a Western model of schooling and disregarding native teachings sacred to many cultures. Public schools' erasure of native history and identity is also evident in the change of Nelson Mandela's name in South Africa as, "Whites were either unable or unwilling to pronounce an African name, and considered it uncivilized to have one" (Mandela, 2008). Teachers substituted African names for Christian names which illuminate how imperialization disassociated natives with their heritage through public schooling.

The diffusion of ideological beliefs and religious practices during imperialism came with the persistent idea of civilizing "new-caught, sullen peoples....half devil and half child" (Kipling 1899). During the 19th century, British poet Rudyard Kipling described the idea of the "white man's burden" to tame countries like the Philippines whose citizens he deemed as unintelligent because of the color of their skin. White imperialists sought to displace native cultures with European culture based on the belief that for nations to rule themselves, they had to be forced to attend school. Furthermore, the perception that indigenous children were savage and uncivilized was a justification for white people to save them. White educators in the American West and Australia during the late-nineteenth century justified the removal of indigenous children from their parents through the use of boarding schools as, "believing that "full-blood" Aborigines were dying out, officials sought to isolate them" (Jacobs, 2005). Compulsory education was not used as a way to elevate indigenous children's status, but rather strip them from their parents to eradicate their culture. It demanded that "half-castes" be

integrated into the white community through schools to “breed out the color” and ultimately civilize their population to the acceptable white standard. The government weaponized education to assimilate indigenous children and suppressed parents’ objections to this compulsory schooling.

Compulsory education presented itself as the path to social mobility when in reality it was a way to manipulate the masses by educating them on values and ideals based on the interests of the government. It was a way to condition students to make them subordinate, like-minded individuals who never questioned authority. Fascist dictator Benito Mussolini used schools as a vehicle for “teaching order and discipline and of maintaining the highest concepts of human service in the various schools of the regime” (Mussolini, 1933). Mussolini glorified military and patriotic virtues in public schools to teach them total obedience and control them. Rather than education, it was more like indoctrination because it emphasized instilling ideas of the country to students rather than teaching them to create their own opinions and think for themselves. This was a form of social control which removed any aspect of individuality and stressed collectivism to promote the education system to become more like a Fascist institution. Similarly, Adolf Hitler believed schools were designated to teach “the importance of maintaining the racial blood unadulterated” (Hitler, 1925) and brainwash citizens into believing that Germans Aryans were the master race. Schools were used to control populations by upholding these oppressive ideas through propaganda posters and restricting the citizens’ say in public schools. Those with power and authority have used public schools to suppress individual thoughts and actions.

Public education also reinforced inequality as it oppressed students of color. The discrimination and exclusion of black students in public education is especially evident throughout history. Slaves would risk

their lives hiding textbooks just for the sake of learning literacy since enslaved African Americans’ schooling was prohibited and illegal in most Southern states. Despite the passing of the Thirteenth Amendment which abolished slavery, and the Fourteenth Amendment which legally accepted African Americans as individuals with equal protection and rights, black students remained segregated and shortchanged in the quality of their education (e.g. textbooks were 4-5 years behind white textbooks). Booker T. Washington expressed for black Americans to “plead industrial education and development” (Washington 1903) and settle for a lesser education to build themselves up without arousing hostility from white people. Ultimately education only provided a way to become second-class citizens at best and still left black people targets of racism. Similarly, in the Southwest, many Mexican Americans found that the road to opportunity was closed as white teachers dominated schools and controlled the school curriculum. Textbooks did not reflect Mexican American culture and public schools assumed it was their burden to Americanize the Mexican community by prohibiting a bilingual education. The lack of access to English and Spanish instruction promoted inequality that forced Mexican American students to fall behind and resulted in high dropout rates for middle school and high school, limiting their opportunities for a better life.

Although the cracks in public education have fostered social control and inequality, education has also been used to cultivate people’s natural capabilities to contribute to the good of society. The problem that exists is the idea that education is not necessarily set in place to achieve enlightenment and liberation but rather embody, as nineteenth century school reformer Horace Mann explained, the “grand machinery by which the ‘raw material’ of human nature can be worked up into inventors and discoverers” (Mann, 1848). In other words, education molds individuals to become finished products to help *society* progress. As

educational philosopher John Dewey argued, historically education has been a passive, preparation experience designed to “impose certain ideas... form certain habits” (Dewey, 1897) that benefit the collective society rather than enhance the individual’s knowledge. Public schools have been built to prepare students for higher education and the workforce rather than flourish as an individual to expand their intellect and overall learning process. Moreover, public education has been used as a vehicle to reinforce power structures and differentials already in place with the idea that, as Brazilian educator Paulo Freire explained, “knowledge is a gift bestowed by those

who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing” (Freire, 1970). Education has modeled itself as the lower class knowing nothing and the elites knowing everything. This has hindered the ability for individuals to discover and answer meaningful questions and learn about local culture rather than solely superficial, national culture. Despite significant progress in public education, it has unquestionably served as a tool of social control to maintain social hierarchies and exclude marginalized groups.

---

## Biography

Dewey, John. “My Pedagogic Creed,” 1897.

Freire, Paulo. “Pedagogy of the Oppressed,” 1970.

Gandhi, Mahatma. “The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi,” 1937.

Hitler, Adolf. *Mein Kampf* , 1925.

Hobbes, Thomas. *Leviathan* , 1651.

Jacobs, Margaret D. “Maternal Colonialism: White Women and Indigenous Child Removal in the American West and Australia, 1880-1940,” 2005.

Kipling, Rudyard. “White Man’s Burden,” 1899.

Macaulay, Thomas. “Minute on Indian Education,” 1834.

Mandela, Nelson. *Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela* , 2008.

Mann, Horace. “Report No. 12 of the Massachusetts State Board ,” 1848.

Montessori, Maria. *The Montessori Method: Scientific Pedagogy as Applied to Child Education*, 1912.

Mussolini, Benito. “The Schools of Italy,” 1933.

National Commission on Educational Excellence (USA). *Nation at Risk: An Imperative for Educational Reform*, 1983.

Peasant educator. “Response to Meiji Reforms,” 1920.

Ravitch, Diane. *Reign of Error: The Hoax of the Privatization Movement and the Danger to America’s Public Schools*, 2013.

Washington, Booker T. “Industrial Education for the Negro,” 1903.

# Health Disparities: COVID-19 and Black Americans

---

*Precious Modupe*

**Course:** Cultural Foundations of Nursing

**Professor:** Dr. Lizy Mathew, Nursing

**Student:** Precious Modupe

**Essay:** *Health Disparities: COVID-19 and Black Americans*

---

## **Assignment:**

In this course, students were asked to write a scholarly paper addressing a health disparity in a vulnerable population. Using peer-reviewed journals, students supported their rationale for selecting their specific health disparity and the implications that the disparity has for the vulnerable population. Discussion of

social determinants of health, issues of inequality and discrimination were to be addressed in detail. Factors that contribute to the health disparity as well as potential solutions and how those solutions would be realistically implemented and evaluated were also to be addressed.

---

## **Background**

Throughout this paper, the health disparities faced by African Americans in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic are discussed thoroughly. African Americans are disproportionately contracting the vicious virus and dying from it at an alarming rate in comparison to all other races. The origin of this health disparity is rooted in the historical, institutional, and structural racism that continues to place this group at the bottom, in terms of overall health and wealth. These factors are illustrated through analysis of the social determinants of health that lead to such unsatisfactory health outcomes from COVID-19. In the hopes of addressing and remedying the health disparities, multiple solutions are offered that encourage the involvement

of culturally competent, unbiased nursing staff, as well as input from the government and local health organizations. Ultimately, the solution best to address the problem involves community-based efforts that are shown to improve COVID-19 related health issues for Black Americans.

## **Introduction**

The COVID-19 pandemic has greatly impacted individuals both nationally within this country, but also on a global scale. Unfortunately, the virus has not only highlighted the health disparities of racial minorities but has exacerbated them tenfold. Focusing specifically on Black Americans, this population is subject to higher risk and disproportional mortality rates from COVID-19. These disparities must be addressed on

local, organizational, and institutional levels through acknowledgment of this health disparity and by creating better access to healthcare services to improve preventative measures against the virus for Black Americans.

### Rationale for Health Disparity

The COVID-19 pandemic is a current event that impacts everyone on a local, national, and global scale. Focusing more on the local and national levels, COVID-19 has disproportionately impacted vulnerable populations, more specifically Black people in America. Due to the seriousness of this public health issue, COVID-19 and its associated health disparities were covered in our class discussion in week six. That week focused specifically on the culturally appropriate care needed to address the health disparities of people of color and the risk factors making them more susceptible to certain diseases. An article for that week discussed the susceptibility of minority groups to COVID-19, stating that in early April of 2020, data showed that people of color were at higher risk of contracting COVID-19 (Cuellar et al., 2020). For example, Black Americans currently have high mortality rates from the disease, amounting to almost quadruple the national average of any other race (Louis-Jean et al., 2020). Additionally, the overrepresentation of African Americans (AA) when looking at mortality rates from coronavirus is startling. In Milwaukee County in Wisconsin, AA only make up 26% of the population, yet they comprise 77% of COVID-related deaths (Louis-Jean et al., 2020). These statistics emphasize how much of an issue the disease is for Black Americans. Social determinants of health (SDOH) are also a driving factor in creating this health disparity. Healthy People 2030's five overarching goals related to SDOH focus on improving health by reducing health disparities, bettering social, physical, and economic environments, economic stability, and health care access and quality (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, n.d.). These factors impact AA

susceptibility to and mortality rates from COVID, seeing as this group often faces unfavorable outcomes when it comes to SDOH.

### Implications on Vulnerable Population

Because of this health disparity related to the virus, AA face higher than average mortality rates and susceptibility to the virus. This is apparent in the data; it states that "51% of deaths in South Carolina have been **among African Americans** despite their representing only 30% of the population. In Chicago, Illinois, **African Americans** constituted 70% of early COVID-19 deaths despite composing only 30% of the population, and deaths continue to cluster in neighborhoods where more than 90% of the residents are **African American** (Peek et al., 2021). These statistics are exacerbated due to Black American acknowledgment of discrimination from racially biased health care workers resulting in poor health outcomes. Hence, there is severe mistrust between healthcare providers and the Black community (Jones, 2020). This leads to poor health outcomes from COVID-19 because of reluctance to seek treatment due to fear of being subject to racism and discrimination from a medical provider (Destine, 2020).

### Role of Factors Related to Health Disparity

A plethora of factors contributes to the health disparities African Americans face when it comes to contracting and dying from coronavirus. One of the main factors is the social determinants of health. Social determinants of health include economic stability, access to healthcare, and the environment, to name a few (Jones, 2020). As reflected in the name, these factors determine the health of individuals and certainly matter when discussing disparities in those with COVID-19 (Jones, 2020). Cuellar emphasizes this fact mentioning that "Home zip code, where you work and play, income, financial resources, and education all matter in COVID-19 disease and morbidity just as much as having comorbidities" (Cuellar et al., 2020).



Beginning with economic stability, African Americans are more likely to have a lower socioeconomic status and experience poverty (Jones, 2020). As a result of their low-income status, they are often unemployed or carry jobs that do not give them insurance benefits (Jones, 2020). This results in limited access to quality healthcare. This lack of access to adequate health insurance means access to COVID-19 testing and treatment is limited (Jones, 2020). Additionally, due to financial strife, there is an inability to afford personal protective equipment (masks and hand sanitizer), which increases susceptibility to COVID-19 (Jones, 2020). Those within a low social class are also more likely to expose themselves to the virus by using public transportation due to inability to afford personal transportation (Peek et al., 2021). Additionally, the working poor are often essential workers (service workers at grocery stores, food service workers, and agricultural employees) (Jones, 2020). This makes AA of lower social class more at risk for contracting COVID-19 because essential workers must work and are often exempt from quarantine and stay-at-home orders (Destine et al., 2020). Impoverished individuals also cannot afford to stay out of work because they need the money.

Moving along to health and healthcare, as aforementioned, vulnerable populations and underserved communities have limited access to adequate healthcare. This could be due to financial reasons where they are not insured or because the areas where AA reside are often healthcare deserts, which are areas where the appropriate healthcare facilities or clinics are non-existent or scarce (Jones, 2020). Due to these factors, AA often rely on community health centers as their source of primary care, especially for chronic diseases (Destine et al., 2020). The issue is that even before the pandemic, AA live in neighborhoods where community health centers are limited (Destine et al., 2020). After the pandemic, community health centers have fared terribly. They

face a decrease in staffing, lack of necessary resources and equipment to abate the complications from COVID-19, and some have even closed due to the pandemic (Destine et al., 2020; Louis-Jean et al., 2020). This leads to adverse consequences because if an individual contracts coronavirus, which is likely due to increased susceptibility, they will not have access to a health center if they become critically ill, leading to higher mortality rates (Jones, 2020). If AA do have access to health care facilities, the sad truth is that they could be assigned to medical personnel that are culturally incompetent and/or face implicit bias and discrimination, resulting in poor healthcare delivery (Destine et al., 2020). Research indicates that healthcare personnel often see Black Americans as “less cooperative, less compliant, and less responsible in medical spaces”, resulting in undermining the seriousness of their complaints, signs, and symptoms of chronic diseases (Destine et al., 2020).

Additionally, Black Americans are more likely to have underlying, often preventable health issues, like obesity, hypertension, asthma, and diabetes (Louis-Jean et al., 2020). It is well known that those with underlying chronic health issues who contract COVID-19 have an increased likelihood of death because the chronic health condition exacerbates the impacts of COVID-19, leading to complications (Jones, 2020). Concerning health and healthcare, education on health issues or health literacy is also an integral part of preventing health issues. Minority groups who inhabit low-income areas often miss out on proper education about health that is often reinforced through schooling or from primary care providers (because of lack of health insurance or healthcare deserts). This lack of knowledge leads to unhealthy practices that encourage disease and poor health from simply being unknowledgeable (Jones, 2020). This is the case with coronavirus. If the community is unaware of how COVID-19 spreads or its modes of transmission and the available testing, they will

unknowingly spread the virus (Jones, 2020).

In exploring the neighborhood and built environment as a social determinant, it is vital to note that a person's living conditions contribute to COVID-19 cases (Jones, 2020). Due to racial segregation and structural racism, AA were and are pushed into segregated low-income neighborhoods that lack the proper resources that promote positive health outcomes, such as the community health centers discussed prior, access to grocery stores with healthier food options (food deserts), and recreational areas like gyms or biking and walking trails (Peek et al., 2020). The presence of these resources would help to prevent chronic health conditions that AA disproportionately develop, like hypertension or obesity, which complicate COVID-19 (Jones, 2020). Furthermore, AA are more likely to reside in areas densely populated areas and congregate living environments (Jones, 2020). Multigenerational living is also more common, translating into more crowded living areas (Peek et al., 2021). These factors make social distancing impossible, which is one of the main methods to preventing the spread of the virus (Jones, 2020). Significant data has also shown that AA live in coronavirus hotspots, where transmission is high (Moore, et al., 2020). As an example, in a study conducted to locate the hotspots for the virus, 22 out of the 79 hotspot counties analyzed was a county where Black residents were the predominant demographic (Moore, et al., 2020). This means, 2 million Black Americans are at higher risk of contracting COVID-19 simply due to where they live (Moore, et al., 2020).

### **Role of Healthcare System and Providers**

As explained in prior sections, the healthcare system and providers play a fundamental role in contributing to the disparity that is Black Americans being disproportionately impacted by coronavirus. Healthcare personnel are key during this pandemic because they aid in treating and caring for those who are impacted by COVID-19 and could help

in preventing related deaths if the proper care is given. Sadly, many healthcare facilities lack culturally competent staff (Destine et al., 2020). They often carry implicit biases toward Black patients, which negatively impact treatment, patient outcomes, and patient-provider interactions (Destine et al., 2020). Medical mistreatment is apparent, with data repeatedly showing that AA receive subpar, less quality healthcare in comparison to white people, which is still the case for COVID-19 (Larencin & Walker, 2020). A shocking example of this is a story of a young Black woman named Rana Zoe Mungin who verbalized and presented clear signs and symptoms that she was infected with COVID but was turned away and dismissed twice by a Brooklyn hospital (Larencin & Walker, 2020). She was dishonestly told that COVID-19 testing was not available at the hospital both times; the second time they dismissed her signs as a panic attack and sent her home with Tylenol (Arnett, 2020). As her illness progressed, she finally received a positive test at the same hospital (Arnett, 2020). Despite treatment, she sadly passed away from complications. Her story highlights the apparent differences in the way Black people are treated when they are ill - they are dismissed and not taken seriously, receiving poor care that ultimately encourages detrimental outcomes. Dr. Paula Johnson, expressed, "The dismissal of her symptoms is a register of the long history of economic and racial barriers to healthcare faced by Black women in this country," expressing that perhaps if her symptoms were taken seriously and she received care sooner, she would still be alive (Arnett, 2020).

Cases such as these and the high mortality rates of AA highlight the role healthcare providers must play in eliminating this disparity. A key solution would be hiring culturally competent staff, but also teaching medical professionals how to be culturally competent and, more importantly, how to evaluate and resolve their own biases and racism (Cuellar et al., 2020). This teaching is integral because once professionals are

taught to recognize SDOH, the barriers Black people face, and cultural differences, they will understand their Black patients better and be more aware if they are being dismissive and biased (Cuellar et al., 2020). Additionally, hiring more medical professionals that come from the same ethnic group or community of the patients they care for will help to eliminate poor health care due to relatability and strong provider-patient communication (Cuellar et al., 2020). These factors will help improve treatment, access to correct testing, and health outcomes (Cuellar et al., 2020)

### Potential Solutions

In the hopes of eliminating or abating the severity of this health disparity faced by Black Americans, multiple solutions should be considered. One solution involves utilizing community-based organizations to provide preventative resources to high-risk communities (Peek et al., 2021). This intervention would include providing COVID-19 prevention kits that contain personal protective equipment (PPE), hand sanitizer, and education materials about the virus to high-risk communities to increase awareness of the virus, thus reducing susceptibility and mortality rates (Peek et al., 2021) Nurses and healthcare staff can help to provide educational materials to patients. Other solutions include increasing community health centers in high-risk areas and COVID hotspots, with the help of larger hospitals allocating necessary PPE and medical equipment to smaller facilities to decrease health care deserts where Black Americans reside (Peek et al., 2021). An increase in testing sites where nurses provide COVID-19 tests would also be a viable choice (Jones et al., 2020).

Furthermore, to address the disproportionate, high mortality rates faced by AA from COVID-19, a governmental action to guarantee free healthcare care treatment related to the virus would be beneficial to the vulnerable population (Hunter et al., 2020). As stated previously, AA are often underinsured and face financial insecurity. As a result, if they become ill with

the virus, they will either delay treatment or will not seek treatment because they do not have insurance and/or cannot afford the treatment costs (Jones, 2020). This leads to mortality rates due to a lack of proper care. Therefore, a push for free COVID-19 care will encourage individuals within these hotspots to seek care if they contract the virus because money would not be an issue; the uninsured would receive care without worry about copays or other financial responsibilities (Hunter et al., 2020). This would call on the government to categorize COVID-19 care as a preventative treatment, making it a free option for minority groups (Hunter et al., 2020). Nurses can assume roles as advocates for this intervention by speaking with the appropriate government officials to emphasize the importance of enacting this solution.

Lastly, with the introduction of various new vaccines aimed at reducing the spreading of the virus, another potential solution could be incentivized vaccine rollouts (Hunter et al., 2020). This plan would guarantee that every American can be vaccinated within two weeks time (Hunter et al., 2020). A COVID-19 vaccine fund would be created to offer monetary incentives for consumers or could involve offering incentives to health insurance companies that offer health plan benefits for guarantors who become vaccinated (Hunter et al., 2020). The incentive would increase vaccine rates, which would help to decrease susceptibility in the virus' hotspot areas. These incentives would also help AA in these underserved areas who are often of low socioeconomic status, need the incentives, and lack proper healthcare. Once again, nurses can be advocates by convincing federal officials to implement this strategy through lobbying. They can also be advocates and educators for patients by informing them why vaccination is so paramount in preventing coronavirus infections.

### Solution

In the hopes of tackling this health disparity faced by the Black communities across the United States, a

multifaceted, multistep, community-based intervention plan would need to be employed. The priority action plan and key strategy would be to decrease high susceptibility and mortality rates by eliminating healthcare deserts, essentially with the goal to flatten the curve of COVID-19 cases and deaths. This would primarily focus on creating facilities in areas where clinics and community health centers are too far away or are understaffed. This would be better accomplished through collaboration with larger healthcare facilities and hospitals. Facilities would be equipped with nurses and medical staff of African American descent and/or are culturally competent to relate to and understand the community they serve. It would also include community volunteers that are trained to provide supplemental information and give out needed PPE. Free testing and educational materials taught by and given by culturally competent staff would also be integral. This plan would help to improve awareness about COVID-19 and its effects, improve the use of PPE to decrease virus contraction for those who are essential workers, and make communities feel comfortable seeking care when sick, despite their financial situation. Finally, as the vaccine rolls out, these same clinics and community health centers should be properly funded by the government, also in collaboration with larger hospitals to roll out and disseminate the vaccine to any community members willing and ready to be vaccinated.

In terms of the key steps of the implementation process, the first step would be to use data showing the coronavirus hotspots to target areas where the population is most susceptible to COVID-19. As expressed previously, these hotspots are predominantly where AA populations reside. Then, the community-based intervention plan would follow with first identifying the primary care providers and facilities within and closest to these hotspots. These areas would most likely be healthcare deserts with minimal access to healthcare facilities. In areas where there

are nearby healthcare facilities and community health centers, a partnership would be initiated between the local health centers and larger hospitals in the area to staff and equip the local health centers with the needed materials of a functional health clinic. In areas where healthcare deserts exist, pop-up health clinics using the community's trusted spaces, like churches and schools, would need to be developed (Peek et al., 2020). Partnerships with larger hospitals would be required as well. Funding from governmental bodies, like the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services would also be pertinent to supply these local health clinics with the correct materials.

With the help from the larger hospitals, local health organizations, and government funding, these health clinics will be able to provide COVID-19 prevention kits to residents in the area, 24-hour testing, contact tracing, vaccinations, informational pamphlets, and even classes that discuss basic information about the virus. COVID-19 prevention kits, as supplied by large hospitals and the government, would include (PPE), like masks, gloves, alcohol, and hand sanitizer. These kits would carry enough materials to last for a month and can be restocked periodically when individuals run out. Antigen and PCR testing (tests that detects the genetic material of coronavirus, indicating current infection) for COVID-19 would be conducted by nurses free of charge to identify those who are infected. These tests can be conducted regularly to ensure health and can be done when individuals suspect they have been exposed or are feeling ill. Positive cases would employ hospital staff to initiate contact tracing to stop the spread and identify persons related to the virus dissemination. Also, partnerships with hospitals can ensure symptomatic and critically ill residents receive proper medical attention through referrals from the local health centers. The informational sessions would be led by knowledgeable, culturally competent nursing and medical staff recruited via healthcare facilities and

hospitals or those looking for work. The 20-to-30-minute sessions would discuss how the virus spreads, symptoms to look for, and strategies to prevent the spread, like correct use of PPE, social distancing, and hand hygiene practices. Any questions and concerns about the virus would be answered in these sessions and with printed materials to reinforce the topics discussed. As expressed above, with vaccines becoming more readily available, these clinics should be given priority by the health organizations and should receive vaccines so they can be distributed in the hotspot areas.

As explained throughout the implementation, the role of nurses is an integral aspect of the plan. Nurses are important frontline, essential workers who treat COVID-19 patients, but also play a role in educating the residents they serve and providing testing. It is paramount that the nurses conducting the informational sessions are from the community they are serving and/or share the same ethnic background as the residents. This will ensure a strong patient-provider relationship because the patients and nurses relate to each other. The patients will feel comfortable asking questions because they trust the nurses. This will ultimately lead to better adherence to the guidelines and medical advice from the nurses and encourage healthier practices and health promotion in the effort to avoid the spread of COVID-19.

To evaluate the effectiveness of this strategy, data collection and analysis of COVID-19 cases and mortality rates in the hotspot areas would need to be conducted. Closely monitoring the cases and death rates in these hotspots will determine if the interventions are creating positive change. Effectiveness will be determined if the percentage of COVID-19 cases and deaths are decreasing because of the increase in community knowledge, ongoing testing, and medical treatment. Furthermore, it would be vital to keep track of the number of residents that were tested and visited the local health clinics to

determine adherence and utilization of resources. This will require collaboration with state and analysts and epidemiologists.

Though COVID-19 is a newer public health issue, attempts at flattening the curve in hotspots that are majority AA communities have shown some positive results. In Chicago, which is a hotspot, they employed similar strategies to flatten the curve. The city officials intervened by increasing the number of community sites for antigen and PCR testing (Peek et al., 2020). As a result, the city saw a negative correlation between the number of COVID-19 testing sites available and the number of positive cases, meaning the increase in testing translated to fewer positive COVID-19 cases (Peek et al., 2020). Simultaneously, the city saw a drastic decrease in the number of African American COVID-19 related deaths (Peek et al., 2020). Mortality rates dropped from 72% to 47% in less than 2 months (Peek et al., 2020). These positive outcomes reveal the importance of testing. The more testing that is done correlates to a decrease in positive COVID cases, which correlates to fewer COVID-19-related deaths. If more people within a vulnerable population get tested, they can detect the virus early and seek treatment before they become seriously ill and die, as in the case of Rana Zoe Mungin discussed earlier (Peek et al., 2020). Furthermore, if someone is aware of their positive result, they will be more cautious and take precautions not to spread the disease to others.

Additionally, community-based interventions are often utilized to solve health issues within the Black community. This is seen with hypertension, a common health issue seen with this specific population. In a study done in four Dutch primary care centers with patients of African descent, there were significant improvements in the participants' blood pressures following culturally appropriate community-based interventions targeted at lowering blood pressure (Beune et al., 2014). The interventions included hypertension education classes led by nurses trained in

educating this minority population, written learning materials, and referrals to local gyms and health food stores (Beune et al., 2014). At the end of the 20-week study, of the 139 patients, almost half of the patients (48 percent) saw a reduction in their blood pressure by 10 mmHg (millimeters of mercury), showing the effectiveness of the study's approach (Beune et al., 2014). A similar study was done with low-income Black Americans in Baltimore with a similar study design featuring educational classes by culturally competent staff (Cooper et al., 2011). Participants saw reductions in their blood pressure ranging anywhere from 16.8 mmHg at most to 10.6 mmHg at the least (Cooper et al., 2011). These studies can be applied to the COVID-19 health issues within the Black American population. It shows that in using similar community-based interventions as the hypertension studies, improvements in the health issues of the AA community are observed. The health literacy of those who live in underserved communities is greatly improved through patient education that is culturally relevant and taught by culturally competent staff. This health literacy brings about favorable health outcomes due to more awareness of health issues, like hypertension and COVID-19.

## **Conclusion**

In analyzing the health disparities faced by African Americans related to COVID-19, the causes are clear. AA are subject to higher susceptibility and mortality rates due to the pernicious impacts of racism, discrimination, which have led to SDOH that greatly disadvantage this population. Community-based interventions with the help of culturally competent staff and medical personnel, especially nurses can help to abate these disparities. As supported by extensive research, increasing access to health care and improving health literacy in the AA community can positively impact health outcomes when it comes to this virus. Both methods address the social determinants of health, specifically health and

healthcare, the neighborhood and built environment, as well as education, bolstering the point that health disparities are directly caused by disadvantages allotted to minority groups as a result of structural and institutional racism.

---

## References:

Arnett, D. (2020, May 1). Twice denied testing, UMass Amherst scholar dies after long battle with coronavirus. *The Boston Globe*. <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2020/05/01/nation/twice-denied-testing-recent-umass-amherst-grad-dies-after-long-battle-with-coronavirus/>

Beune, E.J., Moll van Charante, E.P., Beem, L., Mohrs, J., Agyemang, C.O., Ogedegbe, G., Haafkens, J.A. (2014). Culturally adapted hypertension education (CAHE) to improve blood pressure control and treatment adherence in patients of African origin with uncontrolled hypertension: Cluster-randomized trial. *PLOS One*, 9(3), 1-11. doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0090103.

Cooper, L. A., Roter, D. L., Carson, K. A., Bone, L. R., Larson, S. M., Miller, E. R., Barr, M. S., & Levine, D. M. (2011). A randomized trial to improve patient-centered care and hypertension control in underserved primary care patients. *Journal of General Internal Medicine*, 26(11), 1297–1304. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11606-011-1794-6>

Cuellar, N. G., Aquino, E., Dawson, M. A., Garcia-Dia, M. J., Im, E.-O., Jurado, L.-F. M., ... Toney, D. A. (2020). Culturally congruent health care of COVID-19 in minorities in the United States: A clinical practice paper from the National Coalition of Ethnic Minority Nurse Associations. *Journal of Transcultural Nursing*, 31(5), 434–443. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1043659620941578>

Destine, S., Brooks, J., & Rogers, C. (2020). Black maternal health crisis, COVID-19, and the crisis of care. *Feminist Studies*, 46(3), 603-614. doi:10.15767/feministstudies.46.3.0603

Hunter, K., Kendall, D. & Horwitz, G. (2020). CoronaCare for everyone: A comprehensive plan to rescue health care. *Third Way*. <http://www.jstor.com/stable/resrep24034>

Laurencin, C. T., & Walker, J. M. (2020). A Pandemic on a Pandemic: Racism and COVID-19 in Blacks. *Cell systems*, 11(1), 9–10. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cels.2020.07.002>

Louis-Jean, J., Cenat, K., Njoku, C. V., Angelo, J., & Sanon, D. (2020). Coronavirus (COVID-19) and racial disparities: A perspective analysis. *Journal of Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities*, 7(6), 1039–1045. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40615-020-00879-4>

Jones, M. L. (2020). The Social Determinants of COVID-19. *ABNF Journal*, 31(3), 97–101.

Moore, J.T., Ricaldi, J.N., Rose, C.E., Fuld, J., Parise, M., Kang, G.J., Driscoll, A.K., Norris, T., Wilson, N., Rainisch, G., Valverde, E., Beresovsky, V., Agnew-Brune, C., Oussayef, N.I., Rose, F.A., Adams, L.E., Awel, S., Villanueva, J., Meaney-Delman, D., & Honein, M.A. (2020) Disparities in incidence of COVID-19 among underrepresented racial/ethnic groups in counties identified as hotspots during June 5–18, 2020 — 22 States, February–June 2020. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 69(33), 1122-1126.

Peek, M. E., Simons, R. A., Parker, W. F., Ansell, D. A., Rogers, S. O., & Edmonds, B. T. (2021). COVID-19 Among African Americans: An action plan for mitigating disparities. *American Journal of Public Health*, 111(2), 286–292. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.wpunj.edu/10.2105/AJPH.2020.305990>

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (n.d.). *Social determinants of health*. Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. Retrieved from <https://health.gov/healthypeople/objectives-and-data/social-determinants-health>





# Dear Mama: Single Motherhood During the Coronavirus Pandemic

---

*Nicole Mejia*

**Course:** Interdisciplinary Senior Seminar

**Professor:** Maria Kromidas, Community and Social Justice Studies

**Student:** Nicole Mejia

**Essay:** *Dear Mama: Single Motherhood During the Coronavirus Pandemic*

---

## **Assignment:**

Students in this course were tasked with developing a project that is intended as the culmination of their undergraduate education and representative of their political, professional, and personal interests in their fields of study. Students choosing to write a traditional

academic thesis selected their own topic aligned with the broad course theme (Spring 2021 theme: Radical Care), and developed the project through a series of steps throughout the semester.

---

## **Abstract**

This thesis explores single mothers' professional, social and emotional struggles as they navigate the difficulties of the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on in-depth interviews with three single mothers and conversations with two others on their experiences during the pandemic, I compare women's stories of these women in terms of their support networks. I put these women's experiences in dialogue with scholarship that describes the impact that the pandemic has had on the ability of mothers to maintain a family, work, and social life balance. I demonstrate that support networks, or the lack thereof, to single mothers are of decisive consequence, and argue for the importance in mobilizing such systems before one is set to enter the journey of parenthood. As the coronavirus pandemic has drastically amplified

the need for community, it is crucial for expecting parents, especially single parents, to organize a community of people to rely on that can help in areas like childcare, tasks or errands, or someone to simply offer mental and emotional respite and overall assist with daily processes. Many of the issues confronting single mothers' pre and during the pandemic are the lack of resources available to them that assist in childcare services, housing, employment, health, nutrition and financial relief.

The unexpected and severely devastating global coronavirus pandemic only introduced itself to our world a mere year ago, as is the case, quickly placing an overwhelming hardship upon humankind like never seen before. Unfortunately, the biggest hardships disproportionately fell onto mothers- single mothers. The ideology of a nuclear family still exists yet the reality does not. Nearly nineteen million children – twenty five percent of all children in the U.S. - were living in single-parent households (Chamie, 2021), and of approximately 13.6 million single parents in the United States, eighty percent is made up of mothers (Arnold, 2020). While the capability to care for children is critical, having to do so while actively in the workforce during such adverse and uncertain times proves just how crucial the role of Mother is.

At this very moment thousands of women are struggling to find a network to rely on. Some women are lucky to have found that support; physical, mental, or emotional, where others are not so fortunate. Even though mothers may have supportive networks available, the pandemic has made it seem as if they did not. Due to intense restrictions and guidelines imposed by governing officials as a result of the virus, moms are left without the imperative assistance needed to navigate through a new set of responsibilities. Support networks provide essential relief to single mothers and being a single, working mother not only affects the parent but the young ones as well. Studies show that children in two-parent families fare better in social behavior, interpersonal relationships, school, careers and employment (Chamie, 2021). However, recent literature consistently measures multi-adult familial structures and as a result, single adult households are highly underrepresented.

Alas, the significance of this argument contributes to the global debate concerning the continued oppression of women and the enduring matter of reproductive freedom. By contextualizing my interviews with a historical framework, I demonstrate

how the issues currently faced by single mothers are not exclusively a result of the coronavirus. Women have struggled with financial, housing and food insecurities for decades, and all are intertwined with larger concerns regarding reproductive justice. My goal for this study is not only to prove the importance of support networks to single mothers, but also analyze the cause for why they are needed in the first place.

### **Capitalist Patriarchy**

While single moms are finding themselves forced to decide between staying home to care for their children or being employed, they are ultimately at risk of food and housing insecurity; all posing immediate threat to both mother and child(ren). What this outbreak has shed light on is society's extreme reliance on domestic work and how undervalued that responsibility is in the scheme of things. As the famous expression goes, "it takes a village to raise a child". It would be foolish to disagree with that sentiment, and to be honest, what better time for it to resonate? And that is not a plea to return to a bygone past but rather points to the importance of social networks that are essential for mothers, cast with the primary responsibility of the extraordinary work of caring for children. If we are to examine the impact of COVID-19 on single mothers, we must consider the influence of patriarchy and capitalism in societal institutions that maintain gender and racial inequality.

We must avoid treating capitalism as a purely economic system separate from culture. It is entirely embedded into the American way of life. If you are not bringing anything to the table, move over, someone else will. If that's so, why is domestic work, one of the hardest works, still underpaid – if paid at all? That is because patriarchy has undervalued a woman's job as mother because they believe it is in their nature to be mothers and perform "woman" tasks. Domestic work has never been considered true work and seldom are mothers compensated for their jobs because "that's just what moms do". The male centeredness, identifica-

tion and dominance that is patriarchy has made it so that housework is exclusively a female's job. Therefore, maintaining gender inequality through socialization by a collective of implicit beliefs, institutional policies and simply male privilege.

It is not surprising that a percentage of the general public shows little respect for the work and care performed at home. Childbearing, housework and family management requires a substantial amount of effort, often more than most jobs, and capitalism as a system can only function on unwaged labor from those vulnerable to exploitation. So, if it weren't for the unwaged work of mothers the economy would be far behind the nation's counterparts. Not only does capitalism depend on the unwaged labor of mothers, but it also creates a social and economic divide connecting capital and racial exploitation, thus producing the theory of racial capitalism.

### **The Institutional Context of Single Motherhood**

It appears that America lacks a great sense of priority when it comes to acknowledging the fundamental contributions of women to the economy, and equalizing gender relations. The virus has evidently turned millions of lives upside down, and the economic shutdown clearly caused for existing gaps in gendered wages to further deepen. The effects of institutional sexism and racism have limited the employment opportunities available to women for decades. In theory, without production there is no reproduction. Reports show that for every 82 cents women make a man earns a dollar and according to Rowe-Finkbeiner (2020), Latina moms are paid forty-five cents to a white dad's dollar, Black moms fifty cents, Asian American and Pacific Islander moms eighty-nine cents, Native American moms forty-seven cents and white moms sixty-nine cents. Working mothers are being forced to risk their family's health for a fraction of what their male counterparts earn; some are in fact being pushed out of the workforce. Contrary other Western countries, the U.S. is in need for public policy initiatives

and are behind in implementing helpful work-family policies such as childcare, paid family and medical leave and earned paid sick leave on which single moms could count on.

Certainly, single moms are fighting a never-ending battle to find ways to provide food and shelter for their families, adequate childcare, all the while trying their hardest to retain their employment and maintain their health. In addition to their paid labor, a mother's unpaid domestic work also keeps the economy and their families running. According to Gogoi (2020) more than 865,000 women left the U.S. workforce in September, of which 324,000 were Latinas and 58,000 were Black women (Ewing-Nelson, 2020). These numbers in fact reflect similar 1980s data where the number of women active in the workforce mirror those of today. Surely with more women leaving the labor force, the U.S. economy is at risk of a complete bust and that fallout will greatly contribute to preexisting disparities, leaving long lasting consequences for women personally, financially and professionally. Furthermore, causing disaster to a society that already relies heavily on the labor of women. As stated by Chris Arnold (2020), "A lot of people need help in the pandemic, but especially single mothers."

To make matters worse, women and working mothers are at higher risk of experiencing exploitation and quid pro quo sexual harassment at work. Hours are lessened, wages are decreasing, and benefits are disappearing. Countless moms are in dire need of employment which exposes them to abuses of power and manipulation. Companies are taking advantage of difficult circumstances by knowing that working moms cannot afford to give up any income. Employers are quickly choosing women first for layoffs due to their personal responsibilities or intentionally reduce their income in order to recover funds for the business. Supposing one is furloughed, their callback may be conditioned on less pay for the same work and rarely do women reject the offer. As asserted in "COVID-19 and Gender Based

Violence”, the IFC (2020) claims, “Gendered power disparities in highly hierarchal organizations, where a predominantly female workforce reports to predominantly male supervisors will also increase the risk of quid pro quo sexual harassment.” From salary cuts to sexual coercion, inappropriate conduct demonstrates the power inequalities between female employees and male employers.

### Methodology

To examine this phenomenon, I interviewed three single mothers named Mia, Katherine and Lily. Mia (27) is a first-generation Bangladeshi mother to Evie (8). She earns her income as a server working at an Applebee’s restaurant and recently lost her second job at a Cheesecake Factory due to the pandemic. Mia is also attending nursing school and is set to graduate this upcoming September. We both live in the same suburban town and she is the ex-girlfriend of a former friend of mine. The relationship between Mia and Evie’s father was tumultuous from beginning to end. She endured many abuses in her past relationship and is looking forward to a brighter future with her daughter.

Katherine (30) is a mixed Latina with Arab descent and mother to Alfonso (3). She lives in the city where she works in retail at a boutique clothing store. Katherine is a college graduate, and we were introduced almost ten years ago through a mutual friend. I didn’t know much about Katherine before this conversation; she appears reserved and despite her offer to participate in the interview she seemed reluctant throughout our time. It was as expected, and I am not in the slightest surprised as this subject matter can be difficult to discuss especially with outsiders.

Lily (36) is a working-class Latina mother of two children, Jaiden (5) and Alexis (14). This was in fact my second interview with Lily, as she and I spoke last September about her experiences just at the height of the pandemic. I met Lily through a mutual group

of friends close to twelve years ago and we have been close friends ever since. Jaiden is my godson and I have been there for the family through all the ups and downs life has taken them through and witnessed the obstacles Lily has faced being a single parent. She continues to work as a licensed nurse practitioner for a Urology practice and is currently living in her parent’s suburban home in order to save for an apartment. Almost six years later and she continues to resent the fact that she was forced to move back into her parent’s home after Jaiden was born. The economic burden she faced while caring for a newborn and an adolescent on her own heavily weighed on her, even before the pandemic.

Although she now earns close to \$60,000 a year, Lily is still not in the financial position to get her youngest Jaiden into a full-time daycare without public assistance. To her success, she was fortunate to have made a career without having a formal education. She dropped out of high school at the age of sixteen and later received her GED so she could enroll into nursing school. Lily never thought she would find herself as an LPN, being that she always dreamt of going into the fashion industry. But like other firstborn and first-generation children, the responsibilities bestowed on her to secure income did not allow her to follow her dreams.

All interviews were conducted through zoom and lasted about thirty minutes long. I was able to coordinate these interviews by posting on social media about my research and asked if any single mother was interested and willing to briefly speak about their experiences during the pandemic. Mia and Katherine reached out, then we agreed to a Tuesday evening on March 2nd and away we went. Besides the former three, I spent time with an old friend Cori (37) and her family at their Sunday dinner. I am familiar with Cori’s story and we occasionally speak about her circumstances, so my observation of this conversation.

<sup>1</sup> Full interview transcripts can be found in appendices.

was something I am not new to.

Cori is a white working mother to two boys Cameron (13) and Miller (5). She just left the medical field to begin working as a car salesperson at a luxury dealership and lives in a two-family house in a more rural area. With an associate degree in fashion marketing, she often freelances, and commissions work for designers and their clothing lines. Unlike the other women, Cori's dilemma isn't the lack of childcare per se, but the facilities willing to take Miller as a student. Sadly, Miller is dealing with behavioral and emotional issues. He frequently lashes out in uncontrollable and harmful ways towards himself and others as he finds it difficult managing his anger. Cori is being pulled in all directions. She has been fortunate to remain at work, but she cannot leave during her shift every time Miller's teachers cannot console him. It's gotten bad, so much that she now worries that she will lose her job if she isn't able to find a way to help him. Being that Cori and Miller are continuously in between daycares, she is finding it harder to afford childcare due to the constant switching from one place to the next.

Finally, in a strange but remarkable turn of chance, I had the unexpected but extremely valuable opportunity to speak with a fourth mother named Maritza (28) while vacationing in Mexico. Although my conversation with Maritza was quick and informal, it was profoundly moving, and I was truly touched by her strength, courage and resilience as it reminded me of my own mother's journey. Maritza originally came to this country at twelve years old and began a life with her aunt in California. While living with her American born son Romeo (6) in Massachusetts, she was caught in the middle of an ICE raid at work and was later deported to Mexico without her son in 2018. Today she is living just outside of Cancun in a one-bedroom villa with her grandparents and a second son, while working as a butler at a five-star resort.

## **I Am Who I Am**

As the first child of an immigrant, single working mother I developed several perspectives that help me analyze matters differently through many lenses. One would be the perspective of a first born and first-generation child coming from a different cultural background. Another perspective would be that of a child of a single mother. Those intersecting identities shaped my experiences and allowed me to witness certain realities firsthand. From divorce, bankruptcy and even threats of eviction, I've watched my mom tirelessly fight her battles with conviction and make her way through the mud to get where she is today. Now as an adult I am once again in the presence of similar realities, however in slightly different circumstances. In my immediate circle of family and friends, a few women from all walks of life currently struggle with single motherhood and bearing witness to their burdens brought up many familiar memories. While my personal relationship with the matter influenced my selection for this thesis, it's also important to note that during my gathering and analyzing evidence it was clear that the basis of most literature was on the image of a nuclear family. This qualitative phenomenological study was a means to explore the lived experiences of single mothers in the United States, and that to me confirmed there was little coverage on the topic where an entire group of people were not being represented fairly.

## **Single Motherhood During the Pandemic**

Let's be real, the idea of a multi-parent family structure is not true for most. The truth is, instead of looking at institutional forces influenced by patriarchy that enable hardship, attention is diverted to stigmatized conceptions of what women should or should not be doing. Women are choosing not to get married and choosing to become single mothers. According to Livingston (2020), four-in-ten births were to women who were solo mothers, and one in four mothers are unmarried. Not long-ago unmarried women were their

father's property, and if married had to ask their husband's permission to leave the marriage. The man ultimately had control over the house, finances and family in a time when divorce was taboo, and plenty of women were shamed for ever having the desire to separate. Today, women are choosing to be single mothers and whether it was intentional to undertake the task alone, the decision is hers and hers only.

Contemporary data shows that more women are choosing to be single mothers. A distinguishing facet of single mother households must be the ability in which a mother creates and sustains a supportive network of resources. These networks are essential in a mother's ability to parent and be employed. In fact, research shows that the ability for middle-class women to pursue paid and full employment relies on the outsourcing of childcare and other reproductive labor to lower-wage women from other class and racial groups (Hertz et al., 2020, pg. 3). As it goes in the story of Maritza, she must work grueling days as a butler at one of the many five-star luxury hotels in Riviera Maya for a mere wage in order to support her two kids, grandparents and provide food and shelter. All in all, the intersections between inequalities within gender, race and class are raising more concern than ever for single mothers and their children.

According to Maggio (2019), "The poverty rate among single mother-led families is five times that of married couple families, which has major implications for the children involved, not just the mothers." Women are living in constant fear of food and housing insecurity, and studies show that 29.2% of custodial single mothers and their children lived in poverty (Wolf, 2020) and a third of all single mom-led families are considered food insecure (Maggio, 2019). Additionally, families with single moms currently account for 60 percent of all the homeless families in the country (Maggio, 2019). These stresses not only affect mom's mental health, but the child's wellbeing as well, causing emotional, mental and behavioral anxieties. When

asked about her daughter's changes in emotional behavior, Mia stated, "But as time went on when we didn't go back to school, I realized I don't know her at all. I don't know her emotions. I didn't know anything about her, and it was really hard for me."

From an educational standpoint, kids are struggling with remote learning and it often seems hopeless for elementary-aged students to comprehend the information being taught to them. Some students need more personalized attention, and teachers are finding it hard to individualize certain needs. From a physical and social aspect, kids are left with no space to freely move around or have social interaction with others. Schools are closed, childcare centers are closed, and mothers are worrying that their children's social skills, emotional behaviors, academics and development will fall behind. This is even more so for mothers with toddler aged children. Katherine asserts, "Not being around other kids definitely impacted him in so many different ways. It definitely put a huge pause on his speech development. You know, it's just me and him, kids need other kids to learn different things from."

### Support Networks

Due to the pandemic, single mothers were suddenly burdened with the responsibility of being fulltime teachers to their children while concerned with the looming uncertainty of the future. Not to mention already managing the task of being primary caregivers and sole providers. As a result of the above, their mental, physical and emotional wellbeing are being brutally tested and the strain is taking a toll on their health. Almost 70 percent of mothers reported that increased levels of stress and worry from the pandemic have caused damage to their health (Grose, 2021). To add fuel to the fire, without their being employed, there is no healthcare. Research conducted by Fronstin and Woodbury (2020) found 53 percent of working women lost jobs with employer sponsored health insurance. The authors state, "(Women)and their

dependents accounted for slightly more than half of all lost jobs with ESI and potential ESI coverage loss when dependents were included.” (Fronstin & Woodbury, 2020).

Although many moms feel fortunate to still be working, they insist there’s never enough time in maintaining a home and work life. A work-family balance remains a rarity for many employed mothers in the U.S. Undoubtedly, single mothers are feeling a loss of control; they are livid, tired, angry, stressed, and filled with rage. In many cases the essence of motherhood has been deprived from single moms due to the overwhelming responsibilities. With a newfound workload and no respite, remote learning, social isolation and no partner to share the financial burden, tensions rise enhancing a person’s anxiety and causing uneasiness. Even the most successful women suffer from what sociologists call “mom penalty”. Women are forced to step down the career ladder to stay home and risk well-deserved promotions, future earnings and leadership roles while simultaneously depleting their savings, 401k’s, getting into their retirement and pensions or collect unemployment (Rogers, 2020). Without the help of family, friends, and neighbors – among others – single moms are drowning.

When looking at support networks, we must remember that the problems single mothers face today were alive and well before the pandemic. The significance of support networks to single parents, especially moms, is essential to their managing of daily operations. These networks, or “villages”, provide help with childcare, running errands or simply lend a listening ear. However, due to the abrupt cease of social interaction, the ounce of support mothers had pre-covid were suddenly gone. Subsequently, society was given a closer look into the everyday responsibilities and efforts performed and contributed by moms. Because of the nationally mandated quarantine, the established support networks mothers had been too confined to their homes and left without a way to offer any relief. I

asked Cori, “what upsets you the most?”, she responds, “Aside from all the other shit in my life, the fact that I feel so alone, I feel like I have no one at all to help me. The government barely wants to help me with funding for childcare, their father is nowhere to be found, my parents are retiring south soon, and my friends are either pregnant or ‘magically’ always too busy to help in watching Miller. It sucks.”

### That’s Life

There was no instruction book that came with the global pandemic. Not a single person knew what to do, not governments, not healthcare professionals, not militaries, and most definitely not parents. Navigating life as a single mother throughout it all has not been easy, but someone must do it. And the social institutions single moms typically rely on were shut down barely helping or barely functioning. Both Mia and Lily expressed their disappointments regarding their children’s schools. Mia states, “I mean, honestly, I don’t feel like they helped me at all. They just closed in March. I think it was the 16th. They barely communicate or check up on the kids, well at least my kid. And I ended up losing my job when all this happened because I’m a server like so we couldn’t do indoor dining. So, it was really just up to me to figure out what the next steps were with her schooling and my job.”

She also mentions changes in her daughter’s academics and claims, “I mean now she’s learning how to read and like reading has been really a struggle for her. And before we used to have a lot of one-on-one sessions and tutoring after school and we don’t really have a laptop, so she’s not really like learning anything. I personally don’t feel like (Evie’s) getting a full education because they don’t even want to have parent-teacher conferences. We’re only limited to 60 to 75 seconds. So, I’m like not able to get the full questions and I’m not able to tell them how I feel about everything and it’s just like I have to be quick about everything.”

When asked about her son's academics and the role his school played in the transition to remote learning, Lily described it as "hard". She alleges that "It was like a big hot mess honestly. I mean, I didn't find out about zoom classes until like a week before school started. I didn't know who their teacher was and it was really stressful. They really didn't reach out much and you know, it was more me calling them like what's going on." Lily also described Jaiden's schooling as "hard" claiming, "For Jaiden that's in kindergarten it's hard because you know, he doesn't have a teacher there and she needs to see like how he's writing or reading which you know, he's just starting to learn, so she doesn't really see all of that. And like at his daycare teachers have to sit with him sometimes while he's in school. They help him with the zoom links with his laptop, but they don't know what's going on in his school since they're two different places. It's hard for him to focus and sit on a chair for hours so it's difficult for the daycare too."

For Katherine, she mostly worries about having a toddler whose developmental advances have been interrupted. She mentioned her son Alfonso was not in daycare, so I asked how she has been supplementing his education. She stated, "Honestly you know, I interact with him. We sing, we dance, we play, that's how he learned. You know, thank God. He's like young enough where I don't have to sit there and teach him or do homework or anything, but it's definitely been hard because we see a lot of kids his age. They're definitely talking a lot more than he is. He was in speech therapy, which covid also put that on a tremendous halt. You know, that definitely affected him and then on top of that like potty training and I just I couldn't even handle that because my plate was so full with many different things. Like working, trying to make extra income for us, trying to play with him and you know, give him a break from trying to teach him things and just bond with him."

Cori believes her son acts out because his father is not

in the picture. She's commented on several occasions that Miller is consistently looking for his dad, especially when he has one of his bad days. Although their father only lives half a mile down the same road, he barely comes around to visit and sometimes won't even answer a facetime call. Cori can usually make decisions for the kids on her own, but every now and then she must get their fathers permission or signature for certain things. She has been trying to get Miller the therapy he needs but is often delayed because she can't get in contact with his dad to signoff. Similarly, Maritza has not been in contact with Romeo's dad. She didn't mention him too much, but from the looks of it she hasn't had his support in a long time.

### She Said

As I investigate the importance of support networks to single mothers, I found that one of the greatest support networks to any parent is in fact the other parent. In the cases of all five women, their children's fathers are not in the picture, which means there is one less support network to rely on. Mia says, "He hasn't called in five years. So, it was a little difficult for me to hear that she still wants to see him." The inconsistent or nonexistent relationships between the two have great effects on the way mothers can raise their kids. Some have been more fortunate than others seeing that they are in positions to not need monetary assistance from their ex-partners, but others do not manage the same.

When asked about the situation with her daughter Evie's father and support, Mia responded, "There is absolutely no child support. Her father can't hold a job long enough to get paid on the books. Everything he does is illegal or under the radar." Shockingly enough, Lily had a similar answer.

NICOLE: May I ask, is there father involved in their lives?

LILY: Nope, the last time the kid's saw him was when he was kicked out of his parents' house and had



nowhere else to so he decided to call me out the blue and ask if he could stay here. I only said yes because he hasn't seen them in a minute so I thought it would be nice for them to spend time. Alexis is over his shit though, she's old enough now to understand what's going on.

NICOLE: Does he offer monetary support?

LILY: His parents used to send me money every month, like \$500. He can't keep a job so I can't put him on child support. Now that his parents kicked him out, they're not giving me money.

On the other hand, Katherine does receive some child support, but at the expense of her son not having a relationship with his father.

KATHERINE: I live by myself and I have my son 365 days. The year his dad's not seen him. I don't speak to him. Everything is me on my own and like yeah, I get some child support but like I can't depend on that. I have gotten money in like over a month now from him. So, this is all just me, me hustling to get some extra money for us.

While sitting with Cori and her family, the topic of father and support also came up. Like Mia, Cori finds it utterly useless to get the courts involved.

CORI: You know I've tried everything to get their father involved and he just doesn't care. He doesn't show up. And before you say to get the courts involved, tell me, what job does Adam have for the government to take from his check to give to me?

I also identified that most of the moms do not prioritize their own mental health and respite. What! Why not? Day in and day out moms devote one thousand percent of their attention and efforts into everything else rather than themselves. There is an underlying sense of anger and overlying feel of frustration and mothers are working tirelessly to do it all. When I asked Katherine where she finds her me-time, her peace, she replied, "It's hard, you know.

When I think about things, everything that I do literally just revolves around my son at this point. It's not really for myself anymore. You know, I'll try and find time for myself. Like literally the only free time I get away from him is at my job." Similarly with Lily, she simply responded, "Ain't nobody got time fo' that!"

But in fact, what I found to be the most interesting throughout all the conversations was the recurring theme of not wanting or feeling like they are taking handouts. Maritza, Mia and Katherine discussed their opinions on federal assistance. When I asked Maritza who she looks to for help or if she has someone to rely on, she simply said she has all that she needs within herself. She does not look to others and wants to set an example for her sons to be resilient.

MIA: At the end of day I don't need help from anybody, and I don't want to feel like I need to rely on anybody. I didn't have anybody on assistance or anything like that.

KATHERINE: Well, I don't have many thoughts to be honest. I never want to feel like I'm taking handouts, but I do see other people getting loads of money and other assistance and I kind of ignore it. It would be helpful I'm sure at some point.

### Thoughts from a Balcony

The influence of patriarchy and capitalism over gender, race, bodily autonomy and reproductive freedom institutionalizes sexism, racism and perpetuates injustice against racial and ethnic minorities, gender and sexual minorities, low-income minorities, able minorities, children, families, and women. Every act of reproduction is an act of social and economic production. America as a nation and a democracy needs to prioritize work-family policies in order to support working moms all over. From publicly funded childcare to paid parental and family leave, we must undo laws that leave girls, women and other marginalized groups vulnerable to exploitation and harm through legal inequality. The imposition of ideas

and interests by those in authority transform prejudice into oppression. All oppression is connected, and we see this in the many intersecting identities that exposes people to bias, prejudice, and discrimination. The need for community is more apparent now than ever before. COVID-19 has only exacerbated gender, racial and class issues, further deepening the gaps between wages, resources and the economy. Housing, food, income and employment insecurity, along with vulnerability of exploitation and harassment is a direct

result from the capitalist patriarchy that is embedded in our social institutions. Even though mothers indeed can do it all, they shouldn't have to and that is why it is imperative for single mothers to establish support networks in order to encourage their own physical, emotional and mental wellbeing.

---

## References:

- Arnold, C. (2020, October 26). 'Incredibly Scary': *Single Moms Fear Falling Through Holes in Pandemic Safety Net*. NPR. <https://www.npr.org/2020/10/26/925898367/incredibly-scary-single-moms-fear-falling-through-holes-in-pandemic-safety-net>
- Chamie, J. (2021, March 19). *America's Single-Parent Families*. <https://thehill.com/opinion/finance/543941-americas-single-parent-families>
- COVID-19 and Gender-Based Violence: Workplace Risks and Responses. International Finance Corporation (IFC). World Bank. July 2020. <https://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/42b50ce3-3867-48b2-9818-acfbc4080ea2/202007-IFC-GBV-COVID+D.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CVID=ndOei13>
- Ewing-Nelson, C. (2020). *Four Times More Women Than Men Dropped Out of the Labor Force in September*. National Women's Law Center. Retrieved from <https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/september-jobs-fs1.pdf>
- Fronstin, P., & Woodbury, S. A. (2020, October 7). *How Many Americans Have Lost Jobs with Employer Health Coverage During the Pandemic?* <https://www.commonwealthfund.org/publications/issue-briefs/2020/oct/how-many-lost-jobs-employer-coverage-pandemic>
- Gogoi, P. (2020, October 28). *Stuck-at-Home Moms: The Pandemic's Devastating Toll on Women*. <https://www.npr.org/2020/10/28/928253674/stuck-at-home-moms-the-pandemics-devastating-toll-on-women>
- Grose, J. (2021, February 4). *America's Mothers Are in Crisis*. The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/04/parenting/working-moms-mental-health-coronavirus.html>
- Hertz, R., Mattes, J., & Shook, A. (2020). When Paid Work Invades the Family: Single Mothers in the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Journal of Family Issues*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513x20961420>
- Livingston, G. (2020, August 27). *Facts on Unmarried Parents in the U.S.* Pew Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends Project. <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2018/04/25/the-changing-profile-of-unmarried-parents/>

---

Maggio, J. (2019, February 5). *Single Mother Statistics*. <https://thelifeofasinglemom.com/single-mother-statistics-parent/>

Rogers, K. (2020, May 8). *How Single Mothers Are Coping During the Pandemic*. CNN. <https://www.cnn.com/2020/05/08/health/single-mom-challenges-mothers-day-coronavirus-wellness/index.html>

Rowe-Finkbeiner, Kristin. "Moms Are Running on Empty, but Hungry for Change." *The Hill*, September 4, 2020. <https://thehill.com/opinion/civil-rights/515124-moms-are-running-on-empty-but-hungry-for-change>

Wolf, J. (2020, May 1). *Census Data on the Number of Kids Being Raised by One Parent*. <https://www.verywellfamily.com/single-parent-census-data-2997668>

---

## **Appendix A – Interview Questions**

1. *How have you seen a change in your child's behavior / emotions?*
2. *How have you seen a change in your child's academics?*
3. *Are you currently working? Why or why not?*
4. *How did the pandemic affect your work?*
5. *What support networks do you have to rely on?*
6. *Is the father present? Do you receive child support?*
7. *What kind of public assistance do you receive?*
8. *How do you feel about living in "the new normal?"*
9. *How are you supplementing their education?*
10. *How do you take care of your mental health?*
11. *Where do you find your own peace and solace?*
12. *What advice would you give to single moms during the pandemic or in general?*



# Clinical Undiagnosis

---

*Ian Stafford*

**Course:** Creative Nonfiction

**Professor:** Martha Witt, English

**Students:** Ian Stafford

**Essay:** *Clinical Undiagnosis*

---

## **Assignment:**

In this course, students were asked to complete a multi-step assignment that included reading model personal essays, free-writing about significant life moments, and observing ways in which those moments reflect larger

global issues and/or realities. Writing exercises leading up to this essay focused on dialogue, setting, rendering the characters of those involved and, finally, work-shopping and revising.

---

When my shop gets a call from home, it can be joyous—tiny voices on the other end of the line, eager to relay a happy event, or stressful—appliance failures, landlord troubles, a myriad of other “joys” of adult life. This call was the latter; nothing prepares you for the gut-check at hearing your child say “Dad, mom needs you to come home, she’s on the bathroom floor.” Healthcare was something I had always taken for granted until I met my wife. For the entirety of our relationship, she’s been plagued by lingering health issues. The biggest of these—migraines—are something that at their worst-best make her move slow throughout the day, and at worst-worst completely knock her out of commission. Aside from the obvious frustrations this causes, the most nagging one leaves any relief bittersweet. For all the time we’ve spent in pursuit of answers, no doctor has been able to pinpoint the root cause of the issues; she is “heard” but ushered out the door with platitudes and false hope. Walking away from a doctor so many times

empty handed makes you feel like you’re being gaslit by an entire industry. This is compounded further by the fact that she is not alone in this inattention; across the world a vast majority of women have found themselves receiving substandard reactions towards their maladies. Before we started dating, I had never been confronted with the possibility that equal treatment didn’t exist at the doctor’s office. From the first time I accompanied her to an appointment to our most recent health emergency, our story is the tangible evidence that has convinced me that the medical field has critically failed a significant number of women. In 2018, a New York Times article referenced a survey of 2,400 women, 83% of whom experienced a difference in how they were treated based on their gender. With a population that slants more female, applying this statistic over America to predict how many women throughout our country don’t get the care they deserve paints a grim portrait of clinical malfeasance. Looking outward, if this number

represents a global mentality that has resulted in a pattern of poor treatment for half of the world's population, then a staggering number of people have been left behind in a crucial component of wellbeing. Vicki, unfortunately, was already in this demographic by the time we'd met. A combination of inattentive parents and laissez-faire doctors had led her to believe that her migraines were an exaggerated facsimile of her imagination. Early on in our relationship it was not uncommon for her to hide her discomfort, a result of being met with skepticism so often in her youth. Having never suffered from headaches, I struggled initially to understand how light and sound could hurt, or how even a simple caress could feel like fire and cause nausea. The very palpable change in demeanor that accompanied this violent internal battle was all the proof I required though; watching someone of her intense creative passions go from world beating mode to having to lie prostrate with an ice pack in a dark room was alarming. A CT scan ordered by the first neurologist we'd seen showed nothing. "Allergies," he posited, and suggested we consult an ENT. The proposed treatment this yielded—an injection—would be delivered into her nasal passage. A traumatic experience with needles as a child made this a frightening proposition for Vicki, but with me at her side, we were willing to try anything to see if it would help. Several arduous sessions offered fleeting relief, but ultimately changed nothing. We ended up not seeing another neurologist until much later, a result of a changing health insurance situation and frustration from lack of other options.

In high school, I went years with an ingrown toenail on my big toe. I knew it was an issue but was too stubborn to have it examined. When I finally did, a podiatrist looked at it and took care of it immediately. This shaped my early (and naïve) perception that healthcare meant being able to go to a doctor, get diagnosed, and get out with medicine or other relief. If even a teenager from a poor and broken

household such as mine could get treated so swiftly, surely everyone could, right? Likewise, as I watched my father struggle with Parkinson's disease, there was no shortage of specialists or trials available to him before he passed. Healthcare, simply put, was a given. What do you do when a supposed authority in the field doesn't listen to you, or treats your complaint like a non-issue then? Some women can go for years before they get even close to a proper diagnosis. While the light being shone on this issue is pushing the needle of healthcare closer to gender equality, being stuck in a limbo of false starts and conciliatory head pats is a demeaning and demoralizing way to live. I couldn't believe that for all her visible signs and precise descriptions, Vicki was not afforded the same courtesy I was accustomed to. The closest breakthrough we had with regards to her migraines came years after we started dating. When a particularly bad cycle made it difficult to move at all, I watched Vicki as she shrank in pain from the slightest touch from her doctor. In that moment all he could do was recommend going to the ER to chemically break her pain while wondering how she could have let it linger for so long; why hadn't she come in sooner?

After this we did seek out a new neurologist. When she mentioned that the longest pain-free windows coincided with her pregnancies, this specialist responded in joking (not joking) tones, "Well, if you feel at your best when you're pregnant, maybe you should just get pregnant again." While the thought of having a TLC reality show's worth of children is intriguing, it STILL doesn't solve her migraines. This experience was so souring we have yet to seek out another opinion in this field. While a cardiologist has found some evidence of heart issues—promising, if not scary, progress—the medicines that have been prescribed are patch work. "I feel like we're circling the drain for something," she always says after each new consultation. I agree—I just wish a doctor would, too.

In January, we were blind-sided by something else

completely. The call came as I was wrist deep in a machine, prepping a job to be run that morning. I don't normally handle the phone, so I paid no mind to it stopping, thinking that it was either spam or a client. "Sounds like one of your kids," my boss said, handing it to me. I had left my phone at home, with hours to go until I went home for lunch, I had considered calling to check in once the rhythms of work drove back the morning grogginess. With mounting confusion and panic, I took the phone. The ensuing moments on the cold bathroom floor must have stretched out from minutes to hours, the ebb and flow of pain from Vicki's stomach taking her time hostage while waiting for a sign that help would be on the way. Our oldest child brought the phone back to her. "I haven't called the doctor; you need to come home." she tells me through sobs. Less than 2 hours later, I went from flying down 287, to assessing Vicki's condition while discussing options with her doctor, to getting her mobile enough to get into a car while entrusting our children to the care of our upstairs neighbors. As we rushed to the ER, I held her hand and anxiously tried to keep her conscious with conversation. Covid-19 adds a horrible wrinkle to modern medical emergencies; once we got into the lobby, I could do nothing but sit alone in our car, engine running, desperately waiting for a text from her while wondering how she would be able to advocate for herself in her current state of pain. Engine idling, car stinking somewhat from the machine-oil-soddened work pants I hadn't the time to change out of, I coordinated having my children's godmother come over.

It's not just that medical science can show a tendency to write off aches and pains as "hysteria," or "Lady-time troubles," there has been a lack of progress in even attempting to understand female biology and how to treat it properly. In an article back in 2019, Melissa Malamut tells us that as recently as 30 years ago, a woman's menstrual cycle was enough to bar them from any type of testing. Echoing the sentiments of this article is *Doing Harm*, a book by Maya

Dusenbery. In it, she talks about how the medical field takes a patriarchal view of how it conducts itself to the point where entry rates for clinical studies for gender specific issues were laughably bereft of female participants and shared a common theme that as long as a drug works on a man, it should work on a woman. A result of these findings was something that we had long been aware of, that patients suffering from chronic pain were likely to experiencing feelings of resentment towards a system that can't assist them in the ways they need. The supplication to the reader is to "believe us when we say we're sick". Even with the light-speed pace of technological progress, 30 years is not sufficient to catch up on the physiological differences that a woman's body has over a man's. It isn't surprising to me now that women who seek help with something still get met with antiquated responses.

Unable to physically be in the room or even in the building, I could do nothing but burn gas and try to allay my fears by flipping through apps on my phone until I heard from her. When I did, she told me that they put her on heavy dose of pain medication and flushed her out with antibiotics. They took bloodwork and suggested stomach flu. A white blood-cell count came back high—a frightening prospect— but no clear ideas, so in the least I was prepared to go home while she was admitted overnight. "They're letting me go home," read the next message, so shocking I read the text over twice to make sure I understood correctly. 30 mins later I pulled back up to the ER entrance and found Vicki, not much better than I had dropped her off. Gingerly, she got into the car and filled me in. "The head nurse came in and told me to stop moaning so loud—she acted like I was an entitled woman with a tummy ache." She told me on our way home. "We can't make you 100%, we can only make it feel a little better," was the nurse's passing attempt to offer comforting words. Knowing this, I once again felt the all too common upset and frustration of seeing Vicki failed yet again.

“For the first time in a long time, I feel like I could actually eat.” Vicki says to me in the kitchen a few weeks later. We took this development as a step in the right direction, but with no clear idea of what the issue is, we cautiously walk down yet another path to wellness at the behest of the newest cast of doctors brought into our orbit by this latest event. With that and even more diligence on her part, life has returned to a semblance of normal. I’m reminded of how things were not long after her migraine had been broken in the ER. A friend offered to watch the children for a bit so that we could get some air. Walking through the parking lot towards a BestBuy, she stopped dead in her tracks.

“Is everything alright?”

“Yes. It’s finally lifted. I feel like myself for the first time in days.”

It was true. There was a noticeable change in her appearance, like a heavy burden finally fell off her shoulders. Windows like this are brief, but we take them for the wins they are. Others do not get the same luxury. Not long after her collapse Vicki shared an article with me about a woman pregnant with twins. Despite numerous appeals to her doctors and to nurses during multiple trips to the ER, no one would listen to her about her claims that her extreme nausea and weight loss constituted a serious problem. After several trips to the hospital, she was diagnosed with Hyperemesis gravidarum, a severe medical condition that resulted in the loss of one of her children. For Vicki, the article resonated with her from her own experiences. Though we are only a few weeks removed from it, for me the article brought me right back to those stressful moments in my car as it sat in a parking deck on a rainy day filled with uncertainty.

Did the ER really think that this was just a stomachache? Did anyone realize that pain from her intestines triggered a migraine event that made sound and light unbearable, and needles feel less like pin pricks and more like a stabbing? (One nurse finally saw

that Vicki was suffering from a migraine and turned down the lights, thankfully) They flushed her with antibiotics, but did they even see an infection? There were too many questions on top of the trauma from the event, and here we are, unsure of how the evening was going to play out, in the very least, shouldn’t they have sought to observe her overnight? Based on what both her GP and new gastrointestinal doctor think, YES. I’m grateful to have understanding bosses, so taking time off made the next few days easier, but tense. As of now, we are formulating a complaint to the hospital, based on the steps her new health team has suggested. For all the women in the world who go ignored when it comes to medical treatment, multiply that by the spouses waiting patiently by their side, children waiting anxiously at home, and friends furtively checking their phones for an update, because from where I sit, I’ve learned that this is an issue that goes well beyond the people directly affected. I have no way of knowing if this will be the last time we are in this position and take no comfort in the fact that we are attached by invisible heartstrings to so many who deserve so much better.



---

## References

Allison, E. (2020, October 16). *I could have died because none of my doctors believed something was wrong with me*. HuffPost. [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/pregnancy-hyperemesis-gravidarum-doctor\\_n\\_5f873830c5b6c4bb54722a37](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/pregnancy-hyperemesis-gravidarum-doctor_n_5f873830c5b6c4bb54722a37)

Dusenbery, M. (2018). *Doing harm: The truth about how bad medicine and lazy science leave women dismissed, misdiagnosed, and sick*. HarperCollins.

Kiesal, L. (n.d.). *Harvard health blog women and pain: Disparities in experience and treatment - Harvard health blog*. <https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/women-and-pain-disparities-in-experience-and-treatment-2017100912562/print/>

Pagan, C. N. (2018, May 3). *When doctors downplay women's health concerns*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/03/well/live/when-doctors-downplay-womens-health-concerns.html>

Shaw, G. (2018, June 7). *Why women struggle to get the right diagnosis*. <https://www.webmd.com/women/news/20180607/why-women-are-getting-misdiagnosed>



# Toward Final Participation

---

*Christina Burdick*

**Course:** Theory of Knowledge

**Professor:** Daniel Kolak, Philosophy

**Student:** Christina Burdick

**Essay:** *Toward Final Participation*

---

## **Assignment:**

Students were asked to choose a philosopher and, after explaining what a theory of knowledge is and why we need one, situate that Philosopher's theory of knowledge within the Philosopher's overall system

as well as within the history of epistemology and the broader knowledge-seeking enterprise.

---

Noble Prize-winning novelist Saul Bellow wrote, "We are well supplied with interesting writers, but Owen Barfield is not content to be merely interesting. His ambition is to set us free. Free from what? From the prison we have made for ourselves by our ways of knowing, our limited and false habits of thought, our 'common sense'."<sup>1</sup> One could argue why Owen Barfield would warrant such high praise and be given substantial significance. Although Barfield had a great impact on theology, philosophy and literature and published numerous essays, articles, and books about the world as we see it and the world as it is, about God, human nature, and the evolution of consciousness, his work remains veiled in anonymity. However, closer consideration of his work is warranted when the human condition is of great concern. In his book *The Rediscovery of Meaning*, Barfield opens by asking:

Amid all the menacing signs that surround us in the middle of the twentieth century, perhaps

the one which fills thoughtful people with the greatest foreboding is the growing general sense of meaninglessness. It is this which underlies most of the other threats. How is it that the more able man becomes to manipulate the world to his advantage, the less he can perceive any meaning in it? (13)

This is a matter we have widely contemplated yet have been unable to resolve while imprisoned by our ways of knowing and our "common sense". By common sense, Barfield meant becoming blind to one half of reality while retaining the other.

As Thomas Kuhn puts it in *The Structures of Scientific Revolution*, "We see the world in terms of our theories." Thinking occurs before any activity, concept, or language. It is important to study the inner dynamic of our cognitive abilities. It is not only necessary to understand how one comes to know anything but also

<sup>1</sup> Saul Bellow quoted on the cover of Barfield's *Saving the Appearances*.

to have confidence in what one knows. More importantly, thinking always implies consciousness. To have a theory of knowledge one must begin with thinking and learn how it happens, understand how our current ways of knowing came to be, and how we come to know the meaning of anything. When looking at how man thinks now in comparison with how man previously thought, we bring consciousness into the discussion. Tracing this evolution of thought can broaden and improve a way of seeing than we are used to. Everyone has the ability to observe thinking as this is the most important observation one can make. "For he observes something of which he himself is the creator; he finds himself confronted, not by an apparent foreign object, but by his own activity. He sees into his connections and relationships. A firm point has now been reached from which one can, with some hope of success, seek an explanation of all other phenomena of the world."<sup>2</sup>

We will consider Barfield's ideas to describe the polarity between rationality and imagination which allows for the emergence of something new, the creative expression of humanity in words. Guided by Barfield one will perhaps begin to understand consciousness as not a tiny bit of the world stuck onto the rest of it, but as the inside of the whole world.

The aim of my paper is to demonstrate how Barfield may offer a solution to our current human condition. I intend to do this through exploring Barfield's ideas and attempt to discuss the need to return to the imagination. This warrants a brief tracing of his lines of thought which would be difficult to do in such a concise measure. However, this attempt to bring his philosophy into relevance serves more as an unfolding of his concepts against rather than a particular teaching on Barfield's detailed philosophy.

### Fundamental Shifts

Barfield understood that the human experience of life shifts fundamentally over periods of cultural time

and our awareness of how things evolve. He offers a historical analysis of how the increasingly detailed knowledge arriving from the scientific revolution seemed to simultaneously evacuate the world of meaning. He writes:

The vaunted progress of "knowledge", which has been going on since the seventeenth century, has been progress in alienation. The alienation of nature from humanity, which the exclusive pursuit of objectivity in science entails, was the first stage; and was followed, with the acceptance of man himself as part of a nature so alienated, by the alienation of man of himself. This final and fatal step in reductionism occurred in two stages: first his body and then his mind. Newton's scientific traditions, a form of behaviorism; and what has since followed has been its extension from astronomy and physics into physiology and ultimately psychology. (277)

This closely parallels Bernard Lonergan's words in *Dimensions of Meaning* concerning the breakdown of the Greek classical mediation of meaning that has us bewildered, disoriented, confused, and "preyed upon by anxiety." Barfield explained the limitations of Enlightenment thinking with a particular focus that concerned the nature of language and its influence on how we think.

Our consciousness changes intensely across history and Barfield proposed that this transpires in three phases of participation: original participation, withdrawal from participation and final participation. We will consider his accounts of these three phases through the evolution of consciousness. This account is not new as it is similar to what is called the Axial Age or axial shifts developing, a term formulated by German philosopher Karl Jaspers. The axial age emerges when people begin to commit more attention to their inner life. This evolution can also be found in the work of psychologist Robert Kegan in the *Evolving Self* where

<sup>2</sup> Steiner, Rudolf. *The Essential Rudolf Steiner*. Simon & Shuster, 2013

our consciousness evolves through the course of a lifetime while it corresponds to how consciousness evolved in a collective sense as well. Where Barfield differs in his approach is that he argued these changes have not stopped, that the stages are not linear but cyclical through these shifts in participation. By participation he meant our sense of being with ourselves, being with others, with nature and with God. Essentially it is the felt consciousness of what it is to be human and how that has shifted. In Barfield's magnum opus *Saving the Appearances: A Study in Idolatry*, he argues for the reality and significance of the evolution of consciousness. He maintains mostly for a diachronic shift from the first phase of original participation to a withdrawal of participation that would come to the possibility of final participation. This tracing of consciousness moving from an indigenous and primal way of relating to nature, gods and spirits and shifting to a post-Enlightenment way of relating to the world can be seen throughout his other works.

### Participatory Consciousness

Barfield was profoundly influenced by Austrian philosopher and founder of anthroposophy, Rudolph Steiner. This is where one can insert the difficulty in accepting Barfield since they would also need to accept some of Steiner's teachings. What they will most likely find in Steiner is a polymath connected to the Theosophy of Madame Blavatsky with mention of automatic writing, séances and ectoplasm. In short, the general reader would associate Steiner with the word occultist. It is no doubt that it is Barfield's bold association with the Anthroposophical movement that has kept him relatively unread and accepted until recently. Yet Steiner was, for Barfield, a key figure not for his strangely associated theories but for an extraordinary strong convergence of views. The essence of Steiner's teachings is the evolution of consciousness. Barfield in his own way, came to the same conclusion before hearing of Steiner. What

Barfield had done was establish that there was such a thing as the evolution of consciousness from a more illustrative or more living form to our own. This is also clear since Steiner's notion of "flight from Nature" can be seen in Barfield's revelation in the history of meaning and consciousness.

In Barfield's evolution of consciousness original participation dominated when there was little distinction between what is felt to be inside someone and what is outside. In original participation life was lived at the level of the collective rather than discovering one's own inner essence. Barfield's term "original participation" is closely related to what French anthropologist Lucien Lévy-Bruhl called "participation mystique". Barfield wrote, "The principal reason which Lévy-Bruhl, Durkheim and others assign for the fact that primitives 'do not perceive with the same minds' as ours is that in the act of perception, they are not detached, as we are, from the representations."<sup>3</sup> This perceiving was at the same time a kind of thinking as thinking occurred more in the world than in man. Perceiving and thinking had not yet split apart as they have for us. "The essence of original participation is that there stands behind the phenomena, and on the other side of them from me, a represented which is of the same nature as me. Whether it is called "mana," or by the names of many gods and demons, or God the Father, or the spirit world, it is of the same nature as the perceiving self, inasmuch as it is not mechanical or accidental, but psychic and voluntary."<sup>4</sup>

Over the course of the millennia, consciousness began to go through a "withdrawal of participation" which is a kind of ingathering of vitality of life to discover an inner cosmos. It happens when there is a shift from the sense of being immersed in the life of others, nature and gods. A person will begin to sense that they have

<sup>3</sup> Owen Barfield. *Saving the Appearances: A Study in Idolatry*, 2nd ed. (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1988), 31

<sup>4</sup> Owen Barfield. *Saving the Appearances: A Study in Idolatry*, 2nd ed. (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1988), 42

an inner life that is relatively their own. Barfield argued that a significant withdrawal of participation began to unfold in the middle of the first millennium BCE. Questions such as the meaning of life started to emerge as humans turned away from a dependence on myths and their interests shifted from sharing life to explaining life. This has an advantage since the individual began to develop a keener sense of self, recognize choices, and conscience. Yet, with this inner turn there came the disadvantage of a disconnect on how to merge back to life as it was before. There was a detachment from when human beings had experienced a profound intimacy with the world and nature. Human beings became separated from that time where thoughts, feelings and the objects of perception rested in healthy and proper association to one another. With this inward turn an awareness of separation, even isolation, had emerged. This development of keen self-awareness intensifies the individual but also leaves a sense of alienation. This new found gap where the primordial unity disappeared resulted in the philosophical skepticism that presently afflicts us. Primordial man possessed a poetic language saturated in meaning. The consciousness that evolved and made this poetic experience of reality possible has declined and we find ourselves facing a crisis of meaning. We are progressing deeper into alienation unaware of meaning and relation while losing the sense of personhood. It is what concerned Barfield when he asked, "How is it that the more able man becomes to manipulate the world to his advantage, the less he can perceive any meaning in it?"

Nevertheless, there could be a way to move through that withdrawal without regressing back to an original state where one would not have to eliminate the gain of their new found individuality. This would be through final participation where what is known within is reflected without in such a way that one could still have a profound sense of oneself within. This is similar to a call of the mystical sense where a reconnection of the individual life to the inner life of the cosmos.

Barfield succinctly put it as "the consciousness of the whole world." This evolution is cyclical as one can exist in any of the three stages or positions, and can move between them as individuals as well as collectively. There is potential for movement and fluidity between these positions because each position has their own advantages and disadvantages. A means to apply Barfield's thinking to our present age is to diagnose the path out of the caged fragmentation. According to Barfield, it is not by finding a new argument but to experience a "felt change of consciousness". In his fictional work *Worlds Apart*, Barfield's character, a retired schoolmaster named Sanderson, says:

As we see it, the whole outlook brought about by the scientific revolution should have been - must be - a phase, only, of the evolution of consciousness. An absolutely indispensable phase, but a passing one. What is riveting it on to us and preventing us from superseding it, because it prevents us from even imaging any other kind of consciousness, is precisely this error of projecting it back into the past. (236)

This statement by Sanderson is clear today that we are unable to supersede our current withdrawal because the imagination has been sidelined for hundreds of years. Barfield believed that any significant change taking place collectively is immediately reflected in a general shifting of the meaning of common words. Bringing these separated meanings and accepting them into our lexicon has implications on how we will comport ourselves with the world as well as how the world offers itself to us in the future. In a sense the whole measure of the history, as well as the future, of our collective consciousness is contained in our words which make the world. It has been a marked theme of Romanticism that the interior is, was, always anterior. "Man's interior - the interior which was also anterior - had been at work, as it had been at work also in the earlier stages of his existence."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Barfield, *Unancestral Voice*. (Oxford, England: Barfield Press, 2010), 17

Barfield places the nature of the Copernican Revolution as a stage in the evolution of consciousness. “The real turning-point in the history of astronomy and of science in general was something else altogether. It took place when Copernicus (probably—it cannot be regarded as certain) began to think, and others, like Kepler and Galileo, began to affirm that the heliocentric hypothesis not only saved the appearances, but was physically true.”<sup>6</sup> Barfield noted that it was not simply a new theory of the nature of the celestial movements that was feared, but a new theory of the nature of theory; namely, that if a hypothesis saves all appearances, it is identical with truth. Barfield posits that our collective representations were born when men began to take models literally. He suggested that before the Scientific Revolution, qualities were felt to reside both in nature and in man. The dispositional qualities of the planets were also dispositional qualities of man. The four elements of nature were not exclusively objective, and the four humors of man were not exclusively subjective. Therefore, it was unusual to call the pre-Copernican world anthropocentric: “We have just been seeing how the qualities formerly treated as inherent in nature have, as far as any scientific theory is concerned, disappeared from it, and how they have reappeared on the hither side of the line between subject and object, within the experiencing human psyche; how we conceive ourselves as “projecting” qualities onto nature rather than receiving them from her. Is that any less anthropocentric than the Aristotelian world-picture? I would have thought it was more so.”<sup>7</sup>

Barfield argues consciousness has evolved along with the evolution of physical phenomena. He dissects thinking into three distinct acts: figuration, alpha thinking, and beta thinking. “For as the organs of sense are required to convert the unrepresented (‘particles’) into sensations for us, so something is required in us to convert sensations into ‘things’”.<sup>8</sup> He calls this figuration, a process by which the unrepresented becomes represented and what is real is a collective

representation. Because of idolatry, according to Barfield, we rarely understand the real to be either collective or a representation. In its place the real becomes a matter of common sense. We seldom recognize the shaping role we play in creating the real world around us. This misperception of the phenomena as entirely independent of human perception Barfield terms idolatry, and it is to idolatry that he is attempting to bring awareness, to then overcome and lead human consciousness into final participation—an awakened recognition that the phenomenal world is one of collective representations. Idolatry suffers from literalness. To the idolatrous mind an event can either be historical or it can be a symbol, but it cannot be both. Alpha thinking describes what we typically mean by thinking, and beta thinking is thinking about thinking. Alpha-thinking left to its own ends produces idolatry. To free us from our idolatry, Barfield turns to the study of language.

### Words Have Soul

Barfield explored how the history of language contains a guide to the evolution of consciousness. In his first book *History in English Words*, he writes: “Language has preserved for us the inner, living history of man’s soul. It reveals the evolution of consciousness.” (18) He remarkably analyzes the way words once held a fullness of meaning, not merely literal but metaphorical as well, and how this meaning was progressively lost. Words have a soul therefore words are fossils of consciousness. Barfield uses the example of the Greek word *pneuma* which meant both spirit and wind. In Christianity and the modern biblical translation of John 3:8 reads: “The wind (*pneuma*)

<sup>6</sup> Owen Barfield. *Saving the Appearances: A Study in Idolatry*, 2nd ed. (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1988), 50

<sup>7</sup> Owen, Barfield. “Science and Quality,” in *The Rediscovery of Meaning and Other Essays*. (Oxford, England: Barfield Press, 2013), 279.

<sup>8</sup> Owen Barfield. *Saving the Appearances: A Study in Idolatry*, 2nd ed. (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1988), 25.

blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of Spirit (pneuma).”<sup>9</sup> Two different words for pneuma are used in English that represent what we accept to be separate spheres of reality. “Wind” is an external and tangible phenomenon while “spirit” is internal and intangible. In the Greek word of pneuma, there is no distinction and does not turn one into a metaphor for the other. Both “wind” and “spirit” were two aspects of a continuous experience: pneuma. To the ancient Greeks what was a vitality in the external world mirrored and echoed the vitality in the internal world.

Tracing this idea philologically, Barfield noted that this involved a distinction of exterior and interior meanings, which were then identified as subject and object or literal and metaphorical meanings. *History in English Words* showed how the world lost its interiors and how concepts lost their multivalence. It tracked the way the original poetic depth of words disintegrated into a merely denotative semiosis. Barfield also uses the case of the way we use the word ‘heart’. Originally, the heart involved the physical organ and what we now consider its metaphorical connotations. It is necessary but challenging to connect the literal and the metaphorical concept of “heart.” We say that the actual meaning is the organ, the pump in the chest. Yet, the metaphorical meaning has become separated from the organ as well as the idea that mean both organ and affect. Heart has become two separate words that it takes some form of imaginative thinking to put these meanings together again. To reunify the physical and metaphoric meanings of the word “heart”, it takes an act of intentional creative thinking. This imaginative act is what Barfield calls for in “final participation” and which he finds present in poets such as William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge along with other writers of Romanticism and its related movements. What Barfield attempted to do in *History in English Words* was to articulate a history

of the development of the soul of western man. He explored this further in *Poetic Diction* where he does a phenomenological analysis of poetry and how it affects us the way it does. He writes about the way poetry becomes a description of how we experience these “felt changes of consciousness” when it is read and how our participation with reality changes our consciousness:

When I tried to describe in more detail than by the phrase ‘aesthetic imagination’ what experience it is to which at some time or other I have been led, and at any time may be lead again, by all of these examples, I find myself obliged to define it as a ‘felt change of consciousness’, where ‘consciousness’ embraces all my awareness of my surroundings at any given moment, and ‘surroundings’ includes my own feelings. (40)

By ‘felt’ Barfield means to signify that the change itself is noticed or attended to. This felt change is categorized by a distinct awareness that serves as a grounding for the kind of extraordinary perception. Barfield then ties our interpretive poetic and imaginative abilities to a larger narrative of our participation in the world’s own development. Essentially, he is proposing an evolutionary vision of a transforming and participatory consciousness through an explanation of the way that the human co-creation of the world has been altered. Neither subjective or objective, this change involves both the way that we conduct ourselves in the world as well as the way the world presents itself to us. What Barfield uncovered was a schema for the evolution of consciousness that can be traced over time in stages and positions of participation.

### A Return to the Imaginal

The imagination for Barfield is the way of seeing inside of things. The intelligence of the heart was a way of being able to understand the inside of something was

<sup>9</sup> Bible, New International Version



taken very seriously by German poet, novelist, and statesman, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. He had a profound influence on both Steiner and Barfield and developed an entire scientific approach using the imagination when he wrote a book called *The Metamorphosis of Plants*. Goethe devoted a loving attentiveness to the study of plants and claimed to be able to perceive what he called Urpflanze, the primal or historical ancestor of plants. It is a kind of archetypal plant that cannot be seen with the senses and it is not merely a concept. It inhabits this intermediary realm that French phenomenologist Henry Corbin would later term “the imaginal”. This is not to be confused with the imaginary, which is fantasy and a substitute for reality. The imaginal is a realm in between the physical and the purely conceptual. Principally it is the realm of images, the realm of poetry. Poets have a real cognitive content that tell us something about the world. Within the history of language, which is embedded in the life of human beings who use language to apprehend the word, exists a second life giving force. Barfield found that force in poetry within the lines of the poem “The Tables Turned” by William Wordsworth:

Sweet is the lore which nature brings:  
Our meddling intellect  
Mis-shapes the beauteous forms of things –  
We murder to dissect.

Barfield saw that “slowly the divers of the Romantic expedition brought up to the surface of consciousness that vast new cosmos which has so long been blindly forming in the depths. It was a cosmos in which the spirit and spontaneity of life had moved out of Nature and into man.”<sup>10</sup> Literary critics such as René Wellek and Northrop Frye also recognized the common denominator of romanticism as a central concept in the integration of synthetic imagination with its rootedness in a sense of continuity between man and nature and the presence of God. In the past two to three hundred years we have sidelined the imagination in favor of the extensions of the scientific revolution

and age of materialism for the way in which we deal with the world. In order to amend that balance is not to throw out science with all its advantages and achievements and to merely plunge headfirst into the imagination itself. Barfield was concerned about this since he held the existence of a relationship with what goes on in the mind and what happened outside of the mind. He, like Steiner, believed that the way the world will appear in the future depends on what people are thinking now. Our inner world is connected to our outer world and we have lost sense of that. In moments of participation with poetry, meditation or contemplative practices we may perceive a brief feeling of a continuum between the two. However, what we must realize, and what Barfield calls us to consider through acknowledging these “felt” changes, is that consciousness must take precedence.

It is vital what we imagine. In *Romanticism Comes of Age*, Barfield masterfully explores the role of the imagination in Romantic philosophy and literature in the works of Coleridge and Goethe. Barfield was concerned during his time about the art that was being produced because it suggested the imagination was delving into some rather dark places. Barfield warned of the Surrealists who could usher in a “fantastically hideous world” with their “pictures of a dog with six legs emerging from a vegetable marrow or a woman with a motor-bicycle substituted for her left breast.”<sup>11</sup> One could read his thoughts concerning Surrealism and assume them to be the ramblings of an alarmist. Still, one can also argue that art has not progressed any further since Barfield’s time as we grow deeper into the age of digitalization and replication of surrealism in graphic design.

Returning to the imaginal is not a call to disregard the gains achieved through a withdrawal of participation.

<sup>10</sup> Reilly, R.J. *Romantic Religion*. (University of Georgia Press, 1972), 65

<sup>11</sup> Reilly, R.J. *Romantic Religion*. (University of Georgia Press, 1972), 76

We must understand what kind of imagination is being called upon to reemerge. There is a distinction that Samuel Taylor Coleridge, another major influence on Barfield, had made concerning the imagination. Coleridge formulated a clear difference between true imagination and fancy. In fancy, or fantasy, a conception is not original since we take things that are already created and merge them together in strange and bizarre ways. A product of true imagination, however, is truly original because it can be traced back to its origin. Therefore, the imagination is the root and foundation of the phenomenal world. If we can understand that in our own individual lives, we can enliven the world. The world is looking and asking how we can do this in practical ways in terms of our ecology and environment but one must begin in how we perceive and envision the world. To open our perception to this new way of thinking, we must understand the physical and mental processes involved in thinking. As the poet William Blake wrote in "To See a World":

A truth that's told with bad intent  
Beats all the Lies you can invent.  
It is right it should be so;  
Man was made for Joy and Woe;  
And when this we rightly know,  
Thro' the World we safely go.

We can begin by recognizing the polarity, which Coleridge describes as the tension between different points of view. These views would not get stuck in a combat to the death which characterizes how we exist in our world now. Instead, these views, to use a term from psychoanalyst Carl Jung, would create a "transcendent function" where the two views can merge into a third and something completely new emerges. Intellectual advances in the world came using imagination, not merely sense-based knowledge. Copernicus and Galileo all used imaginative thinking that did not follow the common sense of the day. I propose there is a theory of knowledge that allows

for knowledge to be drawn from sources other than empirical science. A knowledge that can speak to the insides of the unconscious inner reality, subjectivity, feelings and meaning that humans contribute to the world of objects. One can enter "the great world of the interiority of consciousness" put succinctly by Edmund Husserl.

Moving humanity forward requires both imagination and science. The profound use of our imagination will allow us to evolve to this new way of thinking and will open a means for us to develop an expanded science. Only then perhaps humanity will come to understand what Albert Einstein meant when he said:

A human is a part of the whole called by us, "the universe." Apart, limited in time and space, he experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings, as something separate from the rest—a kind of optical illusion of consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening the circle of understanding and compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty..We shall require a substantially new manner of thinking if humanity is to survive.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Einstein, several attributions of this quotation, most cited is New York Post, Nov. 28, 1972.

---

## Bibliography

- Barfield, Owen. *History of English Words*. Lindisfarne Press, 1985.
- Barfield, Owen. *The Rediscovery of Meaning, and Other Essays*. Barfield Press, Oxford, 2013.
- Barfield, Owen. *Saving the Appearances: A Study in Idolatry*. Wesleyan University Press, CT, 1988.
- Barfield, Owen. *Poetic Diction: A Study in Meaning*. Barfield Press, Oxford, 2010.
- Barfield, Owen. *Worlds Apart: A Dialogue of the 1960's*. Barfield Press, Oxford, 2019.
- Barfield, Owen. *Unancestral Voice*. Barfield Press, Oxford, 2010.
- Barfield, Owen. *Romanticism Comes of Age*. Barfield Press, Oxford, 2012.
- Blake, William. *Auguries of Innocence and Other Lyric Poems*. Create Space Publishing, 2014
- Brown, Robin S. "Beyond the Evolutionary Paradigm in Consciousness Studies." *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, vol. 45, no. 2, June 2013, pp. 159–171.
- Leif Treinen, Max. *Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy*, vol. 16, no. 1, 2020.
- Morris, Francis J., and Ronald C. Wendling. "Coleridge and 'The Great Divide' between C.S. Lewis and Owen Barfield." *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, vol. 22, no. 2, Fall 1989, p. 149.
- Morris, John D. *The World's Best Poetry*. Philadelphia Press, 2012.



# How Public Narratives Impede Reproductive Justice: Reform for the Chemical Body Burdens of Children

---

*Erica Albino*

**Course:** Interdisciplinary Senior Seminar

**Professor:** Maria Kromidas, Community and Social Justice Studies

**Student:** Erica Albino

**Essay:** *How Public Narratives Impede Reproductive Justice: Reform for the Chemical Body Burdens of Children*

---

## **Assignment:**

Students in this course were tasked with developing a project that is intended as the culmination of their undergraduate education and representative of their political, professional, and personal interests in their fields of study. Students choosing to write a traditional

academic thesis selected their own topic aligned with the broad course theme (Spring 2021 theme: Radical Care), and developed the project through a series of steps throughout the semester.

## **Abstract**

The responsibility of fetal and infant development has been historically framed as belonging to the individual, childbearing woman. Public narratives assert that disparities in health outcomes would be improved from reforms in mothers' lifestyle and behaviors, with the media continually emphasizing "precautionary consumerism" as a means to ameliorate the dangers of chemical body burdens and their associated health risks (Mackendrick, 2014). However, this account does not take into consideration the economic, educational, and cultural dynamics that intersect with maternal and infant health. A growing body of scholarship, critique the hegemonic view of mother as

autonomous bearer of health outcomes. This thesis contributes to this body of critical scholarship by exploring how women navigate chemical exposure risks, demonstrating how individualist approaches are not conducive to addressing and mitigating the hazards. I argue that public narratives about health risks disempower women and function to mystify the larger forces responsible for these health risks. The way we understand and manage chemical burdens through individualistic consumerist methods put marginalized women in a double bind – unprotected and unable to access these "solutions." Based on my analysis of non-governmental organization's strategies to impact these issues and interviews with mothers, I argue that a

public health approach that educates but also focuses on wider social reforms on women's reproductive rights is one key way to address the disparities in health outcomes amongst marginalized women.

## Introduction

Toxicity is a global issue due to the expansion of the capitalist industrial system and the resulting proliferation of harmful chemicals that are in commercial products but also released into the environment contaminating food, water, and the air we breathe (CDC&P, 2020). These industrial chemicals include but are not limited to lead, mercury, arsenic, per- and polyfluoroalkyl, and phthalates which all have been scientifically noted as having effects on the reproductive, endocrine, neurological systems (Woodruff *et al.*, 2011). Children are at most risk because of their developmental plasticity and smaller body surface area (Stoiber, 2017). The responsibility of protecting and rearing children has classically fallen disproportionately on women and maneuvering these modern health threats are no different. As women of childbearing age are expected to be knowledgeable and avoid these hazards the reality that they can influence on a personal level the pervasiveness of their and their children's exposure to poorly regulated toxins (Stevens, 2016). The consequences of not addressing this chemical epidemic endangers not only individuals whose health is compromised but collectively to people at every level of society.

## The Modern Proliferation of Chemical Exposure

The pervasiveness of industrial chemicals in modern society is scantily acknowledged by the public. When people think of the harmful chemicals they are exposed to, they think of car emissions, erosive cleaning products, and pesticide treated produce, but it is more ubiquitous. Per and poly-fluoroalkyl substances (PFAs) are readily in one's household running water, lined in our microwavable popcorn bags, and in the fabrics of our clothing (CDC&P, 2020). Phthalates are

in our body care items such as shampoo and makeup and can even be found in our Kraft® macaroni and cheese (Swanson & Persellin, 2019). Polybrominated diphenyl ethers (PBDE) are in infant car seats, electronics, and household furniture (Stoiber, 2017). These are but a few of the chemicals people encounter on a daily basis and they all have been shown to have negative effects on endocrine functions of all people and particularly cognitive development in children. This includes an increased risk of cancer, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, asthma, renal and thyroid dysfunction, and decreased immunological response (Rappazzo *et al.*, 2017).

Infants and children are at most jeopardy of these chronic illnesses with evidence demonstrating that over 99% of women of reproductive age have these chemicals in their bloodstream with studies on PBDEs indicating that children have bloodstream levels three times more than their mothers' (Woodruff *et al.*, 2011 & Stoiber, 2017). This ultimately encumbers their right to a life well lived and their social mobility. This is most relevant in communities that are already underprivileged and lack resources to manage these medical conditions. The anecdotal response to avert this incitement of ill health is to practice, what sociologist, Norah Mackendrick, coined as "precautionary consumerism" where one assumes the responsibility of educating oneself and researching the contents of one's products to manage our own exposure risks.

## Feminist Lens on Chemical Body Burdens in Neoliberalism

The ubiquity of chemical body burdens has in the past few decades been a growing base of knowledge among medical and scientific professionals, many of whom have advocated for research in understanding the effects of these types of chemical exposures (Stevens, 2016). Mitigation of this rising health concern has been focused, as with most issues in our neoliberal society, on autonomous interventions.

Neoliberalism espouses the misguided notion that the freedom to redirect personal socioeconomic destinies is within the capacity of the individual. This concept romanticizes the image of a completely independent person capable of superseding the significance of society itself thus promoting apathetic attitudes on social solutions. By embracing individualism, consumerism is perpetuated as a way to manage chemical threats to health. This tactic fails to recognize the underlying systemic elements of classism that neoliberalism bolsters with its foundations in racial oppression that ultimately render it ineffective to extensive reform (Chatzidakis et al, 2020). Though there is consensus that these chemicals are disrupting the health of people at large the manner in which it has come to be dealt with has done little to reduce its prevalence. Scholars have emphasized how these individualistic consumerist solutions are inaccessible to poor women and women of color. Their exposure to chemicals is also immoderately higher due to cultural and occupational conditions which are part of the larger context of being racialized and disenfranchised (ASPM, 2013 & Mandell et al, 2019). My research explores how marginalized women understand chemical body burdens, and how popular sites that try to educate women thru the consumerist lens reproduce classism. Feminist scholars have convincingly demonstrated not only how chemicals body burdens disproportionately affect women and children, but how wider society doesn't acknowledge the intersecting factors that put them not only at higher risk but also the adjoining burden at being held responsible for health outcomes related to chemical exposure. In Mackendrick's research, her participants demonstrated devoting considerable time and resources on the practice of precautionary consumerism. These participants would scour information on resources that were available to them to be aware of exhaustive ingredient lists that posed threats to themselves and in connection their children. They would shop at organic supermarkets or expend time on trips to

organic farms for poultry. Women referred to their own chemical body burdens in relation to their maternal and reproductive responsibilities, such as being pregnant and breastfeeding. Mackendrick refers to this as a personal "project" due to "Its labor intensity, inherent commodification, and overlap with mothering ideologies urging mothers to give children "the best"". Most women in her sample expressed a sense of agency and assigned their precautionary consumption as an extension of the affection they had for their children. Mackendrick notes how the women who felt this way were of a higher economic bracket and had the time to devote to these practices whereas lower income participants expressed shame and feelings of being overwhelmed at managing their children's chemical exposures. By embracing precautionary consumerism new forms of mother-blaming are reproduced.

Mother blaming is a phenomenon, by sociologist Lindsey Stevens' research, on the recommendation given by medical providers to their female patients. Within that research it was noted that medical providers concentrated on women's behavior as a major indicator of fetal health, with one provider stating that some women were "piss-poor gestational carriers" and "should not have children". Chemical body burdens were again framed as a maternal responsibility placing the blame on women alone as the source for negative infant health outcomes. When some providers were questioned about paternal chemical body burdens dialogue was directed towards male infertility and was rooted in involuntary environmental and occupational exposures. Lindsey identifies that even though women's exposures are also involuntary, medical providers don't perceive it as readily as such. Also, that fact that infertility is the only measure of male chemical responsibility in fetal health does not encompass the potential hazards posed to make contributions to fetal chemical exposure.

## Methodology

Media is instrumental in today's society in extending knowledge and shifting public attitudes. An issue connects to people through the internet so in this research I analyzed two NGO's websites, the Environmental Working Group and Healthy Babies Bright Futures. I combed through their websites and focused on their organization's aims and the methods they use to educate and spread their message. I examined their databases, research initiatives, and graphic representations. A price comparison of baby products that were deemed "safe" by EWG was contrasted to similar baby products available at Walmart. I also interviewed two expectant mothers, Tasha an African American mother of soon to be five children who works fulltime as a patient care technician, and Jessenia a Hispanic mother of soon to be two children who is an administrative worker. I also interviewed, Melissa, a single mother of two who is currently on maternity leave who I met through my own social networks. One interview was in person (Tasha) and was recorded and later transcribed. The other two were done over text messages. The questions asked were open ended and revolved around prenatal practices that they followed and had heard through their family, friends, media and healthcare professionals. Since these women are entering or have recently been in contact with medical professionals addressing the development their infants', I thought them most prudent demographic of women to consult with. I wanted to gage as most current public narrative that childbearing women were exposed to and their perspective on the issue of chemical body burdens.

### **Working-class Women Navigating Chemical Body Burdens**

The manner in which toxicity is portrayed is erroneous and contradictory. It puts public health at risk and misinforms people at large. The most vulnerable to hazards are also those who are most isolated from the knowledge pertaining to the discussion of this issue. By not being properly or efficiently versed in

chemical body burdens women are left susceptible to oppressive rhetoric that neither helps them and their children but also pits them as deserving victims of the consequences of chemical exposure. By empowering recognition through our discourse of the issue we can revise the injustices that this narrative, places on childbearing women.

### *Toxicity Awareness*

To incite reform for any issue, awareness of the problem is the initial and crucial step. The public must value the importance and the disruption caused by chemical body burdens. When the pervasiveness and health hazards is identified en masse it can become politized and addressed in policy and regulatory legislation. In my interviews with mothers, we discussed toxicity and its possible health risks in regard to their fetal health most concentrated on their diets. They were wary of processed foods that were linked to health risks such as bacterial infections, preeclampsia, and gestational diabetes. Chemical exposures that were a concern were constrained to hair dyes, over the counter drugs, and mercury in seafood. The ubiquity of chemicals and their possible health hazards seemed to elude their awareness. When asked about her thoughts on BPA products one mother, Tasha, admitted that she thinks it's great that something that was harmful is being regulated but doesn't really understand what the chemical is and what negative impacts it causes. Another mother, Melissa, stated that she felt overwhelmed by all the information about chemical hazards saying, "*I think I would drive myself crazy looking at all the things that can go bad or are bad*" and as a result put it out of her mind unless presented with it directly through word of mouth or on social media. Tasha had a different appreciation of chemicals and expressed that she preferred that her children be exposed to chemicals so that they would have a resistance to the hazards provoked by them saying "*...I avoid "safe" products. It's like a vaccination, rub some dirt on yuh.*". The



knowledge base of the risks involved with chemical exposures was superficial and most critically inaccurate.

This inaccuracy and limited knowledge base are centered on the mechanisms of social constraints where women are groomed recipients of the information that is most comfortable for those in power. Women of low socioeconomic status are more likely to have compromised time availability as work hours continue to expand in our society, which in turn cultivates a lifestyle conducive to quick information and rushed decisions. This makes them prime candidates for misinformation and extortion. It is the responsibility of those in positions to regulate and change industrial practices to ensure public safety as well as be transparent and advocate for the remodeling of this culture of misinformation.

### Cost

Practicing precautionary consumerism requires a lot of time investment in researching the severity of certain chemical hazards, formulating plans of avoidance and substituting items, and investigating the chemical content of products which may not be as accessible in their transparency with customers. This time is a commodity and luxury in of itself which cannot be afforded by many low-income workers. More so for women who work, as sociologist Arlie Hochschild famously named, the second shift. Many women also devote their supplemental time to income producing labor. Apart from this concept of “time is money” is the actual cost of buying products such as the ones suggested by the EWG on their consumer guides and product databases. When a product is EWG verified it means that the product company provides full transparency on their ingredients list and manufacturing practices as well as not containing any ingredients that have been flagged as a health concern by EWG specialists. These items may seem like a reprieve and a promising market initiative, but their price points are for people with surplus income making

them elitist commodities. A small sample of baby products that are EWG verified exhibit the disparity between them and common brands. Only one brand of diapers is EWG Verified and costs \$30 for a package containing a 52 count. This product can only be bought through the company’s website with standard ground shipping starting at \$7.95. To purchase these diapers, one must have a credit or debit card and by default a bank account which can be a barrier for some parents. Most importantly is the cost of when compared to common brands like Huggies® and Pampers® which can average to \$40 for a package containing a 138 count and can be purchased at various and very accessible locations such as grocery stores and corporate chains such as Walmart®. Though there is more variety in wipes and baby shampoos accessibility to these products were mostly through company websites or specialized health food stores like Whole Foods®. The most expensive wipes were priced at \$14.95 for a 60-count package and on average wipes were \$17.82 for a 225 count versus \$1.86 for a 70-count of brands available at Walmart® and the most expensive baby shampoo is \$60 for 35 fl oz (though it is worth noting that this shampoo is a concentrate intended for dilution before use) and prices averaged \$23 for 15 fl oz versus \$2.95 for 18 fl oz available at Walmart®.

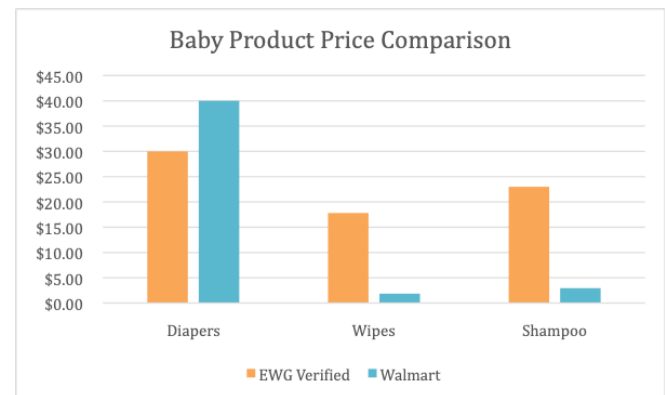


Figure 1. A price comparison between products that are EWG verified as safe and common brands found at local retailer, Walmart. [chart created by Erica Albino]

Curating these lists for the public, free of charge, is undoubtedly a valuable resource for consumers but can encourage the perception that small and individualist solutions can resolve the wider problem of chemical exposure. This positions underprivileged women as conceptualizing blame and shame in not being able to provide these commodities. In our interview, Jessenia expressed that she thought organic products were better because of their diminished pesticide exposure and related adverse health risks but stated that it was too “expensive”. Even when mothers are aware of the consequences of chemical exposures their budget constrains their autonomy to act according to public narratives of precautionary consumerism.

### *Trusted Sources of Information*

Where women turn to for trustworthy information is vital in educating the public on chemical exposures and empowering society wide action for reform in chemical industries. Healthy Babies Bright Futures and the Environmental Working Group are excellent resources for such information since they provide their own accredited research by scientific professionals. They both are involved in reporting on legislation and grassroots initiatives centered on chemical exposure issues ranging from water quality to agricultural practices to corporate responsibilities of transparency. Though their work and other organizations like them reaches many, the women I interviewed did not receive their message. Information trusted by the mothers I interviewed were through social media and their healthcare providers. Social media can be a great and accessible way of obtaining information and news on these issues but can be unreliable when using these platforms that are not peer reviewed and fact checked. One mother, Jessenia, got some of her chemical exposure information from a user edited website while another mother, Tasha, relied on the popular website WebMD for information prenatal advice. WebMD is a for profit organization that posts health related

information by sponsors who fund them and who are responsible for their own veracity and objectiveness when publishing their medical information on the WebMD website. The other mother, Melissa, stated that she learned about chemical hazards through posts on her personal social media account. All the mothers interviewed were working class women and one, Melissa, was a single mom and the readily available information that they can obtain was perhaps convenient due to their easy accessibility but deprives them of reliable sources.

Another factor that engendered trustworthiness which was apparent among all mothers interviewed was their reliance of brand recognition. How products have been advertised has made lasting impressions on their consumers. Tasha reiterated numerous times how she trusts Johnson & Johnson® products, Huggies® diapers, and Avent® baby bottles, stating she had “no kinda problems” in her previous experiences with these products. Melissa also intended to use products that she and her partner had used previously stating that they based their decisions on what “had worked”. When asked why she had chosen a certain prenatal vitamin Jessenia replied with the brand slogan of “it[s] a complete multivitamin with brain support”. Marketing and short-term experiences play a vital role in the comprehension of dependability when shopping.

### *Gendered Responsibility*

As noted by scholars on the issue of gendered responsibility in managing chemical body burdens, the mothers I interviewed reproduced the sentiment that their pregnancy and maternal habits were their own responsibility. They internalized the misconception that their fetal health was largely dependent on their independent behaviors. During our conversations we discussed their partners’ involvement in the changes they had made in their habits. Tasha dismissed her partner’s involvement reclaiming her autonomy and stating that she did as she felt fit and that her husband

knew better than to interfere, stating “*he knows ima want to eat what I want to eat...it would be like beating a dead horse..*”. Melissa felt that her “*partner was supportive in the sense that he would eat salads with me as opposed to me having to do two different meals*” which translated to her as a kind of parental solidarity. Jessenia stated that her partner’s form of involvement was by researching online and monitoring her eating and behavior serving as human reminder. Though she conveyed a sense of annoyance at his auditing and directing of her actions, she did interpret it as his way of showing his affection and concern for her and their future baby. The fact that their partner’s involvement was measured in their capacity to supervise and support the modification of their personal behaviors indicates their sense of maternal responsibility and their partner’s optional engagement.

This culture of thinking cultivates individualist reasoning when dealing with solutions to the ubiquity of chemical exposure. It was unfortunate to observe that the HBBF bolstered these gendered views by depicting on their website visuals of babies with their mothers. The connotation of messages such as these can promote the misleading idea that responsibility of infant chemical exposure is a task that is to be fulfilled by child-bearing women when expanded and multi-tiered institutions are the perpetrators of chemical exposures. The expectation that an individual alone can offset a globalized industry with safeguards based in their monetary growth rates and financial gambits, such as the un-democratic practice of lobbying, is unrealistic and unlikely.

### **Penetrating the Pervasiveness of Threats to Child Development**

Chemical exposures are unavoidable in the context of weak regulation by our government agencies. To acquire effective policy change, the issue of chemical exposure and the peril it places on our developing members, i.e. infants and children, needs to reach

all members of society. The fact that low-income communities are disproportionately at risk provides an imperative to address this issue as a society. Some advocates feel that when the most vulnerable communities are addressed it improves the overall exposure in a bottom-up manner (though others feel it that it creates more social inequities by othering chemical body burdens). Nonetheless visibility is key in creating a movement towards the systematic reform of policies surrounding chemical use in industry and infrastructure. Organizations such as the ones reviewed in this thesis should embrace more accessible and user-friendly outlets of information such as Instagram, to target a wider net audience. The interviews in this research would suggest that popular and familiar “seen” spaces would impact their awareness and possibly empower them to be more proactive in politicizing this issue.

The pricing of products that do not contain harmful ingredients must also be re-accessed. The reasoning for the price hike must be properly examined and monitored in the interest of public health at large. If in fact manufacturing “safe” products are so costly, government subsidizing could make these products more attainable for low-income communities.

It is also important that the gendered responsibility of chemical body burdens be eliminated. By assigning accountability we deflect underlying problems and fail to work together to achieve solutions. By accepting child rearing in all forms as a social responsibility we use all our resources in creating a brighter, more sustainable, and beneficial society.

---

## Bibliography

American Society of Reproductive Medicine. (2013, September 25). *Exposure to Toxic Environmental Agents*. [https://www.fertstert.org/article/S0015-0282\(13\)03009-4/fulltext](https://www.fertstert.org/article/S0015-0282(13)03009-4/fulltext).

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020, June 24). *PFAS chemical exposure*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/pfas/health-effects/exposure.html>.

Chatzidakis, A., Hakim, J., Littler, J., Rottenberg, C., & Segal, L. (2020). *The care manifesto: the politics of interdependence*. Verso.

Gutierrez, M. (2017, February 9). *WebMD Debunked: evaluating the credibility behind online health information*. UF monogram. <https://futurevoices.mph.ufl.edu/2017/02/09/webmd-debunked-evaluating-the-credibility-behind-online-health-information/>.

Mackendrick, N. (2014). MORE WORK FOR MOTHER: Chemical Body Burdens as a Maternal Responsibility. *Gender & Society*, 28(5), 705–728. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243214529842>

Mandell, R., Israel, B. A., & Schulz, A. J. (2019). Breaking free from siloes: intersectionality as a collective action frame to address toxic exposures and reproductive health. *Social Movement Studies*, 18(3), 346–363. <https://doi.org.ezproxy.wpunj.edu/10.1080/14742837.2018.1556091>

Olufemi, L. (2020). *Feminism, interrupted: disrupting power*. Pluto Press.

Rappazzo, K., Coffman, E., & Hines, E. (2017). Exposure to Perfluorinated Alkyl Substances and Health Outcomes in Children: A Systematic Review of the Epidemiologic Literature. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 14(7), 691–. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph14070691>

Stevens, L. (2016). Environmental Contaminants and Reproductive Bodies: Provider Perspectives on Risk, Gender, and Responsibility. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 57(4), 471-485. Retrieved February 7, 2021, from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44507352>

Stoiber, T. (2017, October 5). *San Francisco moves to protect children from flame retardant chemicals*. <https://www.ewg.org/news-insights/news/san-francisco-moves-protect-children-flame-retardant-chemicals>.

Swanson, S., & Persellin, K. (2019, September 16). *Kraft-Heinz Rejects Effort To Get Phthalates Out of Mac and Cheese*. Environmental Working Group. <https://www.ewg.org/news-insights/news/kraft-heinz-rejects-effort-get-phthalates-out-mac-and-cheese-0>.

Woodruff, T. J., Zota, A. R., & Schwartz, J. M. (2011, June 1). *Environmental Chemicals in Pregnant Women in the United States: NHANES 2003–2004*. National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences. <https://doi.org/10.1289/ehp.1002727>

# A Burning of Freedom

---

*Steven Siragusa*

**Course:** Indian Literature

**Professor:** Rajender Kaur, English

**Student:** Steven Siragusa

**Essay:** *A Burning of Freedom*

---

## **Assignment:**

Having read the novels of Amitav Ghosh and Megha Majumdar students were asked to write an essay exploring the effectiveness of the form of the uncanny

and supernatural, or satire to explore contemporary issues of climate change and an increasingly intolerant and dystopian India under the Modi regime.

---

*A Burning* by Megha Majumdar is a complex novel that explores a potential reality India is heading towards. Majumdar never explicitly calls out the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) or the RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh). However, it is self-evident that these two right wing Hindu Nationalist organizations are at the forefront of her novel. The current political climate in India is not something that can be ignored when reading *The Burning*. Modi, the current Prime Minister, is passing laws intent on removing Muslims as citizens of India; a place in which Islam has existed since the 7th century AD. Nationalism is something that has swept elections worldwide as a push back against globalization. In India, the BJP has swept elections and controls or has influence in every branch of India's Republic. Serious dangers can arise when a single political party assumes full control over policy making. Political Parties who control all branches of government have the power to enact their agenda with little to no push back. Majumdar explores three characters who

are either at the mercy of the party, or being seduced by them. Jivan, a Muslim girl, experiences the dangers of extreme Nationalism; while PT Sir and Lovely represent the corruption of the everyday person. In *A Burning*, Majumdar's effectiveness at showing the dangers of a nationalist movement comes through the use of characters, such as Jivan, PT Sir, and Lovely, as individuals being destroyed, rather than groups being targeted.

Before getting into the nuances of *A Burning* a question must first be answered. What fuels extreme nationalism? There are two answers to this question, and both the same; hate. In one way, hate can fuel nationalism through a charismatic leader pointing fingers at a marginalized group (in India's case, Muslims). It does not take long for the country to blame this targeted group for their problems (most of which can usually be traced to corruption within their own government). This type of leadership will stir up a loud crowd of passionate voters who don't necessarily

represent the majority of the country. Extreme nationalism can also be seen as the byproduct of anti-nationalism. No country is without flaws. Atrocities have been committed all over the world by all types of governments and cultures. As we progress and look back on our actions, attention is drawn to mistakes or miscarriages of justice that occurred in the past. This can lead people to shouting that their country or government is inherently evil. When anti movements start within a country there will always be a strong reaction. In the world of politics it is possible to apply Newton's Third Law of Motion; "Whenever one object exerts a force on a second object, the second object exerts an equal and opposite force on the first." (Newton) Basically, if one side of the aisle goes strongly anti-nationalism, the other side will push back with extreme nationalism. That type of division will lead to the destruction of a society. Nationalism, in moderation, can be a valuable asset to the strength of a country; it can reinforce positive aspects and values the people of a nation possess. However, too much of it and it's citizens begin turning a blind eye to the government's misdeeds, allowing them to take advantage of citizens who have become subservient. Actions that would not be tolerated under normal circumstances become acceptable in the wake of extreme nationalism.

Majumdar's first victim on Hindu Nationalism is Jivan. This young girl speaks out on Facebook against, what she perceives to be, an act of injustice by the police. This single comment sends her life into a downward spiral. Jivan is then targeted by the State in a vicious campaign set on scapegoating her. In essence, the mob comes for her. Jivan says, "When I protest my innocence, they point to the seditious statements I posted on Facebook, calling my own government a "terrorist" and showing, so they say, a marked absence of loyalty to the state."(Majumdar 23) Majumdar's India has become so infected with nationalism the citizens have lost their freedoms. "Loyalty to the

state"(Majumdar 23) is one of the most frightening statements a person in Jivan's position can hear. It means she has been deemed a traitor and not only is the entire might of the government against her, but also the people it governs. When a nationalist government pronounces a person's disloyalty, they paint an image to the public of this individual hating everything about their country; rather than the reality of Jivan identifying existing flaws within her nation. Jivan is not criticizing with the intent of dismantling the foundations of India; she is just hoping to bring attention to an issue she feels could change India for the better. The state, however, does not care about the foundations of India or the injustices; all their concerns lie with power, and how to get more. Jivan serves as a tool that must be crafted and then broken in order to win over public opinion.

The state begins their crafting by sending a reporter to talk with Jivan. At no point does this character hint, to the reader or Jivan, that they are a pawn of the state. He befriends Jivan, offering her comfort after she has been denied her rights. Jivan has no choice but to allow herself to trust him. She is in a position where she must put her faith in the idea that humanity, overall, seeks to help one another. Jivan's trust is forced on this reporter; this is a calculated move. The government was not denying Jivan rights and interviews just to be cruel. It was to wear down her guard, so when they presented Jivan with an opportunity to tell her story, she would not think twice about talking. This form of betrayal is very characteristic of nationalism. Through the use of propaganda, the state will turn its citizens against one another; all the while, centralized power increases and freedom decreases.

This reporter represents a major issue in Majumdar's India. The reach of the government now has control over journalism, effectively eradicating the right to free speech. Attacks on journalists, by the state, is a clear sign that something is wrong. There are few things more dangerous to a nation than a political party

claiming ownership over all media consumption. This allows for information to be filtered, altered, and even entirely fabricated, with the public having no outlet to seek the truth. The reporter is a fully realized PT Sir, who represents the total corruption of the individual by the Party.

PT Sir is not an evil malicious person hell bent on ruining peoples' lives. At first, he is a kind school teacher who sees no opportunity for upward mobility. PT Sir is given the opportunity, by the Party, to feel like he is a part of something bigger. His corruption is brought on slowly. When he first falsely testifies to secure a conviction he is nervous and troubled by his actions. However, those feelings do not last long. Soon, those human emotions are shed away as he performs more and more false testimonies, undermining the idea of justice. It becomes easier with every court case. The courts even shield him from the condemned. This tactic erases the existence of the accused in PT Sir's mind. He will never have to look these people in the face and see the pain he is causing. His humanism is eventually fully replaced by materialism. Eventually, he secures Jivan's death sentence and begins his path to a marginally better lifestyle. All the while, PT Sir is convinced that his actions are for the good of India.

These actions by the state are not coincidence or strictly for the purpose of malice. They are intentional in the pursuit of power. Great effort was taken by the Party to ensure PT Sir remained loyal. The psychology of humans is understood by those seeking more power. They knew to hide the victims from PT Sir, and how to slowly corrupt his morals, bending his will to their goals. The people PT Sir wrongfully testifies against were just a lesser pawn in their game. The state wants to present the public with a high conviction rate to appear tough on crime. These convictions do not need to be just, they just need to be.

It all leads back to the destruction of humanism and the building of materialism. The final victim is Lovely, the aspiring actress and friend of Jivan. Lovely

is meant to represent the everyday person who will betray her fellow citizen in the pursuit of distractions. Unlike PT Sir, Lovely does not actively harm others to further her goals. The destruction of her morals comes passively; it's not what she does, but what she does not do. Lovely decides to distance herself from Jivan once she realizes it will impact her future goals. At first, Lovely is willing to testify on behalf of Jivan because she is under the impression that society is trying to act justly and failing. This naivety is by no means exclusive to Lovely. Oftentimes, society will seek to condemn those taking the side of those perceived as guilty. Once she realizes the system has no interest in justice, she backs down. Anyone adhering to Jivan's innocence would've been ousted by society due to the propaganda constructed by the state. Once the court of public opinion becomes more influential than the actual courts, a window opens for a nationalist party, such as one run by Modi, to throw out justice. All that is required is manufactured stories, along with well timed propaganda. This manipulation in *A Burning* is not fantasy. It is the sign of a downward spiral towards the end of a democracy and the rise of totalitarianism or facism.

The spread of totalitarianism, and eventual facism or communism, has happened in the modern world and still persists today. The two extremes have claimed hundreds of millions of lives, collectively. All nations who were consumed by authoritative governments had a Jivan, PT Sir, and Lovely. These three all represent the different ways the state seeks to corrupt the people, while strengthening their grip on power. Lovely turns a blind eye to the miscarriages of justice. Jivan must face off against the full power of a corrupt government. Lastly, PT Sir betrays all of his morals and assists in the murder of his former student. Majumdar is telling the reader that people should be questioning their governments actions. Once a society surrenders their will to the state, the government is free to rule in any fashion they please. Some of the most important

words about freedom exist in the Constitution of the United States. The First Amendment reads,

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances. (U.S. Constitution).

The responsibility of protecting their freedoms falls on the backs of the people of a nation. They must ensure governmental bodies, such as the one in Majumdar's India or that of Modi, do not overstep their boundaries. When nationalistic governments are allowed to erode the morals of a nation, a trade occurs. The government swaps out freedom with a false sense of security. Whether that security comes in the form of finances, power, or fame, there will always be a Jivan, hanging at the end of a rope.

---

## Bibliography

Majumdar, Megha. *A Burning*. Alfred A. Knopf, 2020.

Newton, Issac. "Newton's Laws of Motion." NASA, NASA, 29 Apr. 2021, [www1.grc.nasa.gov/beginners-guide-to-aeronautics/newtons-laws-of-motion/](http://www1.grc.nasa.gov/beginners-guide-to-aeronautics/newtons-laws-of-motion/).

Chatzidakis, A., Hakim, J., Littler, J., Rottenberg, C., & Segal, L. (2020). *The care manifesto: the politics of interdependence*. Verso.

"U.S. Constitution - First Amendment: Resources: Constitution Annotated: Congress.gov: Library of Congress." *Constitution Annotated*, constitution.congress.gov/constitution/amendment-1/.



# Who Would Have Thought Women Had Lives?

---

*Yazmin Johnson*

**Course:** Nineteenth-Century Women's Voices

**Professor:** Barbara Suess, English

**Student:** Yazmin Johnson

**Essay:** *Who Would Have Thought Women Had Lives?*

---

## **Assignment:**

Students in this course were asked to write a formal literary analysis paper that explores representations of women's (perceived or real) power in nineteenth century literary works in order to consider what literary

representations suggest about the changing and/or varied views about women's power during the nineteenth century.

---

Historically, Europe kept most women from working outside of the house. Women and girls were expected to handle household chores while men worked outside. Women in the 19th century were considered to be the property of their husbands. Due to the standards set by society, married women have interpreted their femininity differently. Their thoughts were placed in either conservative or progressive mindsets. The government and religion were a strong component in leading women to develop their mindsets. Through the readings of Sarah Stickney Ellis and Frances Power Cobbe, the similarities and differences of that defined femininity can be seen through their responsibilities, morals, and focus on economic status.

There were numerous responsibilities that women had to handle. Two main responsibilities were child-rearing and pleasing the husband. In Sarah Stickney Ellis's case, she considered a wife's duties incredibly important. In her first chapter she wrote, “

The personal-services she is thus enabled to render, enhance her value in the domestic circle, and when such services are performed with the energy of a sound understanding, and the grace of an accomplished mind—above all, with the disinterested kindness of a generous heart—they not only dignify the performer, but confer happiness, as well as obligation,” (Ellis 16). Her views are that women should be able to derive their pleasure from giving to others, and as such their focus should be on providing a quality household. Frances Power Cobbe takes a look at this from a legal standpoint of marital happiness. Women having more rights and legal representation allows for them to be able to have happier home lives. Cobbe noted how the rights of married women were not sufficient for them. A balanced relationship between men and women was needed in order to have a respectful and durable marriage. Both women agree that marriage is an important union between people, but their beliefs in household happiness differ.

“The Women of England, Their Social Duties, and Domestic Habits” discusses the desired expectations of women. Mrs. Ellis mainly focuses on the character and behavior of women as she wants England’s women to appear proper. She writes with the image of a good working husband that provides for the family. As shown in Cobbe’s “Criminals, Idiots, Women and Minors” Cobbe discusses the poor treatment men give to women. Frances Power Cobbe describes several scenarios of the legal system favoring men in situations that should have been ruled in the woman’s favor. Here is an example of this, “In vain did the poor half-starved wretch appear before them, and pray to be admitted into the workhouse. She was refused admission on the ground that her husband earned good wages; and so she went home, and, after lingering a while, probably fed now and then by her neighbours, she died. The husband escaped without any punishment whatever,” (Cobbe 12). The law held many loopholes that allowed men to get away with neglecting or abusing their wives. Both Ellis and Cobbe remark about the ignorance women have when handling outside matters. The education of women does not delve into money or business. Those standards are what made it so difficult for women to break out of the standard mold.

Following that is the morality that is expected to be seen in women. Kind, patient, and respectful women were desired. This standard was also created due to the very religious time period too. Ellis believed women to be the moral center of the home. The inner sphere was where morals were taught and so it was the responsibility of women to fulfill that obligation to the children. In Ellis’s words, “Much more congenial to the highest attributes of woman’s character, are inquiries such as these: ‘How shall I endeavour through this day to turn the time, the health, and the means permitted me to enjoy, to the best account? Is any one sick, I must visit their chamber without delay, and try to give their apartment an air of comfort, by arranging such things as the wearied nurse may not have thought

of,” (Ellis 24). According to Ellis, married women with good distinction take care of others more and worry less about themselves. Women are meant to cater to the household rather than focus on their own pleasure. There were aspects of the religion that believed women to be subservient to men which maintained the ideal of women focusing on their husband’s needs. Cobbe was not as religious as Ellis. Although Cobbe did agree that women should be moral it was not to the strong degree of Ellis. In her writing, Cobbe shows more focus on women’s well-being. She aimed for changes that would improve women’s quality of life one step at a time. Cobbe saw that women should not be so restricted by men and deserved to be on equal footing with them.

An important aspect to consider is the economic status of the women at the time. There were women of the lower class whose households could not depend on taking care of solely the house. Of course, there were women who took on traditional roles while having a lower economic status. However in order to take care of the home extra work had to be done. Both Sarah Stickney Ellis and Frances Power Cobbe were middle-class women which meant the luxuries they could afford differed from lower-class women. Sarah Stickney Ellis decided to focus most of her attention on middle-class women with her book. She saw that middle-class women would be able to have the most impact when it came to trying to change the public. She disapproved of women trying to leave their designated station. In the text, “There never was a more short-sighted view of society, than that by which the women of our country have lately learned to look with envious eyes upon their superiors in rank, to rival their attainments, to imitate their manners, and to pine for the luxuries they enjoy; and consequently to look down with contempt upon the appliances and means of humbler happiness,” (Ellis 15). Ellis expects women to appeal more to internal happiness rather than external factors.

Frances Power Cobbe recognizes the disadvantages that lower-class women have to face when dealing with society. Money has the ability to influence happiness. Seeing as it is capable of providing all the necessities humans need, and it provides a way for people to seek counsel should they need it. As shown, "If she possess real estate, so long as her husband lives he receives and spends the income derived from it; being only forbidden to sell it without her consent. From none of her property is he bound to reserve anything, or make any provision for her maintenance or that of her children. This is the law for all, but practically it affects only two classes of women, viz., those who marry hurriedly or without proper advisers, and those whose property at the time of marriage is too small to permit of the expense of a settlement; in other words, the whole middle and lower ranks of women, and a certain portion of the upper ranks,"(Cobbe 7). This led to most women not being able to have the backing that they needed. The complete dependence that women had to have on their husbands was very unhealthy.

---

The nineteenth century was a time period that began loosening their constraints on women after many women began to write and speak up against the unfairness of the laws. A few women were in a position where they followed the more conservative rules put in place. The readings provided a view on two different sides of the conversation. Two women developed their beliefs and created systems they thought were the best. Sarah Stickney Ellis when it came to the middle-class domestic sphere and Frances Power Cobbe working towards women's suffrage.

## Works Sited

Cobbe, Frances Power. "Criminals, Idiots, Women and Minors. ." *Victorian Women Writers Project*, n.d., [webapp1.dlib.indiana.edu/vwwp/view?docId=VAB7044](http://webapp1.dlib.indiana.edu/vwwp/view?docId=VAB7044).

Ellis, Sarah Stickney. "The Women of England, Their Social Duties, and Domestic Habits." *Victorian Women Writers Project*, n.d., [webapp1.dlib.indiana.edu/vwwp/view?docId=VAB7198&chunk.id=d1e561&brand=vwwp&doc.view=0&anchor.id=#VAB7198-008](http://webapp1.dlib.indiana.edu/vwwp/view?docId=VAB7198&chunk.id=d1e561&brand=vwwp&doc.view=0&anchor.id=#VAB7198-008).



# Weber, Capitalism, and Asia

---

*Cortney A. Pruden*

**Course:** Honors Seminar in the Social Sciences

**Professor:** Neil Kressel, Psychology

**Student:** Cortney A. Pruden

**Essay:** *Weber, Capitalism, and Asia*

---

## **Assignment:**

Students were asked to pick one of the major social scientific thinkers listed on the syllabus and write

a 5-10-page essay reacting to one or more of the thinker's ideas.

---

Max Weber has been described as “. . . the most important sociologist of the twentieth century” (Curtis, p.423). Though deeply involved in German politics, his ground-breaking scholarly work always stressed the need for objectivity and value-free empirical analysis in the examination of social problems. Moreover, he saw passion, responsibility and objectivity as desirable traits for all who wished to contribute importantly to politics and economics.

Most of Weber's work concentrated on topics that lay at the juncture of ideology, social structure, and material interests. Famously, he focused his intellectual energies on Calvinism and the spirit of capitalism. More generally, he was interested in the close study of religion, both Eastern and Western, and how they had their power over local economics and government. Weber believed, as political scientist Michael Curtis writes, “Rationality was the basis of and distinguishing characteristic of modern civilization, illustrated in capitalist economics, the application of science to human affairs and to bureaucracy” (Curtis, p.423).

Weber felt that the most desirable way to understand sociopolitical phenomena was through the identification of “ideal” types. These were not wholly realistic descriptions of particular cases, but rather conceptual tools to clarify important social phenomena. Weber used this method to clarify the power of politics and the forms of authority that stem from it, for example, traditional hereditary authority, legal authority, and charismatic leadership.

Many of these theories are discussed in Weber's 1919 essay *Politics as a Vocation*. Weber, a philosopher, economist, and sociologist, considered studying philosophy and religious life to be a crucial skill for identifying the distinctive development of societies worldwide and the climb of globalizing capitalism, largely in western Europe. “Why”, Weber asked, “did the highly rationalized, systemized, and industrial form of capitalism emerge in Europe and not in another part of the world (Guest, p.377, 2018)”?

From a political standpoint, “Weber writes that vanity creates unique problems for politicians because they

do indeed control the tools of legitimate violence. “Common vanity”, Weber wrote, “means that politicians are tempted to make decisions based on emotional attachments to followers and sycophants, and not on the rational reasoning needed to govern justly and effectively (Curtis, p.347)”. Weber affirms this to be a trait far too typical in our politicians.

With these factors and thoughts combined, Weber claims, the hazard of politics is ingrained in the connection of the politician to the means of brutality which are innate to the institution, and which will be abused at the hands of the political leader conceited enough to do so. He reiterates throughout his career that the practice of politics is a daunting idea, and not fit for someone who is searching for salvation through the practice of justice and understanding.

Opposite to Marx, who maintained that economics ultimately shapes society, Weber believed that simple ideas such as religious beliefs, can be just as if not more powerful. His book *Sociology of Religion* was one of the first mainstream sociological attempts to contrast the world’s major religions. In this work, Weber suggests that Asian religious beliefs and philosophical schools of thought barricaded the door to capitalist economic growth in the East and had kept Asian economies from developing like that of western Europe. While India, China, and other cultures had conjured some aspects of modern capitalism even earlier than western Europe did, they did so without a particular type of ideological support, thus a more ‘advanced’ capitalism by Weber’s standards had not evolved in Asia. Because of this, Weber derived that simply economic innovations alone could not explain the different paths (Guest, p.377, 2018).

In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* published in 1909, Weber suggested that the “ascetic values of self-denial and self-discipline that developed in western European Protestantism provided the ethic that was necessary for capitalism to flourish”. Calvinists believed it was crucial to express their religious beliefs

and values in a daily lifestyle of discipline and hard work. In such ideas, “Weber found evidence of the ethical and psychological framework necessary for the success of industrial capitalism. He did not dismiss the role of economics in shaping the social dynamics of western Europe, but he argued that ideas, including religious ideas, may at times equally influence the economic direction of a society (Guest, p.377, 2018)”.

Another major component to the development of Western capitalism, in the eyes of Weber, was the increasing systemization and rationalization of religious ideas. When Western Christianity began to evolve, this increasing rationalist brought a decline of rituals and lifestyles based on magic and spirituality. Weber viewed these developments as having led to bureaucracies with “clear, intellectual and systematized rules that replaced tradition, sentiment, and charisma as the operating system in social institutions (Guest, p.377-78, 2018)”.

Weber dreamt of an advancement of rational thought in religion that strayed from traditional religion based on magic and warned that as society became more rationalized, it also risked becoming more secular, less religious, and thus losing the very spirit that had driven its success and development (Guest, p.377-78, 2018).

*The Religion of China: Confucianism and Taoism* was first published in German under the title *Konfuzianismus und Taoismus* in 1915 and was Weber’s second major work on the sociology of religion, after *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Weber focused his study here on those aspects of Chinese society that were different from those of Europe and posed a question why capitalism did not develop in China. He concentrated on the early eras of Chinese history, namely the Warring States Period, during which major Chinese religions like Taoism and Confucianism were formed. In that period, he focused on the issues of Chinese urban development, Chinese devotion to authority, and Chinese philosophy, since these were the schools of

thought in which development differed greatly from the West.

Confucianism is an ancient political and cultural philosophy dating back to the 500's B.C. It is based on the teachings of the famous Confucius, originally known as Kong Qui, who believed that power and respect should be earned based on a person's character rather than their inherited status (Charleton, p.98, 2019). While it is still argued whether Confucianism should be considered a philosophy or a religion, there is no doubt that the teachings of Confucius continue to have great hold on contemporary Chinese society and government.

Confucius lived in China from 559 to 479 B.C., during a period known as the Warring States in which the nation was broken into several smaller societies all battling for control of the Chinese Empire (Charleton, p.98-99, 2019). His teachings emphasized on the importance of honorable relationships; the five most important relationships according to Confucius were prince to subject, father to son, husband to wife, elder to child, and friend to friend. He also taught five important precepts known as the Five Virtues-- ren to practice humanity, yi to be righteous, li to practice proper conduct, Zhi to be wise, and xin to remain loyal. As we begin to see when approaching modern China from a historical perspective, we begin to see how traditional thought such as that of Confucianism is still held to high regard. Priorities of family, honor, tradition, and political loyalty are prevalent themes in modern Chinese culture.

Another important aspect of China, Taoism is an ancient Chinese philosophy dating back over 2,500 years, though could be much older given how much of Chinese religion and folklore was not written down for many years before. Taoism differs from Confucianism by not emphasizing rigid rituals and social order but is similar in the sense that it is a teaching about the various disciplines for achieving "perfection" by becoming one with the unplanned rhythms of

the universe called "the way" or "tao." Taoist ethics vary depending on the school, but in general tend to emphasize wu wei (action without intention), "naturalness", simplicity, spontaneity and the Three Treasures: *ci*, "compassion", *jian*, "frugality" and *shen*, "humility" (Taoism and Anarchism).

The approach to nature recommended by Lao Tzu and the Taoists is one of receptivity. Where the Confucian wants to conquer and exploit nature, the Taoist tries to contemplate and understand it. The Taoists' traditionally 'feminine' approach to nature suggests that their way of thinking may well have first evolved in a matriarchal society. While at first sight it might seem a religious attitude, in fact it encouraged a scientific and democratic outlook amongst Taoists. By not imposing their own preconceptions, they were able to observe and understand nature and therefore learn to channel its energy beneficially (Taoism and Anarchy). [Taoists believed] That the best leaders are humble, compassionate, and selfless. To lead, one needs to be non-egoistic and genuinely concerned with the needs of the people.

What we must understand is that culture is not fixed and forms in response to both native and foreign interactions, often a response to formal government initiative and informal shifts in popular ideas. In East Asia, the cultural norms most frequently explored in understanding development are linked to Confucianism; the philosophy emphasizes hierarchical reciprocal relationships, deference to authority, and bureaucratic privilege, all of which have persisted to varying degrees in East Asia. Other prominent cultural patterns, such as group orientation, have fused with Confucian practices to become politically important, as illustrated by the factionalism that dominates Japanese political parties (Charleton, p.346, 2019).

It became common place to argue that these cultural attributes were contributory in aiding the swift modernization of Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore by instituting, for example, a

regard for authority and high emphasis on education. Through the 1970s, two contesting theories led social science analyses of development. One assumed that the experience of Western Europe would be replicated for “latecomers” to modernization. Development would be boosted by capitalism, irreligious cultural values and social structures, and, for some academics, Western-style democracy.

Many theorists also believed in a fundamental conflict between growth and equity. The alternate “dependency” theorists condemned the suppositions of a European pattern by highlighting the position of developed and “underdeveloped” economies in a world economic system dominated by Western Europe and North America. The latter, the “core” of the system, is seen as exploiting the “periphery in a relationship of dependency. The economic success of several East Asian countries challenged these two theories in several ways (Charleton, p.346, 2019).

Advancement in countries such as Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore did not abide by the Western historical trajectory. The East Asian experience also defied the notions about conflict between growth and equity because these countries seemed to have experienced less class inequality than European countries during their periods of rapid development.

The core value of postulating an East Asian development model was not that it led to better prediction or was any more consistent throughout the region than its predecessors. Yet it did inspire a new discussion about the range of variables that produce development, the relationship among these variables, and finally the value of development itself. In particular, the leading role that government played in East Asian growth contributed to studies of state-led development and assisted in generating a reevaluation of the role of state institutions in civic developments. The persistence of traditional cultural norms in the rapidly growing Asian states “also encouraged scholars and practitioners to consider the possibility of several

models of development and to suggest that ‘modern’ might not be synonymous with Western. (Charleton, p.347, 2019)”.

*The Religion of India: The Sociology of Hinduism and Buddhism* was his third major work on the sociology of religion and deals with the structure of Indian society and the influence of Hinduism and Buddhism on Indian policy. In Weber’s case for Hinduism the Indian social system was influenced by the concept of varna, loosely translated to ‘color’ in Sanskrit. Varna is not caste and caste is not varna, and this is a critical difference not understood by many (Charleton, p.25, 2019). There are five major castes in Indian varna-- Brahmins (Priests), Kshatriyas (Warriors), Vaisyas (Merchants, Landowners), Sudras (Commoners, Peasants, Servants), and Dalits. While castes are most widely understood as inherited identities with set ritualistic status, social classes are defined by the relations of production.

Weber postulated what influence Hinduism and Buddhism impacted the economy; he pointed that the idea of the stagnant world order consisting of the eternal cycles of rebirth, and the lack of concern with the mundane human world. By the conservatism of varna, economic development is slowed as, according to Weber, the spirit of the caste system worked against economic development. Weber concluded this research by bringing in insights from his previous work on China to discuss similarities of the Asian belief systems. He maintained that the beliefs saw the meaning of life as one spiritual experience, with no regard for mortal affairs.

As an anthropologist in contemporary times I would have to maintain that Weber’s interpretation of Asia is primarily a consequence of studying religious thought and practices in Asian culture from the standpoint of the Christian world, where God has a formal structural system and has occupied a strict structural position in the organizational outline of Western society. In more simplistic terms, the “white man’s view”. Some may argue that Weber committed the anthropological



crime of cultural relativism, in which a society's values, morals, and traditions are only appreciated based on that person's own culture.

All through the history of the social sciences in the West, especially in Weber's era, Asian religions and cultures have been exhibited in such a way that lurches on fantasy and orientalism. There has been a history of social scientists illustrating the region with imagery of grandiose spiritualism, a deep emphasis on sexuality (i.e. the Kama Sutra or harem life), and conceited affluence and lifestyles; others represent it with noxious parodies of deprivation, human rights abuses, and weak education all associated with religion. I think for some researchers to claim that religion is liable for the downsides within a culture is not always entirely fair, and its exceptionally unfair for Westerners to ascertain what is and is not doing well in a separate culture from their own Western angles.

Asia today is still a place renowned for its religion and spirituality and remains one of the most spiritual regions in the world. Clearly religion is not getting in the way of economic development right now; according to the World Economic Forum in 2019, Asia's GDP will surpass the GDP of the rest of the world united in 2020. By the year 2030, "the region is expected to contribute roughly 60% of global growth. Asia-Pacific will also be responsible for the overwhelming majority (90%) of the 2.4 billion new members of the middle class entering the global economy (Yendamuri & Ingilizian, 2019)". Much of such growth will come from the rapidly developing markets of India, China and throughout South Asia, giving wave to a host of new prospects for growing markets and non-profit associations. To quote, "The pressure will be on them to guide Asia's development in a way that is equitable and designed to solve a host of social and economic problems (Yendamuri & Ingilizian, 2019)".

Asia and its many ideas have been viewed as 'the opposite' of the West, whatever that may be, resulting

in being deemed as misfires of societies and not equal to the 'great, modern' successes of western Europe. Weber is still, arguably, one of the most influential social scientists in history, and just because his opinions on Asia's economic policies may not be politically correct today does not mean they should just be disregarded.

My interest in Weber piqued when I took a deep-dive into his theories surrounding and attitude towards Asia and its development. As a recovering sociology major and amateur scholar of Asian studies, I thought it would be enlightening to examine Weber's sociological analysis of Asia through the anthropological lens. The sociological, economic, and historical portrayal of Asia and Asian cultures also struck me as an important topic of discussion in an era of rising anti-Asian sentiment in the West, and as an Anthropologist this did not seem like something to ignore in my work. I can't agree with everything that he says, but I can still stress how historically, and sociologically important his Asian capitalism theories still are.

---

## References

Charleton, S. E. M. (2019). *Comparing Asian Politics: India, China, and Japan* (Fourth). London & New York, Routledge: Taylor and Francis Group.

Curtis, M. (1968). *The great political theories. 2*. New York: Avon.

Guest, K. J. (2020). *Essentials of cultural anthropology: a toolkit for a global age*. New York: W. W. Norton And Company.

The Anarchist Organization (Canada). (n.d.). Taoism and Anarchy. Retrieved April 10, 2021, from tipiglen.co.uk website: <http://tipiglen.co.uk/taoanarchy.htm>

Yendamuri, P., & Ingilizian, Z. (2019, December 20). In 2020 Asia will have the world's largest GDP. Here's what that means. Retrieved from World Economic Forum website: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/12/asia-economic-growth/>

# Acis and Galatea Review

---

*Brenna Moran*

**Course:** Vocal Literature

**Professor:** Christopher Herbert, Music

**Student:** Brenna Moran

**Essay:** *Acis and Galatea Review*

---

## **Assignment:**

Students were asked to view the opera, *Acis and Galatea*, by Handel, and write a review of the performance incorporating facts about performance

(who, what, where, when, why, how), facts about the opera and its history, and a subjective opinion about the opera.

---

I recently had the privilege of watching the Opera Theatre Company's production of *Acis and Galatea* from 2017, performed in Dublin, Ireland. The production was directed by Tom Creed, and was accompanied by the Irish Baroque Orchestra with musical director Peter Whelan. Rather than a traditional staging design, a more creative approach was taken by Paul O'Mahony. The set was designed to look like a country-western bar, complete with cheap colored lights and bright seating arrangements. Set atop a floor that could slowly spin in both directions, the audience was able to experience the interior and exterior of this unique design. The costumes, designed by Catherine Fay, reflected this theme. Characters donned brightly colored button-up shirts with blue jeans and cowboy boots. The three main characters, Acis, Galatea, and Polyphemus, were dressed uniquely to reflect their personalities: Acis wore a humble hoodie, Galatea wore a beautiful floral dress, and Polyphemus wore a cluttered suit.

The opera was composed by George Frederick Handel and first premiered in 1718. Most of the songs are de capo arias, which follow an ABA pattern of a melody, then a new melody, and then a return to the original melody with added ornamentations. The work is considered a pastoral opera, as it is based off of mythological themes. It tells the story of Acis, a young and smitten lover, who is in love with Galatea, a beautiful, semi-divine nymph. The story opens with shepherds and nymphs dancing and enjoying the "pleasure of the plains". Galatea, however, is missing Acis, and refuses to partake in the festivities. Acis, nearby, is looking for his lover when he runs into his friend Damon, who comforts him and gives him advice on love. Acis and Galatea are then reunited, and declare their love for each other. The act ends with Acis proposing to Galatea, and her accepting his proposal. However, their joy does not last long, for the drunken Polyphemus stumbles into the bar and tries to win over Galatea. She rejects him, which throws him into a fury.

Just as Damon is able to begin calming Polyphemus down, Acis becomes enraged and declares he must defend his love's honor. Damon once again tries to find a peaceful solution, but can not stop the rage of the two men. Polyphemus strikes Acis with a brick, which kills him. The opera ends with Galatea mourning her love, and using her limited powers to revive him. However, she knows that Acis will never love her again, and is forced to face a bittersweet reality.

I enjoyed many aspects of this production of *Acis and Galatea*. The singing was superb among all the characters, especially the crystal clear vocal lines of Eamonn Mulhall (Acis) and the comforting and serene voice of Andrew Gavin (Damon). All the main characters are able to move through their arias with seeming ease, despite the frequent long and ornamented phrases that occur throughout them. Susanna Fairbairn captures the sweet beauty of Galatea through her delicate maneuvering of difficult soprano lines, and Edward Grint portrays the gruff Polyphemus through his stern baritone melodies. The orchestra did an excellent job, and found a good balance with the singers. However, the ending of the opera was unclear due to the modern-day setting of the story. Normally, the opera ends with Galatea transforming Acis into a flowing fountain of water for all to admire. However, this could not be achieved in the opera's country-western setting for obvious reasons, so the director had to improvise. To anyone who is not familiar with the story of Acis and Galatea, the lines about a fountain at the end of the opera must have been confusing, and since there is no mention of a resuscitation in the original score, the scene was difficult to understand. However, the production was well-done overall, and I would recommend it to anyone seeking an enjoyable performance.

# Agricultural Practices and Zoonotic Diseases

---

*Shaina Lacap*

**Course:** Environmental Determinants of Health  
**Professor:** Marianne Sullivan, Public Health  
**Student:** Shaina Lacap  
**Essay:** *Agricultural Practices and Zoonotic Diseases*

---

## **Assignment:**

The final paper in this course asked students to write a 7-9-page investigation of a specific issue or environmental health topic related to the material

covered in Honors Environmental Determinants of Health.

---

## **Introduction**

Zoonotic diseases are diseases that can be transmitted from animals to humans. They can be caused by various microorganisms, such as parasites, viruses, fungi, and bacteria. Transmission can occur mainly in two ways: human contact with wildlife (undomesticated animals roaming freely in nature, e.g. foxes, rodents, insect vectors) or livestock (domesticated animals raised on farms, e.g. sheep, pigs, cattle). Although both routes of transmission are closely interwoven, this paper will primarily focus on the issue of zoonotic diseases as they pertain to agricultural practices and livestock, including poultry. The devastating impact of COVID-19 and the expansion of other zoonotic diseases are proof that zoonoses pose a massive threat to human health. Therefore, this environmental health issue calls for greater surveillance and implementation of preventative measures against zoonotic diseases in all

levels of society (international, state, local community, individual).

## **Research Question**

This paper will investigate the following research question: How are agricultural practices linked to the emergence of zoonotic diseases, and what can be done to address its disparities? This paper will also examine modern solutions for preventing and controlling zoonotic disease outbreaks and the limitations of implementing those solutions.

## **Presentation of Evidence From the Literature**

Over the decades, there have been reports of zoonotic disease outbreaks attributed to different sources of exposure and adverse health effects. In Bulgaria, Slovakia, and the Netherlands, Q fever is a prevalent zoonotic disease that manifests as flu-like symptoms (e.g. fever, muscle pain, chills) in humans and can be transmitted through contact with domestic ruminants

(cattle, sheep, goats), infected animal byproducts (placenta, excretions), and contaminated aerosols (CDC, 2021; Mori & Roest, 2018). In Thailand, on the other hand, chickens are commonly raised for consumption, sale, and cock-fighting matches (Delabougliise et al., 2015). Consequently, HPAI H5N1 epizootics (epidemics that are widespread in an animal population and can be implied to affect humans) plagued small poultry farms in the early 2000s and continue to be a potential issue due to rampant backyard chicken farms (Delabougliise et al., 2015). In humans, the Asian HPAI H5N1 virus attacks the respiratory tract, leading to pneumonia, respiratory failure, or death (CDC, 2015). Another particularly deadly and disperse zoonotic disease is Nipah Virus (NiV), which has affected pig farms throughout Malaysia, India, and Bangladesh, and has a case fatality rate of up to 75% and no available licensed treatments or vaccines (Humane Society International, 2020). It is theorized that the cause of NiV outbreaks stems from the location of pig farms nearby orchards where fruit bats (natural reservoir of NiV) scavenge for food (Humane Society International, 2020). Pigs can serve also as hosts for other zoonoses, including the H1N1 swine flu in North America, or Ebola in the Philippines (Humane Society International, 2020). Furthermore, salmonellosis is a food-borne zoonotic disease, typically associated with backyard poultry, pigs, and young ruminants, that affects approximately 1.2 million people every year in the United States (CDC & NCEZID, 2020). More recently, it was discovered that farmed mink can potentially spread COVID-19 since some farmers were infected with Cluster 5, a unique strain of SARS-CoV-2 composed of “mink-related mutations” (CDC, 2021).

Besides direct interaction with livestock, human exposure to zoonotic pathogens can occur indirectly through several methods. For example, ventilation systems can unintentionally spread infected dust and aerosols, or they can be spread from transporting

infected animals, feed, or waste (esp. trucking on public roads) (Humane Society International, 2020). Poor waste management, specifically the improper disposal of contaminated animal waste (manure, placentas) or poultry after depopulation, serves as another route of transmission (Humane Society International, 2020; Kelly et al., 2018). Moreover, zoonotic diseases can be food-borne by drinking raw milk and eating undercooked meat or raw produce contaminated with feces, or water-borne, since livestock can easily access drinking water sources and some farms lack water treatment (CDC, 2017; Kelly et al., 2018).

In retrospect, the emergence of zoonotic diseases stems from a series of macro-level drivers in today’s modern environmental climate and globalization of society, which have in turn led to a rise in human-animal interactions and inadequate public health responses. First, there is rapid population growth accompanied by increasing global demand for animal protein and dairy, especially in developing countries (IOM & NRC, 2009). Naturally, to fulfill this economic demand, food systems became industrialized and shifted to intensive agriculture and animal farming, like industrial production units and animal feeding operations (AFOs). Since food production and livestock greatly rely on land, agricultural expansion can bear negative ecological impacts including human encroachment into wildlife, deforestation, habitat fragmentation (destroying a habitat so smaller, discontinuous, and isolated habitat fragments remain), and increased breeding sites for insect vectors (as a result of irrigation development) (IOM & NRC, 2009). Furthermore, the rise in population and animal mobility, whether they be associated with short-term mobility like tourism or migration to establish permanent residence, can facilitate the transmission of zoonotic diseases and may affect food preferences for animal protein due to cultural exchanges (IOM & NRC, 2009). Refugees and displaced communities recovering from natural disasters may be particularly

vulnerable to zoonotic diseases because they are likely to come from endemic countries and find themselves in overcrowded and unsanitary facilities – the same conditions can apply to residents in urbanized areas (IOM & NRC, 2009). Also, the popularity of companion animals, like cattle or fighting cocks/backyard chickens, also fuels the emergence of zoonoses (IOM & NRC, 2009). Currently, a significant driver for the emergence of zoonotic diseases is antibiotic resistance. Antibiotics are used in livestock for disease management, whether it be for prophylaxis, treatment, or to promote growth (Manyi-Loh et al., 2018). However, antibiotics can be irrationally misused and abused especially in developing countries where there are poor surveillance systems. This is because antibiotics are readily available over-the-counter, humans/animals are more prone to infections in these regions, and farmers tend to treat animals using multiple drug regimens (Manyi-Loh et al., 2018). Overuse of antibiotics can lead to the evolution of antibiotic-resistant bacteria, and antibiotic residues can be found in sources such as soil, water, and animal-derived products (e.g. eggs, meat, milk), which can be toxic for humans when consumed (Manyi-Loh et al., 2018). Another macro-level driver is inadequate governance systems, specifically in low-income countries because their governments are generally not well-equipped to prevent and control zoonotic disease outbreaks: they lack adequate resources and proper authority to research zoonoses, monitor disease surveillance, enforce sanitation regulations, and update public health policies (IOM & NRC, 2009).

Virtually anyone in contact with agricultural livestock is at risk of contracting zoonoses, including farmers, cullers, slaughterhouse workers, veterinarians, shoppers, and agricultural fairgoers - even brief contact is sufficient to transmit pathogens (Klous et al., 2016). According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), certain subgroups face an increased risk of developing severe conditions from zoonotic

diseases, like children ages 5 and below, elderly over the age of 65, pregnant women, and those who are immunocompromised (CDC, 2017). Zoonotic diseases are not an environmental health issue exempt from social and structural disparities. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), zoonotic diseases can be predominantly found “among populations living in conflict and war zones, internally displaced populations, refugees, and those affected by natural disasters” (WHO, 2012). The issue of zoonotic diseases is especially critical among smallholder farmers and farmers living in developing, low-income countries who tend to possess lower levels of education, health literacy, and inadequate access to healthcare/ veterinary treatment, vaccines, and other health services. Unlike populations in high-income countries (HICs) who may only share occupational contact with animals, these marginalized populations are more likely to live close to their livestock and highly depend on them for their livelihood and survival (Klous et al., 2016).

For example, in a study conducted among smallholder farmers in Nepal, it was concluded that more than half of the sampled farmers were unaware of zoonotic disease transmission (attributed to low levels of formal education and literacy) and did not report herd health management practices, like proper vaccination and health screenings (Kelly et al., 2018). Furthermore, many farmers engaged in high-risk practices, like inadequate water treatment, improperly discarding animal placentas, and spreading raw manure on fields as fertilizer (Kelly et al., 2018). A similar phenomenon can be seen in another study conducted among livestock farmers in Vietnam. Although most farmers received formal education and demonstrated modest health literacy toward understanding zoonotic disease transmission, more than half reported improper use of antibiotics to handle ill livestock and were not educated on safety practices to prevent zoonotic infection (Ba et al., 2020). Additionally, most farmers

did not regularly practice preventative measures and safe hygiene, such as wearing personal protective equipment, frequently disinfecting raising areas, obtaining vaccinations, and notifying the government about sick or dead livestock (Ba et al., 2020). Similarly, in India, dairy farmers were reported to have limited awareness and understanding of antimicrobial resistance and zoonotic diseases (Sharma et al., 2020). They often treated their cattle by themselves using antibiotics and home remedies or consulted “quacks” and paraveterinary workers because veterinary services were often limited and costly (Sharma et al., 2020).

In marginalized, low-income populations, especially in endemic countries, the disparities faced in regards to zoonoses are further exacerbated by poorly funded, fragmented, and inadequate delivery and information systems, surveillance, and control measures. Such systems can include public health, medical, agricultural, and educational sectors. On a national level, governments have limited funds allocated for addressing chronic diseases and environmental health problems. Hence, in these impoverished communities, the burden of zoonotic diseases is generally underreported and poorly surveilled, especially in rural, hard-to-reach communities beyond the scope of health facilities. Lack of funds can also be credited for the scarcity of research studies and limited prioritization of zoonotic diseases in research agendas, which impair the ability of governments and public health institutions to identify outbreaks, raise policy awareness, and control outbreaks (WHO, 2012).

With the expansion of the human population and mobility, agricultural intensification, increasing economic demand, and changes in the environment, the environmental issue of zoonotic diseases has become progressively aggravated over time. In broader contexts, animal husbandry practices have intensified to accommodate the increasing global demand for food production, specifically meat and

dairy products (Humane Society International, 2020). Agricultural expansion, industrialization, and urbanization paired with the intensification of livestock farming can foster zoonotic disease transmission since they involve habitat encroachment, fragmentation, deforestation, biodiversity loss (species extinction), and climate change – all of which increase contact between livestock and wild animals and promote pathogen spillover (Jones et al., 2012). Livestock production and climate change share a complex, dynamic relationship and ultimately contribute to the global distribution of zoonotic diseases across various geographic areas, and global warming creates favorable ecological conditions that promote interactions between disease hosts, vectors, reservoirs, and pathogens (FAO, 2013). Large-scale intensive animal farming can serve as breeding zones for potential outbreaks due to heavy concentrations of genetically identical livestock in close quarters and confined facilities indoors (e.g. cages, crates, narrow stalls) for mass feeding and rearing operations, like concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs) (FAO, 2013; Humane Society International, 2020). Moreover, there has been increased comingling between animals and the general public through agricultural fairs, exhibitions, and live animal markets (where wild animals and livestock are slaughtered on-site and sold) which remain common in Asia (Humane Society International, 2020).

## Discussion

While there is room for improvement, the issue of zoonotic diseases is being called into action and countries are taking steps towards addressing them. One solution is the Global Health Security Agenda (GHSA), which is an international collaboration that prioritizes global health security and aims to reduce the impact of infectious diseases (CDC & NCEZID, 2020). To motivate countries to undertake proper action, GHSA developed “Action Packages” (e.g. zoonotic disease, antimicrobial resistance, surveillance,



biosecurity, and biosafety) for countries to commit to. The GHSA Zoonotic Disease Action Package proposes that countries reduce pathogen spillover by enhancing disease surveillance systems and adopting more sustainable agricultural policies and practices (CDC, 2018). GHSA also established the One Health Disease Prioritization (OHZDP) process, a series of workshops where One Health government staff, stakeholders, and representatives from agricultural/environmental sectors collaborate to rank the most concerning zoonoses in a region or country and propose recommendations for prevention and control (CDC & NCEZID, 2020). However, as of 2014, Indonesia and Vietnam are the only two leading countries committed to this action package, with other contributing countries being Georgia, Yemen, Sweden, Kenya, the U.S., and the U.K. (CDC, 2018). Therefore, this calls for more countries, either developed or developing, to take stronger initiative towards addressing and preventing emerging zoonoses because they are a global problem.

On the other hand, solutions can be implemented on a national or state level. For example, in the U.S., certain states (NJ, NY, NC, PA, UT, WA, WY) have laws mandating hand sanitizing stations in animal contact exhibits, like petting zoos and agricultural fairs (Hoss et al., 2017). Other state mandates for addressing zoonotic diseases include rabies vaccination laws for pets, as well as laws banning the sale of infected turtles and/or turtles in general to combat salmonellosis (CDC, 2019). Furthermore, the U.S. established a National Action Plan for Combating Antibiotic-Resistant Bacteria (2020-2025) to tackle antibiotic resistance by implementing evidence-based practices, enhancing disease surveillance, and funding research for new antibiotics, alternative therapeutics, and diagnostic tests for resistant bacteria (CDC, 2020). The U.S. also launched Education Among Youth in Agriculture, a pilot program to educate youth & their families in rural America about influenza and other zoonoses and preventative measures (CDC, 2018). In Minnesota, for

example, one of the program interventions involves educating students by distributing agritourism board games, launching online training programs for staying safe when contacting animals, and hosting breakfast meetings so government and non-profit organizations can communicate to aid local communities (CDC, 2018).

Despite these efforts to combat this environmental health issue, new laws and policies are needed to mitigate zoonotic infectious disease outbreaks especially in low-income countries and rural communities. For example, governments in these countries should enforce visitor bans, breeding bans, and transport bans of infected animals and manure to prevent pathogen transmission (Mori & Roest, 2018). To enhance the GHSA, countries should also implement specific disease programs, like routine immunization programs, large-scale culling programs, enhanced laboratory testing or expansions in laboratory capacities, and training programs for epidemiologists to promote effective disease surveillance and data sharing systems (Belay et al., 2017). In terms of antibiotic resistance, there should also be extensive monitoring of antibiotic use and residues, as well as stronger state regulations that direct the purchase and distribution of antibiotics, especially in countries outside of the developed world (Manyi-Loh et al., 2018). Additionally, governments, public health institutions, and agribusinesses can subsidize veterinary services and sensitization campaigns to educate low-income farmers on safe practices for hygiene, slaughtering animals, using antibiotics, and preventing exposure to zoonoses (Manyi-Loh et al., 2018; Belay et al., 2017).

The key to minimizing the impact of zoonotic diseases is not only to address the structural factors of a disease but also to enforce health recommendations on an individual level. First and foremost, to prevent exposure to zoonotic diseases, people need to adhere to the following strategies: practice safe hygiene (handwashing, using personal protective equipment

when in contact with livestock), frequently clean and decontaminate facilities, vaccinate production workers, and ensure workers are properly educated and trained about zoonoses, biosecurity, and preventive measures (OSHA, 2010). Another unique idea can be to impose a “cost-internalizing and wild animal tax” to fund pandemic surveillance and response on an international level (Larnder-Besner et al., 2020). Through this method, each country would provide subsidies according to their participation in “risk-creating” activity, which is based on the amount of their national animal product consumption and wild animal imports (Larnder-Besner et al., 2020). This tax can potentially be enforced by the World Trade Organization and if a country failed to adequately contribute, other countries would be authorized to redress them by collecting a portion of their unsettled contribution later on (or by removing trade benefits) (Larnder-Besner et al., 2020). Such an intervention would recognize zoonotic diseases as a global health issue. In effect, this tax would also ensure enough funds are allocated in the event of disease emergencies, provide incentives for reducing risks of pandemics, and have countries take accountability for environmental health issues.

As with any health issue, public health interventions for resolving the environmental health issue of zoonotic diseases carry several barriers and limitations. One critical assessment for the taxation proposal mentioned previously is that taxation can drive countries to underreport the national consumption of animal products and possibly increase the illegal trade of animal products (Larnder-Besner et al., 2020). Similarly, zoonotic disease surveillance programs can face underreporting as a result of cultural influences, as exemplified in Thailand where chicken farmers are less willing to report HPAI cases because it may interfere with their cockfighting activities (Delabouglise et al., 2015). Plus, even though interventions can improve community knowledge, impoverished farmers still lack

basic resources for daily living such as food or water, so they often may continue their unhygienic farming practices and fail to fully comply with certain health recommendations. For example, if farmers were to implement total confinement of their pigs to prevent African swine fever infection, this would increase their livestock’s demand for food and water provisions (Chilundo et al., 2019). For agricultural fairs and exhibits, even though hand sanitizing stations may be widely implemented, they are often dysfunctional and there is a lack of compliance among fairgoers (Lauterbach et al., 2020).

## Conclusion

Addressing zoonotic diseases requires an ongoing, collaborative, well-coordinated, holistic, and interdisciplinary approach that prioritizes the emergence of zoonotic disease as a global public health issue and implements solutions on all socio-ecological levels. Impoverished, marginalized communities face the greatest burden of zoonotic diseases and require the most attention and public assistance. In low-income regions where disparities in zoonotic diseases are rampant, the Global Health Security Agenda, World Health Organization, and other national/local health organizations should not only outline plans of action for disease surveillance and control but also work collectively to fundraise health projects and distribute resources to low-income communities to prevent future outbreaks. Health projects can be funded through several ways: high-income countries can be incentivized to provide foreign aid to low-income endemic countries, international bodies can enforce a global tax system on animal products and trade, or public health organizations can raise awareness and collect funds through social media platforms. On a local level, universities can aid fundraising efforts and cooperate with researchers, non-profit health organizations, and other volunteers to assist with disease surveillance and community outreach programs. Either way, it is important to

ensure that governments of developing countries are well-equipped to properly implement counteractive measures, especially in hard-to-reach geographic areas. These measures can include addressing food, water, and income insecurity, increasing educational programs/health services, and providing incentives and resources for smallholder farmers to report disease cases and maintain sanitary, hygienic farming practices (FAO, 2013).

In summary, zoonotic diseases are not an issue

that can be resolved in isolation because they exist in tandem with so many other broad structural and environmental health issues outlined by the Sustainable Development Goals, like climate change, poverty, hunger, access to clean water, and social inequalities. Although zoonotic diseases may not ever be eradicated from the planet, with the collective acknowledgment and efforts undertaken on a global, national, community, and social level, change can occur and so many lives can be saved.

---

## References

Ba, K.C., Kaewkungwal, J., Pacheun, O., To, U., & Lawpoolsri, S. (2020). Health literacy toward zoonotic diseases among livestock farmers in Vietnam. *Environmental Health Insights*, 14, 1-15. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1178630220932540>.

Belay, E.D., Kile, J.C., Hall, A.J., Barton-Behravesh, C., Parsons, M.B., Salyer, S., & Walke, H. (2017). Zoonotic Disease Programs for Enhancing Global Health Security. *Emerging Infectious Diseases*, 23. <https://doi.org/10.3201/eid2313.170544>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). (2015, March 18). *Highly pathogenic Asian Avian Influenza A(H5N1) in people*. CDC. <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/avianflu/h5n1-people.htm>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). (2017, July 14). *Zoonotic diseases*. CDC. <https://www.cdc.gov/onehealth/basics/zoonotic-diseases.html>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). (2018, July 16). *Influenza and zoonoses education among youth in agriculture*. CDC. <https://www.cdc.gov/onehealth/in-action/influenza-and-zoonoses-education.html>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). (2018, October 3). *Global Health Security Agenda: GHSA Zoonotic Disease Action Package (GHSA Action Package Prevent-2)*. CDC. [https://www.cdc.gov/globalhealth/security/actionpackages/zoonotic\\_disease.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/globalhealth/security/actionpackages/zoonotic_disease.htm)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). (2019, July 5). *Emerging and zoonotic infectious disease laws*. CDC. <https://www.cdc.gov/phlp/publications/topic/zoonotic.html>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). (2020, October 9). *U.S. National Action Plan for Combating Antibiotic-resistant Bacteria (National Action Plan)*. CDC. <https://www.cdc.gov/drugresistance/us-activities/national-action-plan.html>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). (2021, March 25). *COVID-19 and animals*. CDC. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/animals.html>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) & National Center for Emerging and Zoonotic Infectious Diseases (NCEZID). (2020). *Prioritizing zoonotic diseases for multisectoral, One Health collaboration in the United States: Workshop summary*. CDC. <https://www.cdc.gov/onehealth/pdfs/us-ohzdp-report-508.pdf>

---

Chilundo, A.G., Mukaratirwa, S., Pondja, A., Afonso, S., Alfredo, Z., Chato, E., & Johansen, M.V. (2020). Smallholder pig farming education improved community knowledge and pig management in Angonia district, Mozambique. *Tropical Animal Health and Production*, 52, 1447-1457. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11250-019-02148-x>

Delabougli, A., Antoine-Moussiaux, N., Tatong, D., Chumkao, A., Binot, A., Fournie, G., Pilot, E., Phimphraphi, W., Kasemsuwan, S., Paul, M.C., Dubox, R., Salem, G., & Peyre, M. (2015). Cultural practices shaping zoonotic diseases surveillance: The case of highly pathogenic avian influenza and Thailand native chicken farmers. *Transboundary and Emerging Diseases*, 64, 1294-1305. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/27087572/>

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). (2013). *World livestock 2013: Changing disease landscapes*. FAO. <http://www.fao.org/3/i3440e/i3440e.pdf>

Hoss, A., Basler, C., Stevenson, L., Gambino-Shirley, K., Robyn, M.P., & Nichols, M. (2017). State laws requiring hand sanitation stations at animal contact exhibits — United States, March–April 2016. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 66(1), 16-18. <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/66/wr/pdfs/mm6601a4.pdf>

Human Society International. (2020, September). *An HSI report: The connection between animal agriculture, viral zoonoses, and global pandemics*. The Human Society of the United States. <https://blog.humansociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Animal-agriculture-viral-disease-and-pandemics-FINAL-4.pdf>

Institute of Medicine (IOM) and National Research Council (NRC). (2009). *Drivers of zoonotic diseases*. In G.T. Keusch, M. Pappaioanou, & M.C. Gonzalez

(Eds.), *Sustaining global surveillance and response to emerging zoonotic diseases*. National Academies Press. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK215318/>

Jones, B.A., Grace, D., Kock, R., Alonso, S., Rushton, J., Said, M.Y., McKeever, D., Mutua, F., Young, J., McDermott, J., & Pfeiffer, D.U. (2013). Zoonosis emergence linked to agricultural intensification and environmental change. *PNAS*, 110(21), 8399-8404. <https://www.pnas.org/content/110/21/8399>

Kelly, T.R., Bunn, D.A., Joshi, N.P., Grooms, D., Devkota, D., Devkota, N.R., Paudel, L.N., Rough, A., Wolking, D.J., & Mazet, J. (2018). Awareness and practices relating to zoonotic diseases among smallholder farmers in Nepal. *EcoHealth*, 15, 656–669. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10393-018-1343-4>

Klous, G., Huss, A., Heederik, D.J., & Coutinho, R.A. (2016). Human-livestock contacts and their relationship to transmission of zoonotic pathogens, a systematic review of literature. *One Health*, 2, 65-76. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2352771415300136?via%3Dihub>

Larnder-Besner, M., Gravel-Tremblay, J., & Christians, A. (2020). Funding pandemic prevention: Proposal for a meat and wild animal tax. *Sustainability*, 12(21). <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12219016>

Lauterach, S.E., Nelson, S.W., Martin, A.M., Spurck, M.M., Mathys, D.A., Mollenkopf, D.F., Nolting, J.M., Wittum, T.E., & Bowman, A.S. (2020). Adoption of recommended hand hygiene practices to limit zoonotic disease transmission at agricultural fairs. *Preventive Veterinary Medicine*, 182. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.prevetmed.2020.105116>.

Manyi-Loh, C., Mamphweli, S., Meyer, E., & Okoh, A. (2018). Antibiotic use in agriculture and its consequential resistance in environmental sources:

---

Potential public health implications. *Molecules*, 23(795). <https://www.mdpi.com/1420-3049/23/4/795>.

McDermott, J., & Pfeiffer, D.U. (2013). Zoonosis emergence linked to agricultural intensification and environmental change. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 110(21), 8399-8404. <http://www.pnas.org/cgi/doi/10.1073/pnas.1208059110>

Mori, M. & Roest, H. (2018). Farming, Q fever and public health: agricultural practices and beyond. *Archives of Public Health*, 76(2). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13690-017-0248-y>.

Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). *Influenza in workers and pigs: Guidance for commercial swine farmers and pork producers*. OSHA.gov. <https://www.osha.gov/sites/default/files/publications/influenza-workers-pigs-factsheet.pdf>

Sharma, G., Mutua, F., Deka, R.P., Shome, R., Bandyopadhyay, S., Shome, B.R., Kumar, N.G., Grace, D., Dey, T.K., Venugopal, N., Sahay, S., & Lindahl, J. (2020). A qualitative study on antibiotic use and animal health management in smallholder dairy farms of four regions of India. *Infection Ecology & Epidemiology*, 10(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/20008686.2020.1792033>

World Health Organization (WHO). (2012). *Research priorities for zoonoses and marginalized infections: Technical report of the TDR disease reference group on zoonoses and marginalized infectious diseases of poverty*. WHO. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/23420951/>



# Dear President Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris

---

*Christopher Hall*

**Course:** Anthropology of Social Movements

**Professor:** Lilian Milanés, Community and Social Justice Studies

**Student:** Christopher Hall

**Essay:** *Dear President Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris*

---

## **Assignment:**

Within the individual research portion of this course, students were able to choose and connect with a social movement at the community, city, state, or federal level. The course's final assignment asked students to engage with what they have learned and to use their

coursework and their own research to explore letter writing as an activist tool. Choices for this assignment included writing an op-ed or an open letter, or a letter to an elected official.

---

## **Final Letter Assignment Description:**

Social movements often start with a particular issue, such as: a discriminatory piece of legislation or policy; a social issue (inequities in education, affordable housing, healthcare access, etc.); or an issue affecting a certain community on campus or in your neighborhood. What current social movements have you observed around you? Are there particular organizations or community groups that are especially active where you live? Is there an issue you have observed in your community or everyday life that you would like to draw more attention to? Are there particular organizations or community groups that are especially involved with this topic? Within the individual research portion of this course, you will be able to choose and connect with a social movement--

at the community, city, state, or federal level--and engage with what you have learned in this course. As the final 'paper' for this course, we will explore letter writing as an activist tool. Following along with the social movement of your choosing (affecting people at the community, city, state, or federal level), your letters should be informed by your coursework and your own research. You may choose to write either: (1) An op-ed or an open letter, or (2) a letter to an elected official.

**Dear President Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris,**

I see that for the start of your campaign in the White House, you are striving to make amends in our justice system to create equality for all. Things have been rough for Black Americans for centuries, and it has seemed like with the Presidency of Donald Trump, these issues were put at the forefront. However, I am hopeful that with you two in office, things will start to begin changing. I have read your fact sheet on Black empowerment and I love the idea, but there are still some underlying issues that you are not aware of.

What many people don't know is that Black women face the same social issues that Black men in America face, but in some areas, these inequalities are on a deeper level. In the program that you have in place, most of your focus is addressed to Black men in America, almost disregarding the struggles that Black women are facing. This plan is focused on creating equality for Black men, and nowhere mentioning Black Americans in their entirety. Many people don't know this, but Black women are the "fastest growing arrest, prison, and jail populations..." (Ritchie 2020). This is a very concerning problem with our country because it seems that Black women do not receive the media attention that Black men do. Ritchie explains that the answer to this framing issue must come from the people, and not the system that causes these difficulties. Black women are placed at the intersection of racism, and sexism; therefore, experiencing double discrimination. In a TED talk by social and gender activist, Kimberlé Crenshaw, she had a demonstration where she named multiple Black female victims of police brutality, who no one in the audience was aware of (Crenshaw 2016). This alone illustrates the devastating intersectionality exclusion that Black women face in America.

I have done my own amount of research regarding the social issues that Black people face in our country. Being aware of these concerning problems allows

me to resonate with strong communal leaders like, Jabari Jackson, in my town of Parsippany who voices the frustrations of Black people everywhere. In the summer of 2020, he hosted a Black Lives Matter march in my hometown of Parsippany, NJ which allowed for the unification of all the people in our community and surrounding areas. A popular chant that occurs during these marches are the "say their names" mantras that are often used. Many times, these are focused on Black men that experience police brutality, but very seldomly do we hear the stories of Black women in these same remarks, with the tragedy of Breonna Taylor as an exception.

One of the main overarching themes of social activist, Jabari Jackson, and his foundation "RML" (Respect My Life) is the idea of unity. It is every American's duty to point out the issues of our peers and stand for each other through all forms of injustice. I write to you, President Biden and Vice President Harris today, to stand with us during this fight. It is not the system that is going to resolve these problems, but the people within the system. Andrea Ritchie believes that we should not rely on the judicial systems for justice for Breonna Taylor and other Black women. Instead, it must be the unification of the people to in our communities to create the systems so that we can take matters into our own hands.

We can find the resolutions to these issues within programs that are already in place, to empower and protect Black women. This can be seen within strong Black communities such as Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and Oakland, California. In a youth empowerment journal written by my god sister, Maia Stephenson, she writes about how important unity is to strengthen Black women in our communities, especially through these times of uncertainty during the COVID-19 pandemic. Black people were hit hardest during the pandemic with the majority of deaths being Black Americans in inner cities like Chicago, New York, and Atlanta. In order to bolster Black women and their



self-image, the students in this program, H.Y.P.E (Homewood Youth Empowered Program), launched a positive affirmation social media campaign, which allowed for the participants to maintain their strong well-being (Stephenson 25). In Oakland, CA, there are also amazing plans in place that are protecting Black women. Oakland has organized a Black led project that was created because of the killings of Yvette Henderson, and Jessica Williams. Henderson and Williams were both Black women that were killed in California. Henderson was wrongfully murdered for shoplifting, and Williams for being homeless. The objective of this project is to assist Black citizens who have “unmet health needs that prioritize avoiding police involvement and psychiatric incarceration” (Ritchie). This touches on the topic stated before that it is the people in our communities that are going to make a difference, and make strides towards equality.

In summation, I ask you President Biden and Vice President Harris to assist these communal programs with funds, and socially with your platforms. We can no longer rely on the faulty systems that have disappointed Black citizens countless of times. We need funding to continue these projects, and media attention, to attract more citizens to join our social justice front. I hope that this letter has informed you of some of the underlying issues that Black women face, and what we can continue to do to make reparations. These plans that I have outlined here are directly in line with Vice President Kamala Harris’s idea to fund mental health treatment as slavery reparations (Inskip 2019). I know you’re a woman of your word, so I’m looking forward to seeing these plans being acted upon, and coming into fruition.

Kind Regards,

Chris Hall

---

## Works Cited

Crenshaw, Kimberlé. "The Urgency of Intersectionality." TED, Oct. 2016, [www.ted.com/talks/kimberle\\_crenshaw\\_the\\_urgency\\_of\\_intersectionality?language=en](http://www.ted.com/talks/kimberle_crenshaw_the_urgency_of_intersectionality?language=en).

Inskeep, Steve. "Sen. Kamala Harris On Reparations." NPR, NPR, 14 Mar. 2019, [www.npr.org/2019/03/14/703299534/sen-kamala-harris-on-reparations](http://www.npr.org/2019/03/14/703299534/sen-kamala-harris-on-reparations).

"Empower Black Men." *Joe Biden for President: Official Campaign Website*, [joebiden.com/fact-sheet-joe-and-kamala-will-empower-black-men/](http://joebiden.com/fact-sheet-joe-and-kamala-will-empower-black-men/).

Ritchie, Andrea J. "Ending the War on Black Women- Abolition for The People." *Building a World Where Breonna Taylor Could Live*, 27 Oct. 2020.

Stephenson, Maia. "H.Y.P.E (Homewood Youth- Powered and Engaged) Media: Empower Youth to Change Their Communities Narrative." *Undergraduate Journal of Service Learning and Community-Based Research*, vol. 11, pp. 20–26.

# The Importance of Moral Resilience Illustrated Through Ling Ma's *Severance*, Among Other Literary Pieces

---

*Leonardo Lupidi*

**Course:** Experiences in Literature

**Professor:** Kara Rabbitt, Associate Provost in Academic Affairs

**Student:** Leonardo Lupidi

**Essay:** *The Importance of Moral Resilience Illustrated Through Ling Ma's Severance, Among Other Literary Pieces*

---

## **Assignment:**

In this course, students were asked to develop an argument analyzing Ling Ma's *Severance* and at least one other of the works students read in the course. These texts include: Henrik Ibsen's play *A Doll's House*; Kate Chopin's short story, "The Story of an Hour"; and the poems "Dreamwood," by Adrienne Rich, and "Alone" and "Still I Rise," by Maya Angelou. One choice

of framework, which is featured in this selection, included the theme of Resilience. Specifically, students were asked: in what ways do the novel and the other work(s) you select explore or teach the theme of resilience, of finding the strength to grow through and overcome adversity?

---

Resilience, as a mental or emotional attribute, is often cited as being fundamentally important for the development and conservation of morality and our sense of right and wrong. Yet, despite how often this concept is cited and acclaimed, the world is filled with examples both actual and fictional of people lacking resilience. From actual phenomena like the Bystander effect to novels like *The Lord of the Rings*, the consequences of lacking moral resolve range from missing simple opportunities to submitting oneself to

unspeakable exploitation, or even becoming complicit in abusive systems such as broken homes or parasitic workplaces. In our recent readings, the concept of resilience and its importance is the narrative challenge placed front-and-center by each author unto their *dramatis personae*. Some characters are found wanting, ending up consumed by their internal and external struggles like Louise in *The Story of an Hour* by Kate Chopin. Others learn to rise above adversity, like Nora in *A Doll's House* by Henrik Ibsen. *Severance* by

Ling Ma thoroughly explores the importance of resilience to overcome oppressive cultural norms and rising above adversity to become a better person.

In particular, Kate Chopin's *The Story of an Hour* most clearly displays the consequences of a person lacking resilience. The protagonist, Louise, is initially portrayed as co-dependent and frail of body and spirit, such that her confidantes take the utmost caution in informing Louise of the sudden death of her husband, Brently, so as to not quite literally break her heart. However, in the introspective moments that follow this revelation, Louise slowly begins to realize that she can become independent and finally live for herself now that she is a widow, as opposed to being constrained to the role of a wife. Though she initially tries to squelch her feelings on the matter, she comes to embrace her new lease on life by crying out a word she once could never describe herself with: "Free." Yet just as Louise finally accepts that her life now truly belongs to her, Brently unexpectedly appears, having unwittingly escaped death. This forbidden joy that Louise experienced is utterly crushed, with any chance of independence being torn away from her now that she realizes her husband yet lives. Thus, Louise drops dead from a heart attack, the mere idea of freedom disappearing before her eyes being enough to kill her too. In this manner, the author illustrates how Louise, being denied the opportunity to even think or live for herself, became so frail and meek that a broken heart killed her. Lacking in resilience of mind and body, the protagonist is allowed only to imagine a chance at truly becoming, of acquiring the resilience necessary to truly live for oneself.

The opposite of this situation occurs in *A Doll's House* by Henrik Ibsen, where the main character, Nora, eventually finds the strength to overcome the physical and emotional obstacles set before her. Though she initially seems silly, meek, and childish, as the play progresses the audience sees that she is intelligent and motivated despite the constrictive expectations

of her role as a wife and mother, as well as the opposition presented by her husband, Torvald. While he may initially seem genteel and benevolent, his true nature as a petty, selfish, and cowardly man becomes increasingly apparent the more Nora attempts to act independently and true to herself. One example of the difference in moral strength of each character is when Nora states that even though men refuse to sacrifice their integrity, "hundreds of thousands of women have," which refers to the personal sacrifices she and other female characters in the play had to make in order to support themselves and their families. In particular, Nora's abandonment of her children after Torvald keeps them away from her as an act of petty retaliation exemplifies her selflessness and willpower: despite her great love for her children, she chooses to leave them under the care of her nanny to ensure they are well-cared for. This act of self-sacrifice denies Torvald the opportunity to use their children as pawns to keep her obedient and miserable. In this manner, Nora walking away from her family clearly displays her strong-willed, resilient spirit and its importance as it spares her children from an unhappy upbringing despite how much this separation pains her. Though the play's ending is not exactly a happy one, it clearly displays the importance of resilience in the face of overwhelming odds.

In a similar vein, Ling Ma's book pits the protagonist, Candace Chen, against the oppressively mindless rules of modern bureaucracy and workplace culture as a way of challenging her mental and emotional resilience. Her beliefs and moral character are continuously tempered facing off against them, with the book's alternating narrative contrasting the mundane apathy of her former life as a bible publisher against her horrific struggle for survival in post-apocalyptic America. Despite this dichotomy of setting, in either circumstance Candace's moral strength is tested by the same abstracted antagonist: oppressive societal rules. Her complicity in this abusive system is tested and

questioned through increasingly taxing revelations until, finally, Candace develops the strength of character to break the rules and stand up for herself. This is presented through the many moral struggles she experiences throughout the course of the book.

This moral struggle quickly becomes apparent through the book's narrative, which continuously compares and contrasts Candace's struggles before and after the apocalypse, and how they are intrinsically connected. Prior to the apocalypse, Candace remained in an unfulfilling bible-publishing job due to the economic stability it provided and dated a freelance writer named Jonathan, who unlike Candace refused to work in an office. Though Jonathan would move away before the Apocalypse to escape the stress of New York City, Candace stayed behind as she was used to her job and daily routine. This choice of staying in an unfulfilling life repeats itself even in the post-apocalypse landscape of America, as Candace and a number of other survivors second themselves to an unscrupulous IT worker named Bob. Though he is a devoutly religious Christian and believes that he and the other survivors were chosen by God for some specific but unknown purpose, he demonstrates time and time again a willingness to bend his own supposedly absolute morals to get what he wants. From his purported mercy killings of infected people standing in the way of precious supplies up to his outright murder of a fellow survivor who refused to follow suit, Bob represents how even in the absence of a proper workplace the draconian laws and ruthless exploitation that embody that environment can exert their influence anywhere. Candace, meanwhile, shows how people can willingly and continuously submit themselves to these callous norms out of a desire for safety and normalcy, despite the escalating cold-blooded brutality she witnesses. Her attitude is indicative of her lack of moral and spiritual resolve. By doing nothing to stop or let alone question the status-quo and her participation in it, Candace also

demonstrates how decent, moral people can be corrupted and rendered spiritually powerless simply because they lack the resolve to overcome adversity. In this way, Candace becomes a spectator of her own life, as powerless and inconsequential as the book's reader.

This pattern does not continue throughout the entire book, however. Even before the apocalypse, Candace sparingly demonstrates a degree of resilience and self-determination. For instance, when her partner Jonathan left the city Candace discovered that she was pregnant and that Jonathan was the father. However, she decided not to tell him and to raise the baby on her own, a decision that demonstrates her confidence in being able to raise a child by herself. It was not until New York City was almost completely deserted that Candace decided to leave the city, which further illustrates her resilience as a mother and survivor. However, this pattern of moral strength does not surface again until near the very end of the book, when her and her baby's lives are directly threatened once again. After Candace and the other survivors arrive at the "promised land" Bob had been leading them to, which was in fact merely an abandoned mall, Bob learns of Candace's pregnancy and locks her in a mall's store to prevent her from escaping and depriving the group of a "good omen." Though Candace allows herself to be captured, she later finds the resolve to flee after another survivor is found dead a few weeks later and suspects that Bob murdered them for disobedience. Fearing that Bob will come after her next, she escapes from the mall, commandeers a car, and drives to Chicago, where she plans to start a new life on her own by finding somewhere safe to raise her child. This event demonstrates how Candace manages to finally develop the moral grit to turn away from the corrosive system she had been following since before the world ended, as she now had to not only stand up for herself but also her unborn child. Had she not chosen to flee, it is clear that her or her child's life would have been in jeopardy, and even if both had

survived they would only have continued to be exploited for the betterment of a broken, corrupt system.

Whether the protagonists of stories like *Severance* overcome adversity or are shattered before it is ultimately not as important as conveying the quality necessary to surmount it: that is, resilience of mind, body, and spirit. Each of the stories analyzed above fully explore the consequences of lacking this virtue, from emotional abuse to outright murder. In essence, all of these sins begin with enabling abusive people or systems to take advantage of others who cannot or will not fight back. And, as the novels succinctly portrayed, it is only through having the moral resilience to step back from these systems that once can truly become free.

# “Designer” Babies: A Look into Procedures and Ethics Behind CRISPR Technology

---

*Veronica Bratsos*

**Course:** Human Biocultural Evolution

**Professor:** Tj Gundling, Community and Social Justice Studies

**Student:** Veronica Bratsos

**Essay:** “*Designer*” Babies: A Look into Procedures and Ethics Behind CRISPR Technology

---

## **Assignment:**

Students were asked to write a research paper on a topic related to the course. One optional topic, “Post-Humans in the Anthropocene,” prompted

this examination of the research and ethics of the possibility of “designer” babies using genetic editing (e.g. CRISPR).

---

Genes are often viewed as the building blocks for human life. Over the past century, there has been an abundance of technological advancements in the world of genetics. While there are a variety of techniques used in gene therapy, one of the most prominent developments in gene-editing is CRISPR technology. CRISPR is relatively new and has massive potential to change humanity forever. With this, the science community has coined the term “designer” babies, which refers to babies that are genetically altered to eradicate a condition and/or defect, as well as to make sure certain gene variants are present for desired traits. The main goal of this research paper is to examine the steps it takes to bring a genetically-edited child into the world as well as the ethical debate associated with the rise of such technology.

CRISPR technology was first discovered in the late

1980s but its development as a gene-editing tool had not begun until the early 21st century. The acronym CRISPR stands for “Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats”, which is a basic description of the targeted genetic sequences (Barman et al., 2020). The process is divided into three phases: adaptation, expression & maturation, and interference; “In CRISPR locus, each ‘repeat’ sequence is flanked by ‘spacer’ sequence and these spacers match with the genomic sequences found in virus, plasmid or pathogen” (Barman et al., 2020). CRISPR technology is a growing force in the field of genetics and is still subject to development as more research and experiments are conducted.

The journey from meeting with a genetic counselor to bringing a genetically-edited child into the world is not an easy one as it is intensive and time-consuming.

Genetically edited children are typically conceived through a process called in vitro fertilization (IVF). The primary five steps of IVF are as follows: ovarian stimulation, oocyte maturation, egg retrieval, fertilization, and embryo transfer (Gurevich, 2020). During egg retrieval, the number of eggs “varies but can usually be estimated before retrieval via ultrasound. The average number of oocytes is 8 to 15, with more than 95% of patients having at least one oocyte retrieved” (Gurevich, 2020). After the in vitro process is completed, there is a waiting period that typically lasts 2 weeks to see if the treatment was successful. Embryo transfer is often seen as the final step of creating genetically-altered children, conducted after the CRISPR process. IVF treatment alone is expensive and can cost tens of thousands of dollars, especially if there is a need for egg/sperm donors or a surrogate carrier.

There are many reasons why parents might seek to use CRISPR technology to edit their potential child’s genetic makeup. On one hand, it can be used to decrease the likelihood of their child having a genetic defect that could lead to a disease or condition later in life. Many people who might seek to use this technology during their fertility journey have a family history and/or are genetic carriers for diseases and conditions that could impact their future children’s quality of life.

Although there was an understanding that CRISPR technology should not yet be used on humans, scientist He Jiankui used this method when conceiving twins that were resistant to HIV. The world’s first babies with CRISPR-edited genes were given the pseudonyms Lulu and Nina and were born on November 25, 2018 to an HIV-positive father and an HIV-negative mother (Rose et al., 2019). He explained the process of how he used gene editing in this case, “... He altered the gene CCR5 in those embryos. This gene produces a protein that most strains of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) require to enter cells. This genetic modification

was done on the embryos to protect the resulting children from contracting HIV” (Rose et al., 2019). These scientific developments have allowed a person who is HIV-positive to become a parent and lessen their fears of their children contracting a disease that negatively impacts their life. Many people with lifelong conditions may opt to adopt children or not become a parent at all so they do not have to worry about their child having their condition, but CRISPR technology provides the opportunity to have healthy biological children if they wish to go down that path. In some cases, gene-editing technology is used to conceive a child to act as a sibling donor if a couple has a child that has a disease or condition that requires a genetic match for treatment, though this raises many ethical concerns. For instance, if a couple has a child with leukemia, they might seek to conceive a genetically-edited child to provide easy access to a perfect match if the sick child were to need something such as bone marrow or blood stem cells (Cherkassky, 2015).

However, CRISPR technology can also be used to make alterations that are not deemed to be medically necessary such as choosing genetic sequences associated with hair, skin, and eye color. This process can also be used to determine the biological sex of a child. This is where the concept of designer babies comes from, that parents can choose specific traits to make their future children appear how they want them to.

There are growing ethical concerns over the concept of designer babies. The Alliance for Regenerative Medicine based in Washington, D.C. wrote an article against modifying human embryos, claiming that “... such work could be exploited for ‘non-therapeutic modifications’ ...We are humans, not transgenic rats ... We believe there is a fundamental ethical issue in crossing the boundary to modifying the human germ line” (Cyranoski, 2015). When CRISPR technology is used to edit the genes of one child, those genes can be passed down to future generations. This can be beneficial if the changes are to eradicate the possibility



of getting a disease, but this can be problematic if, for example, a parent hopes to have grandchildren who possess a certain eye color or height, so they genetically edit their own children to increase the likelihood of altering their potential offspring. If people use gene editing technology to alter physical features, they can easily become fixated on the idea of perfection, which could have negative consequences, such as increases in bullying and insecurities. CRISPR and other forms of gene-editing technology are currently very expensive, which could pose a problem for parents with a disadvantaged socioeconomic status, an example being those who come from low-income backgrounds and would not be able to afford such interventions. With there already being disparities in healthcare based on health insurance coverage, there is certainly a possibility that this technology could not be covered by health insurance if it is deemed to be cosmetic, or even if it is to prevent a life-threatening condition. There is also an issue in the viewpoint that human embryos would need to be created for scientific purposes to conduct research on CRISPR technology. If something were to go wrong, would the researchers perform a medical abortion? In contrast, if the child were to be born, would they make sure to support them as they navigate the world with possible side effects or other issues resulting from experimentation? These are valid questions and issues that should be addressed by those conducting CRISPR research.

There have also been legal troubles with the conception of designer babies. He Jiankui, the scientist responsible for genetically editing twins Lulu and Nina, was sentenced to three years in prison after being found guilty by a Chinese court of “illegal medical practices” along with two collaborators (Normille, 2019). It makes both the scientific community and the general public question what constitutes illegal actions that were taken to bring the genetically-edited children into the world and if their actions caused harm to any

of the involved parties. Speaking on the case, CRISPR researcher Fyodor Urnov said,

“The field of gene editing will carry the hashtag #CRISPRbabies in the mind of the public for a period longer than He’s sentence ... I hope that this stain will soon diminish relative to the positive impact that gene editing is likely to have in ethically treating existing disease. Moving forward, the real threat of severe legal action is the right deterrent for future Herostratus-like individuals whose hubris could drive them to follow in He’s footsteps” (Normille, 2019).

It is quite interesting to see how the actions of a figure who was once praised and is credited with making an immense breakthrough in the world of genetically-edited children can be seen as a negative influence on the public’s perception of his respective scientific field. While the public does not know exactly what happened behind the scenes, it is normal to wonder if the collaborators would continue their illegal behavior if they had not been caught. Additionally, there is concern that their actions could have negatively impacted the babies and any future children that were conceived using their techniques.

On a final note, gene-editing technology is a field that continues to rapidly change to this day. CRISPR is relatively new and was only discovered a few decades ago and more recently put into use. While there are good intentions of using this technology to decrease the risk of disease, it is important to acknowledge the possibility of people using it to achieve cosmetic alterations that may solely be based on preference instead of medical necessity. There is an ethical debate on the idea of designer babies, both from the science industry and the general public. New developments will occur as research continues and we can only hope that researchers keep their subjects’ best interests in mind. I think it would be both interesting and helpful for researchers who specialize in CRISPR technology to continue to receive updates from genetically-edited children as they get older to see if the technology was

successful and if their alterations are passed down to their offspring once they become parents themselves. There should also be legal protection for both the medical staff and the people who are seeking CRISPR technology, as well as legislation that regulates these practices. Perhaps it would be a good idea for researchers to maintain transparency to both their colleagues and the public by posting mandatory reports of their findings to a public database of some sort. This technology is very promising but there must be regulation in order for it to truly be successful and beneficial.

---

## References

Barman, A., *et al.* (2020). A glance at genome editing with CRISPR-Cas9 technology. *Current Genetics*, 66(3), 447–462. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00294-019-01040-3>

Cherkassky, L. (2015). The Human Tissue Authority and Savior Siblings. *Journal of Bone Marrow Research*, 3(2), 1-9. doi:10.4172/2329-8820.1000158

Cyranoski, D. (2015). Ethics of embryo editing divides scientists. *Nature*. Retrieved April 30, 2021, from

<https://www.nature.com/news/ethics-of-embryo-editing-divides-scientists-1.17131> Gurevich, R. (2020). What to Expect Along the Path to Conceiving With IVF. *Verywell Family*. Retrieved April 27, 2021, from <https://www.verywellfamily.com/understanding-ivf-treatment-step-by-step-1960200#egg-retrieval>

Normille, D. (2019). Chinese scientist who produced genetically altered babies sentenced to 3 years in jail. *Science*. Retrieved May 1, 2021, from <https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2019/12/chinese-scientist-who-produced-genetically-altered-babies-sentenced-3-years-jail>

Rose, B. I., *et al.* (2019). Genetically Modified Babies and a First Application of Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats (CRISPR-Cas9). *Obstetrics & Gynecology*, 134(1), 157-162. 10.1097/AOG.0000000000003327

# Attention Faculty:

*Please Nominate Student Writing for the*

## **Twenty-First Annual Student Writing Contest Celebrating Student Writing Across the Curriculum 2021-2022**

*Sponsored by the Writing Across the Curriculum Program*

### **Eligibility:**

- Full or Part-time faculty or Adjuncts may nominate
- Student writing may originate from any undergraduate course from Summer 2021 through Spring 2022
- Entries must be previously unpublished
- Short or long pieces, formal or informal assignments welcomed

## **Deadline: May 22, 2022**

**Judging:** An interdisciplinary team of faculty members will select the winners.

For contest information and entry form, please visit:  
<https://www.wpunj.edu/cohss/departments/english/wac/index.html>

For additional information, please contact:  
Chris Salerno, Director – Writing Across the Curriculum  
Salernoc3@wpunj.edu@wpunj.edu

**WILLIAM  
PATERSON  
UNIVERSITY**

**300 POMPTON ROAD  
WAYNE, NJ 07470**