

AKΦ

THE ALPHA KAPPA PHI REVIEW

ANNUAL JOURNAL OF UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH
IN THE HUMANITIES

VOLUME IX
SPRING 2023

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PREFACE

An institution puts forth a mission statement to capture its primary purpose, center of attention, and dedication. Lindsey Wilson College shows the depth of its love for education and the student body with its statement, “Every Student, Every Day.” The *Alpha Kappa Phi Review* is an extension of this mindset, with an interest in the work of all students at Lindsey Wilson College.

This volume contains a broad range of student essays. These essays span a wide variety of topics and academic disciplines, including detailed analyses of works by major authors and solutions for pressing societal concerns that have major implications on our world today. All of the essays that appear in the *Alpha Kappa Phi Review* have gone through a rigorous peer-review selection and revision process resulting in the inclusion of only works that achieve the highest excellence. All of the essays rely on secondary research and/or extensive textual evidence to support their analyses and claims.

The *Review* has sought to include a wide variety of writing from Lindsey Wilson’s student body with this grouping, encompassing the work of high school dual credit students to graduating seniors. This volume includes seven student essays on a variety of topics from imperialism to literary and political analysis to the science of caffeine addiction. The reader will find the essays organized thematically, not alphabetically, into three categories.

The first two essays critique areas of contemporary culture, with Morgan Bryant providing a film analysis of Ari Aster’s *Midsommar* and *Hereditary* and Gracelynn Akin exploring America’s problematic caffeine addiction. The next three essays, written within the discipline of Political Science, explore some of the most pressing issues facing the United States today. Herbert Grimm considers depictions of mass shootings within the media, Emma Peterson critiques the governmental response to the country’s declared obesity epidemic, and Maia Sapp questions the representative fairness of the prevailing first-past-the-post voting system. The final two essays consider human rights within historical and literary contexts. Cecily Wisdom sheds light upon the neo-imperialist forces which sparked the Bolivian Water War, and Shelby Armstrong explores the Black feminism of Frances Ellen Watkins Harper’s 19th-century novel, *Iola Leroy*.

The *Alpha Kappa Phi Review* is devoted to publishing the best student scholarly work that Lindsey Wilson College has to offer. We believe the broad range of topics and arguments within this volume showcase the excellent writing and research skills of Lindsey Wilson’s student body.

—Landon Simmons, Editor-in-Chief
April 2023



The editorial board would like to thank the following English and History faculty members for serving as Faculty Reviewers for this volume:

Ms. Mary Baker
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Each submission to the *Alpha Kappa Phi Review* undergoes an extensive review process in which it is anonymously evaluated by both student editors and faculty.

We are grateful to Dr. Paul Thifault for founding and establishing the *Alpha Kappa Phi Review* in 2015, then the sole undergraduate research journal at Lindsey Wilson College. We are also grateful to Dr. Tip Shanklin for publishing the third volume. Finally, the last seven volumes of the *Review* would not have been possible without the mentorship of Dr. Steffens.



Critical essays in the Humanities, broadly defined as the fields of English, History, Women's and Gender Studies, Philosophy, Theology, Theatre, Film, Political Science, and Art, are welcomed and encouraged from current or recently graduated Lindsey Wilson College students.

For more information, please contact Dr. Karolyn Steffens, Associate Professor of English and Faculty Editor: steffensk@lindsey.edu.

Analysis of Film: Which Ari Aster Film is Better, *Hereditary* or *Midsommar*?

Morgan Bryant

Horror films are prolific in today's culture: from Stephen King's *It*, with various reiterations of Pennywise, to Wes Craven's *Scream* and the multitude of sequels that it spawned. In addition, horror is a genre that has a diversity of opinions from those that consume it, be it a discussion of why one likes horror or what makes one film better than the other. This diversity of interpretations is expressed in various articles such as in Monica Jimenez's "Why do we Like Horror Movies" in which she describes how horror films are "... a mainstay of cinema, going all the way back to *Frankenstein* and *Dracula* in the earliest days of talkies in the 1930s and German Expressionist films like *Nosferatu* in the silent era" (Jimenez). Clearly, horror and horror culture has been prevalent throughout 20th century society and many opinions have spawned from the genre being around for such an extended period of time. These opinions of horror films often range from specific film elements to which films are better in comparison to others. While I do enjoy comparing horror films from various types of directors, I believe that in order to understand the nuances of what can make one horror film better than another, it is much more fascinating to view two horror films that are directed and designed by the same individual. That, of course being Ari Aster, who directed a two movie stretch that encompassed his directorial debut of *Hereditary* and his following film *Midsommar*. I argue that through looking at these two films by the same director, one can understand the many nuances of what could possibly make one horror film better than another. In addition, such a comparison creates an easier way of viewing two pieces with a subjective context surrounding them, as there will be general themes that are specific to Aster's work alone, allowing for more objectivity rather than two separate director's horror films. With that being said, it can be concluded that Ari Aster's film *Midsommar* is the superior film when compared to *Hereditary* due to its cinematography, sound design, narrative, and overall scare quality.

Before proceeding, there needs to be an establishment of certain specifics in order to thoroughly understand the fundamentals that are connected to the contents of this paper. First, I will establish what a horror film is, as well as if there can be objectivity in subjective cinematic analysis, and finally a brief description of Aster's films. The editors of *The Encyclopedia*

Britannica give a well encompassing statement on what horror films are in their article “Horror Film”:

Horror film, motion picture calculated to cause intense repugnance, fear, or dread. Horror films may incorporate incidents of physical violence and psychological terror; they may be studies of deformed, disturbed, psychotic, or evil characters; stories of terrifying monsters or malevolent animals; or mystery thrillers that use atmosphere to build suspense (*Britannica*).

With this definition in mind, one must understand that horror in its ultimate form is a genre that in all its facets gives some sort of negative emotion and achieves its goal in a multitude of ways. Those negative emotions, much like *Britannica* poses, can vary, and the ways in which they are achieved can take several avenues. In addition, the nature of horror is different amongst every individual, so every person’s perception of what makes a horror film actually a horror film is numerous as well. Coincidentally, this causes one to concede the fact that what one individual finds intriguing in horror may not be for other parties. As I will explain later, these are some of the inherent faults in attempting to apply objectivity to a subjective topic. So, while the definition above may not be sufficient to some, it allows there to be a somewhat partially clear understanding of the type of horror and ultimate horror film that will be discussed in this paper.

It should be noted that there is often difficulty in describing something subjective with an objective lens. In the research for this paper, I found that there are many groups from various levels in the film industry that cannot agree with themselves, others, or even fully describe what makes one piece of work better than another. Take the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences for example. For the past ninety five years, the Academy has been posting their rules and eligibility for films and through all the renditions of said rules, they have made no note on how their films are selected for high honors such as Best Picture or Best Screenplay. The aforementioned Academy, as apparent from their ninety fifth current rendition of their rules, simply titled “95th Academy Awards of Merit,” often focuses much more on the technical aspects of eligibility such as when the actual film is premiered, rather than how their voters determine what deserves the high honors of the awards they present (Academy 4). This coy nature represents the fact that even the industry giants often have a tough time laying out guidelines for how they determine what makes one film better than another.

However, through attempting to understand how to write this paper, I realize that often it is not an overall work that makes one better than the other, but the specific elements which ultimately are the deciding factors for what makes one work better. Again taking the Academy, one can look at statistics for who and who did not win as a guide to what may cause one film to be more favorably received than another. Take Ian Pardoe and Dean K. Simonton in their research paper, “Applying Discrete Choice Models to Predict Academy Award Winners.” The possibility of looking at various factors to determine what makes one film more likely to win an academy award over another is the basis of their paper. Pardoe and Simonton point out the fact that between the years of 1938 to 2006, there are connections between the awards films win that allow for them to win even more:

(b) Only two directors have won a Best Director Oscar for a movie that was not nominated for Best Picture (Lewis Milestone for *Two Arabian Nights* in 1928 and Frank Lloyd *The Divine Lady* in 1929).

(c) Only 13 actors have won the Best Actor Oscar for a movie that was not nominated Best Picture (most recently, Forest Whitaker for *The Last King of Scotland* in 2006).

(d) Only 26 actresses have won the Best Actress in a Leading Role Oscar for a movie not nominated for Best Picture (most recently, Reese Witherspoon for *Walk the Line* 2005) (Pardoe and Simonton 328).

This particular data which establishes a correlation between other factors such as directors and actors in the ruling of what makes one film better than another is the crux of what will allow a person to talk about something subjective like film in an objective lens. By being able to understand, like above, that often the factors of one director’s cinematography relates to the winning of Best Picture, or that an actor’s performance might influence the choice for Best Picture as well, it allows one to understand the fact that individual elements will ultimately be the cause of one choice over another. Of course, there may be films that many adore where they have to admit one portion may or may not be as good as others, be it sound, narrative or elements of that nature. Being able to understand that some elements in a film such as acting and directing may not be better than others will aid in understanding what makes one film better than another.

It would be quite a challenge to try and write about and analyze two films if no one knows what the films themselves are about. With that being said, once again for the purposes of this paper one must understand that the discussion of spoilers in the terms of the films must be

mentioned in order to describe various aspects of the movies themselves, particularly in the narrative portion. So, while in the beginning I will give a brief overview of what each film is about, further portions of the paper may include more intense spoilers that may, well, spoil the fun of watching the movie for some. However, I do expect that even after reading this research paper, the paper itself will be less of a spoiler filled romp and more of an additional guide in being able to appreciate both films together as well as independently through analysis.

Midsommar is a 2019 film written and directed by Ari Aster under the production banner of A24. The film itself stars Florence Pugh as the main character, Dani, with a supporting cast of Jack Reynor as Christian, her distant boyfriend, as well as their friends portrayed by Will Poulter, William Jackson Harper, as well as additional others. The film itself is a story illustrating grief, due to Dani losing her family from her sister killing herself and her parents through carbon monoxide poisoning. This immense grief causes Dani to slide into a depression and ultimately feel as if she has no one to turn to, especially due to a lack of support from her boyfriend Christian's obsession with his thesis research. However, from this thesis research, there is an opportunity for Christian, Dani, and their various friends to go on a trip to Sweden to observe an isolated community during their midsummer traditions. The trip, which takes up the remainder of the film, diverges into the aforementioned community being a murderous cult, who assimilates Dani into their folds and kills the remaining cast in order to isolate her and provide her a sensation of family (*Midsommar*).

Hereditary, much like *Midsommar*, is an A24 film written and directed by, of course, Ari Aster. The film itself was Aster's directorial debut, premiering in 2018, and was immensely successful. *Hereditary* is also a meditation on grief, however from a different perspective. In the film, the cast includes a mother named Annie Graham who is played by Toni Collette, with additional cast members being her son Peter played by Alex Wolff and daughter Charlie played by Milly Shaprio. During the course of the film, Annie must deal with the different aspects of grief such as her lack of grief for her recently deceased mother, and the subsequent immense grief she experiences when she loses her daughter in an accident caused by her son. Because of this, she develops unhealthy coping mechanisms such as performing a seance to connect to her deceased daughter, which ultimately results in the entire Graham family being killed, possessed, or in some cases both by a demon (*Hereditary*).

So, let us turn to the meat and bones of the paper: what specific elements make *Midsommar* better than *Hereditary*. First, let's begin with cinematography. Cinematography is arguably one of the most important elements of film, since it is the actual means of storytelling for which a director is primarily in charge. One of the best definitions of what cinematography and a cinematographer does is from Alexander Nevill's paper, "Cinematography and Filmmaking Research" in which he describes that, "... a cinematographer utilizes a variety of tools to achieve a cohesive visual narrative for a film..." (188). Now, what Nevill explains here is that cinematography is the ultimate narrative of a film. One can write as many words or actions as they would like for their characters to say or do, but if an audience does not see those actions or words in specific ways through the use of cinematography, there would not be a story to tell cinematically. Consequently, the variety in which one uses shots also has a significant impact on how the audience perceives not only elements such as the narrative but also the film as a whole. In the research paper, "Affective analysis on patterns of Shot Types in Movies," the authors describe the impact of diverse cinematography in filmmaking:

In film-making, the distance from the camera to the subject greatly affects the narrative power of a shot. By the alternate use of Long shots, Medium and Close-ups the director is able to provide emphasis on key passages of the filmed scene, thus boosting the process of identification of views with the films characters (Canini et al. 253).

With all this knowledge of how cinematography and varied shot choice impacts filmmaking in both a general film sense as well as ultimately a horror film sense, let us see how it impacts Ari Aster's films *Midsommar* and *Hereditary*. In *Midsommar*, Aster's shot choices are far more dynamic, varied, and interesting, which has been established as more compelling to film audiences in its capability to tell a much more persuasive and immersive story (Canini et al. 253). The different shots that *Midsommar* uses, ranging from wide, overhead, and steady, allow the film to emphasize key points throughout the movie in a variety of ways. In comparison to *Hereditary*, however, the shots themselves rely heavily and nearly exclusively on close ups or wide angles. While to some this does build a sense of closeness, the repetitive feeling of the shots creates a much more stale experience for audiences rather than that in *Midsommar*.

To continue, a portion of the cinematography that both films excel in is that of being visually compelling. Aster obviously has his own sense of style when it comes to his directing, and these style choices are apparent from both films such as the bright vibrant nature of

Midsommar and the intensely dark shadows of *Hereditary*. Yet, with the mentioning of lights and darks, that brings up the portion of cinematography that causes *Hereditary* to lag behind in regards to *Midsommar*, and that is because of its use of lights and darks. In *Hereditary*, the shots that make up many of the scenes are often so dark it is nearly impossible to see portions of what is going on. While yes, there are some individuals who say that this choice develops the fear of darkness in Aster's audience, the actual execution ends up creating a difficult visual experience which inhibits other elements of the film. In comparison, *Midsommar*'s vibrant and bright aesthetic actually lends to the overall experience of the film. For example, David Opie, a writer for the BBC in his article, "*Midsommar* and the Blinding Terror of Daylight Horror" explains that, "As children we believe that darkness is our enemy and the morning light, when it finally arrives, is our friend. But what happens if that fear is misplaced, and the boogeyman strikes when the Sun's still high?" (Opie). Opie's description of *Midsommar* and the ways in which it uses its brighter cinematography represents the superior nature of its visual storytelling. *Midsommar*, by being so bright, plays on the preconceived and somewhat misleading notion that horror must be dark and gritty, with horrific incidents only happening at night. In addition, much like how *Hereditary*'s cinematography causes a detraction of other elements, *Midsommar*'s cinematography allows for an elevation of its various parts, creating a superior experience from a visual perspective. So, in regard to each film's cinematography, it is apparent that while they both have visually compelling elements, *Midsommar*'s more dynamic and varied shot list as well stylistic choices in contrast to *Hereditary*'s difficult-to-view visuals causes *Midsommar* to be the superior film.

The next element of film to discuss is that of sound design. This element is responsible for all the auditory experiences audiences have throughout a film, be it music or noises experienced throughout the film. Sound design and the ways in which it is used is actually so important that Dr. Ann-Kristin Herget in her academic research paper, "On Music's Potential to Convey Meaning in film: A Systematic Review of Empirical Evidence" describes how "... music can influence the perception and interpretation of film plot and protagonists and can, therefore, be classified as an instrument of non-verbal communication..." (21-22). With the concept that music is a way for directors to demonstrate their ideas in an auditory way, we can look to see how Aster uses sound and music in his two films. First, *Midsommar*'s music is diegetic in that the sort of instruments used in its musical composition are the various flutes and drums that the

cultists in the film have at their disposal. In addition, all of the general sounds are kept to a minimum, and typically are that of whimsical almost otherworldly nature sounds, such as odd bird chirps or distorted wind gushes. In all, this fits with the aesthetic of the film from having Dani go to this isolated and fantastical commune that gives her a positive feeling of family, which can give that otherworldly feeling to her and the audience. Now, in contrast to this, *Hereditary* uses natural day-to-day sounds, straying away from actual music with the exception of when characters stand by radios or speakers or important moments throughout the film. This again speaks to the general tone of the film of trying to portray realism, and the somewhat more grounded experience that the Graham's are going through by grieving. One could argue that the subtle nature of the sound design Aster chooses for this film mirrors how it seems like all the music has been sucked out when people grieve.

While both films certainly use their sound design to portray their central themes and concepts in a non-visual or verbal way, there is a point that I must give in *Hereditary*'s favor: it uses its own sounds and music far more deliberately and effectively than *Midsommar*. To start, one of the most important sounds in *Hereditary* comes from Charlie, the daughter of the Graham family, and her tongue tick. The tick itself becomes a central point throughout the film since after she is killed, Peter and various other members of the Graham family begin to hear the click, signifying her presence. In addition to this important sound effect, Aster also only uses music in *Hereditary* when strictly necessary. For example, in *Midsommar*, music is heard throughout the film. From the various dances, to general scenes of walking, and of course the ending, there is music present. However, *Hereditary* only really uses music during immensely dramatic moments, such as the very end of the film or when Peter is at school and becomes partially possessed and begins slamming his face against his desk. These far more deliberate choices in its sound design, allow *Hereditary* to squeak ahead in this regard. So, while *Midsommar* certainly does have some incredible sound design, especially in using diegetic sounds that would be naturally heard in its setting, *Hereditary* uses its auditory mediums better to heighten the experience of the film and its genre.

Now, for the element that creates the plot that audiences follow and is the basis of film besides visual aspects: narrative. Narrative is quite important, since if there is no narrative, one would simply just be sitting and watching a bunch of pictures go by with no rhyme or reason. The first time I had ever heard of the term "narrative transportation" was when reading the work

of Dr. Anna-Lisa Cohen and others in their research article, “The Power of the Picture: How Narrative Film Captures Attention and Disrupts Global Pursuit” in which they define narrative transportation as being able to have audiences empathize with characters and situations to which they may have very little, or quite a few connections (Cohen et al. 1). In understanding this, one is able to see the ways in which *Midsommar* and *Hereditary* excel or fail in connecting to their audiences. To start, *Midsommar*'s narrative is superior to *Hereditary*'s since it is far less common story. Often, in all sorts of art mediums, seeing multiple concepts or ideas over and over can develop a sensation of sameness or cliché. For example, *Hereditary*'s plot of having the Graham family lose a loved one, deal with supernatural entities such as a demon, followed by the death of nearly the entire cast is something that is seen over and over again in the modern horror film space. These same narrative beats can be seen in other popular films such as in Scott Derrickson's 2012 movie *Sinister*, in which the Oswalt family moves into a house where there were various murders, a demon that haunts the house, and ultimately the entire cast dies (*Sinister*).

These films, while delivered in different ways, represent the sort of staleness that can form amongst audiences, which can ultimately make the various scares and narrative twists land less effectively. The horror space not seen in many years the concept of a murderous cult assimilating someone into their ranks as occurs in *Midsommar*. By having this fresh lens, Aster is actually able to tell a more enriching story since his audience is less likely to be recognize the story beats, creating a more engaging movie-going and horror experience. This also ties back to the concept of narrative transportation in the sense that through using a less explored concept, Aster engages the audience by allowing them to empathize with ideas for which they have less connections or examples.

Both films' narratives also have different degrees of realism that again ties back to the ability for the audience to engage with these films. In *Hereditary*, the film's narrative threat of demons is far more difficult for audiences to relate to. For instance, every person will be able to realistically say in some way shape or form that they saw their own mother crawling on the ceiling possessed by a demon much like how Peter does in *Hereditary*. Yet, what audiences can connect to is the type of realism shown in *Midsommar*. *Midsommar* is able to connect to its audience through the use of realism by describing how Dani strives for a sense of family and ultimately finds herself in a cult that gives her that feeling. This sort of realism—the concept that

individuals grieving may ultimately fall into cults searching for a family—is something that is unfortunately commonplace in everyday 21st century society. This situation is so real in fact that even in the *Insider* article “3 Reasons Why People Join Cults, According to a Cult-Recovery Therapist” by Julia Naftulin, cults will often prey on people, “... who long for greater human connection [and] may also be more likely to fall victim to a cult. Close relationships are a human need. By capitalizing on this proclivity, cults can be that much more insidious” (Naftulin). In portraying his characters and the realistic situations, Aster actually enhances the audience's ability to relate to the characters of *Midsommar* more than *Hereditary*. Finally, the last note for narrative that also somewhat relates back to the aforementioned concept of realism, is that both films have the overarching theme of grief. Again, both films take different approaches and, again, they both land to different degrees for their audiences. *Hereditary* takes an extremely unrealistic and overtly supernatural approach, jumping straight for the fact that Annie is so desperate to contact her deceased daughter that she would perform a seance. *Midsommar*, takes the more realistic approach and shows that Dani wants anyone to just sit and be a family for her, ultimately finding it in an isolated Swedish cult. While both films are unrealistic in their own ways, the audience is able to relate more to Dani and her character in *Midsommar* in the sense that when a loved one passes, one seeks community from those close to you (and less commonly performs a seance for them like Annie does in *Hereditary*). Again, all of this represents the fact that audiences are able to relate to *Midsommar* in a more meaningful way and empathize with the narrative, even though the story itself is far less common than that of the likes of *Hereditary*.

Finally, and arguably the most important element to horror films specifically, let's turn to scare quality. Now the definition of good scare quality is different between each person, and the means in which scares can come are from a variety of ways. Scaring and the ways in which one enjoys getting scared can change from person to person. As Marc Malmdorf Andersen et al. point out in “Playing with Fear: Recreational Horror,” horror “.ranges from mildly scary children's activities, such as playfully being chased by a parent or caregiver, to full-blown horror media, such as horror films and haunted attractions, which remain prominent in popular culture” (1). Considering this, we can analyze how *Hereditary* and *Midsommar* achieve the various ranges of horror and how ultimately one reigns supreme. First, let's begin with how often the two films actually stage scares. *Midsommar* paces its scares throughout the film, spreading them during its beginning, middle, and end allowing for a pattern of tension, release, tension, and

release. This pattern allows for audiences to release some of their anxieties, but also be able to experience more scares than waiting for one large one near the end. In contrast, *Hereditary*, while indeed having some scares in its middle portion, ultimately uses all its cards in the last ten minutes of its runtime. By doing this, it once again causes audiences to not be able to experience as many scares as *Midsommar*, as well as ultimately leaving out some moviegoers if the final built up scare does not amount in a way that they expected or wanted. In addition, *Hereditary*'s scares are also not as realistic. As mentioned inside of the narrative portion of this research paper, the lack of realism of the threat to the characters actually inhibits an audience's ability to connect and be truthfully scared. While yes, demons and spirits are frightful to some, most if not all audiences will not go home and see their loved ones possessed by demons like Peter in the film.

Yet, as scary as demons are, the actual threat and scares that *Midsommar* itself poses are actually that of higher quality since it is something that can actually happen to audience members when they leave the theater. Take for example the 2018 CBS News article, "How to Identify a Cult: Six Tips From an Expert" in which describes that, "Up to 10,000 cults still exist today in the United States, according to psychologist Steve Eichel, a recognized international cult expert and president of the International Cultic Studies Association" (CBS News). This statistic represents how scary the situation Dani is in, since if there are still 10,000 cults in the United States alone, the fact that she was assimilated to one overseas shows that this is a global issue that can involve every audience member that sees the film. This represents that the realism and relatability of the scares in *Midsommar* creates a much deeper and more complex scare for audiences, especially after watching the film. Finally, possibly my biggest point on why *Midsommar*'s scare quality is better than *Hereditary*'s is because of the fact that *Hereditary*'s scares actually are lessened due to its other elements. As mentioned previously, *Hereditary*'s cinematography is immensely dark, often making it difficult to actually see what is going on. Ultimately, this results in multiple instances throughout the film when, if one is not looking for it, a viewer could miss out on a possible scare.

One of the scares that is most often missed but perhaps one of the most intense is that of Peter when he is looking toward the camera. Annie, who is possessed by a demon, is shrouded in darkness clinging to the ceiling staring at him. While this is indeed a compelling scare, the scene is so intensely dark that you can barely see Peter's face, and often even at the brightest setting on

some televisions or computer screens, one cannot see Annie's figure without immense eye strain. One could argue that Aster did this to once again bring out the idea of the darkness hiding terrible things, but unfortunately the way he went about doing so ended up making it harder for audiences to see the actual scares since they were hiding too well. In contrast, *Midsommar*'s cinematography actually aids in its scares since it is far more difficult to scare individuals in broad daylight, as noted by film critic Opie above (Opie). An example of this is when Dani and her boyfriend Christian are walking around the commune during the daytime, the time in which most of the film is set. Since it is so bright, audiences can clearly see the various cultists in the background doing strange activities, such as burning bodies or digging graves while staring at the camera from a lengthy distance, developing a sense of unease from these very subtle scares. With such bright cinematography, Aster illustrates that the horrible situation that Dani finds herself in (as well as other individuals who are taken by cults) is something that can happen in broad daylight. All of this ultimately allows for Aster to scare audiences not with just the use of shadow but also the sun. Thus, I argue that *Midsommar*'s scares and scare quality are superior to those in *Hereditary*.

In conclusion, while *Hereditary* certainly does have certain elements like sound design or aspects of narrative and scares that are quite well done, if not more so than *Midsommar*, the overall delivery and the ways in which said elements work together are not as cohesive as the latter film. This cohesiveness and the ability to have all elements work in harmony with one another is the ultimate factor in what makes one film better than another. In addition, *Midsommar*'s composition takes all aspects of its elements in order to allow audiences to relate to a narrative that is less common, but at the same time more possible and real than the likes of *Hereditary*. Personally, I believe both of these films are worth watching for what they contribute to the horror film genre. In addition, both of these films present unique renditions of stories in the horror genre. To conclude, I argue that *Midsommar* is a superior horror film to *Hereditary* through the uses of cinematography, sound design, narrative, and scare quality.

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Caffeine Consumption: From a Former Addict and a Curious Writing Student

Gracelynn Akin

Headaches so bad it felt like I just ran straight into a brick wall, nausea so prevalent that I felt like I could pass out, so fatigued I felt as if I could sleep for days, and then wake up and sleep some more. These are just a few effects of caffeine withdrawal. It brings pain like never before. Whenever I was addicted to caffeine, I drank a Bang Energy drink to start every morning and ended every day with a nosebleed. I had no clue what was causing these nosebleeds, until I weaned myself off of caffeine. It is no joke. It affects us mentally and physically, especially energy drinks. Based on my research, the assumption that caffeine negatively affects the brain and body over time appears to be true. While caffeine improves focus and performance in the moment, consumption of it over time *will* have major consequences on the overall health of the consumer.

Like I said, I was heavily dependent on caffeine to enhance my mental and physical performance, as well as my mood. When I was tired I relied on caffeine, not sleep. When I wanted to do better on the ACT I relied on caffeine, not studying. Obviously, I was not thinking logically; how was caffeine going to give me the information I needed to do well on the ACT? I started drinking caffeine regularly when I was fifteen years old. I am now eighteen and still have to consume at least a little to get me through the day, but I would not call myself addicted anymore. There are millions addicted to caffeine today, with many of those being adolescents like me. This poses the question: how does caffeine affect the development of youth?

Alexandra Sifferlin, health and science writer for *New York Times Magazine*, says that “about 50% of adolescents consume energy drinks, according to a recent report in Pediatrics, and 31% do so on a regular basis” (22). Energy drink sales are on the rise, and for some reason ads are targeted towards youth. For instance, just watch any Bang Energy commercial, which always evokes good feelings. They do this by creating commercials that have trendy scenes, bright colors, using conventionally attractive people as the actors and actresses, and making it look “cool” to drink energy drinks. One commercial for Red Bull Energy featured a well-known NASCAR driver winning his race, and ended with the infamous catch phrase “Red Bull gives you wings.” Why are we promoting such a commodity that causes adverse health effects? In *Caffeine*, Amy Francis states that the FDA requires these producers to label caffeine as an

ingredient. However, they are not required to list the amount of caffeine contained in the beverage because it is classified as a dietary supplement (10). This is especially dangerous since the “safe” limit is considered to be between 300-400 milligrams (although this is dependent on the characteristics of the person, such as age, gender, weight, tolerance to caffeine, etc). Kushner voices that millions of Americans drink more than doctor recommended levels (9). Caffeine overdose is real , and it is going to start affecting more and more people if we are not aware of how much we are actually consuming.

Research similarly shows how caffeine directly impacts our brains, with overconsumption physically changing the shape of the brain over time. In an article titled “Brain Boosters,” it is stated that ““mental energy underlies everything in our lives”” (Raloff qtd. in O’Connor 26). Caffeine gives us physical energy, that is not new news. It gives us mental energy as well, but how? Caffeine-containing beverages, such as green tea and energy drinks, also contain L-theanine. Raloff mentions that L-theanine is a natural amino acid that reduces anxiety and increases focus, in addition to altering brain wave rhythms (27) and causing us to feel relaxed *and* awake. Another substance that is found in a lot of caffeine-containing beverages, such as energy drinks, is ginseng. Ginseng is a natural source of energy that is said to enhance mental performance. When we consume large doses of caffeine along with all of these other stimulants, of course we are going to feel hyper-focused. Amy Francis cautions that consumption evokes anxiety in some people (33). Francis also states that “moderate amounts of caffeine can reduce anxiety, while higher doses can increase anxiety” (35). Francis’ claim makes sense because when drinking an energy drink, *multiple* substances (including caffeine) that are said to “improve focus” are consumed all at once. Does it not sound like a brain malfunction in a can? Although it *may* improve mental focus in the moment (depending on the person and the amount consumed), how will it affect the brain when the same amount of caffeine is consumed tomorrow, and then for a week straight, and then the same amount for months straight? The more important question is how will it affect the physical brain structure? Caffeine altering the shape of the brain is a major con of caffeine consumption.

Since caffeine is proven to alter the chemistry of the human brain, what happens when the brain is physically changed? A couple of effects which would be noticeable include personality differences and mental health disorders. This is due to the fact that every part of the

brain has a set function. Whenever one of these physical structures is altered, it alters the manner in which these parts perform. As research shows, “Caffeine perks people up [...] ‘by blocking something that normally slows you down’” (Raloff qtd. in Lieberman 26). The neurotransmitter in the brain that slows us down is adenosine, which aids in our need for sleep. Luckily for caffeine (not luckily for us), its molecular structure fits right into adenosine receptors. As Mark Tarnopolsky informs us, these receptors are not just located in the brain, but also in skeletal muscle and body fat (3). The adenosine is left roaming in the brain because their receptors are blocked by caffeine molecules. In the long-run, adenosine will need to work harder to carry out its functions and get back into those receptors. This causes us to “need” more caffeine to keep us awake. After consuming caffeine for a long time, more adenosine receptors form in your brain in hopes that all molecules will have a home. What does adenosine do when it sees receptors open? Adenosine races back to their home to rest, causing us to feel drained. Another symptom of caffeine withdrawal is extreme fatigue, which is another major con of caffeine consumption.

A study conducted in *Science Translational Medicine* aimed to discover the effects of caffeine on the brain using mice. The study found that when pregnant mice were exposed to caffeine, they produced offspring that experienced memory troubles. Sanders mentions that these troubles occurred due to “the hippocampus [firing] off too many messages, a behavior that could lead to seizures.” (12). Kosofsky, however, “cautions that mouse and human brains develop very differently, so direct comparisons are impossible” (Sanders qtd. in Kosofsky 12). Although it is difficult to compare a human brain and a mouse brain, it is not illogical to assume that they have some similarities. Both organisms’ brains possess a hippocampus, which is responsible for learning and memory. Many energy drinks specifically say that they are “brain boosting” and “help your focus and learning.” That means caffeine affects the *human* hippocampus (like it affects the hippocampus in a mouse). Are these studies more accurate than we think, and can we compare a mouse brain to a human brain? While the brain boosting “benefits” of caffeine seem helpful while we are writing a research paper or in math class running off three hours of sleep, it is undeniable that caffeine is bad for our brain health.

Research has also been done on how caffeine impacts physical activity.. Tarnopolsky explains that “In addition to the ergogenic benefits of caffeine directly on skeletal muscle. There are also central...effects from caffeine administration that may enhance exercise

performance during endurance exercise” (3). Studies conducted in the 1970’s gave subjects only five milligrams of caffeine. That *small* amount was ergogenic, meaning it enhanced their performance. Energy drinks typically contain 40 times more than the amount consumed in that specific study. Many believe that the extra caffeine would enhance performance, but what ends up happening is the brain becomes overstimulated, and anxiety can occur in some cases. Ultimately, a great deal of caffeine does *not* enhance performance. Francis warns that consuming high doses of caffeine all at once is ergolytic, which means it can “impair athletic ability” (64). It can cause anxiety, nervousness, and jitters. This should not be a surprise to athletes, but it is hard to realize if psychological dependence is developed. When the brain becomes psychologically dependent upon a substance, it causes the body and mind to think it needs said substance to perform well. Psychological dependence is different from physiological dependence, which means physical withdrawal symptoms from the drug are experienced. For example, I used to drink an energy drink before every volleyball game I played. There was one game that I did not have an energy drink and I performed poorly. It is not because I *needed* the drug to play well, it is because I was already in the mindset that I was going to perform badly due to the fact that I did not have an energy drink. I had a small cup of coffee earlier that day, so I was not experiencing withdrawal. It was all in my head, all psychological.

Fortunately, caffeine does not cause dehydration (Francis 56). Caffeine is not equivalent to water, though, so it is important that if an athlete consumes a lot of caffeine that they make it a point to drink a lot of water as well. While caffeine does not cause dehydration, it does cause excessive urination and can distract us from drinking water. Dehydration impairs an athlete's performance. Athletes are losing a lot of water anyway, so maybe an energy drink should not be an athlete’s go-to beverage before a game. Advertisements and commercials may make these beverages seem “refreshing,” and they can even be made to taste refreshing by making the flavors fruity, or sweet in general. Our brains and bodies do not consider caffeine a refreshing beverage. When has Gatorade or Powerade, two of the most popular, replenishing sports drinks, ever contained caffeine? The answer is never. These sports drinks only contain substances that are important for an athlete’s health, like electrolytes, calcium, potassium, carbohydrates, zinc oxide, etc. Athletes do not require caffeine to perform well, they require hydration and proper nutrition.

We know caffeine gives us mental energy. We know small amounts can enhance athletic

performance, but most athletes consume energy drinks which contain very large amounts of caffeine. In those moments, we think that caffeine is benefitting us by giving our brains and bodies a good boost. What about early in the afternoon after an addict's two cups of morning coffee? Writer Cecilia Scott says that daily consumers are more likely to experience daytime sleepiness (30). This is due to the caffeine "high" that was already experienced earlier in the morning. Now the addict is experiencing the crash. And what about when an athlete is laying down at night, just two hours after their sports event and they are still wide awake? The athlete still has caffeine running rampant through their bloodstream. I have experienced both of these scenarios, which in turn caused me to be in a bad, non-talkative, non-energetic, negative mood. Scott states that "Researchers found that about 33 percent of teenagers fall asleep during the day. Most of these kids consume caffeine daily, while most of the 76 percent who do not fall asleep during the day do not consume caffeine." (31). If caffeine consumers were more aware of the adverse effects on sleep, I believe their lives could change drastically. Better sleep ultimately leads to better health in numerous ways and scenarios.

Caffeine is left roaming in the body for hours after consumption. According to Francis, coffee consumed at eight a.m. still partly remained in the body at eight p.m. (45). It takes an entire 24 hours for caffeine to be completely eliminated from the body, and when caffeine enters the sleep cycle it leaves you feeling drowsy after you awake. In other words, quality sleep is something we need. If we want to obtain exceptional sleep, we should avoid caffeine. If caffeine is consumed every morning, it will almost never entirely leave the body since it takes twenty-four hours for it to leave the system. Caffeine causes the release of stress hormones, so what is going on in the brain and body of an addict who consumes caffeine daily? Yet another con of caffeine consumption- being in a chronic state of stress (even if the consumer does not necessarily realize it).

Caffeine consumption causes the body to remain in a state of stress, which is due to epinephrine and norepinephrine being released in the brain after consumption. In a recently reviewed article by Cleveland Clinic (reviewed by a medical professional in March 2022), epinephrine plays a role in our "attention, focus, panic, and excitement." See how it is attention *and* focus *and* panic *and* excitement? These states of being are evoked all at once after consuming this drug. This could potentially be a reason that caffeine is said to cause personality changes. In an article by "Endocrine Society," norepinephrine "increases heart rate

and blood pumping from the heart.” Like epinephrine, norepinephrine has stimulating effects on the body. Both of these neurotransmitters are released with caffeine consumption, and both of these neurotransmitters are considered “stress-inducing.” This is why I claim that the daily consumer remains in a constant state of stress. The dependence on caffeine is not worth the stress, nor the adverse health effects.

Is there a healthier option? Decaf coffee and tea is a popular alternative to overconsumption of caffeine. Decaf could potentially have the same effect as regular caffeine on people who are *psychologically* dependent. Is this alternative healthy, or is it diminishing to your health like caffeine is? The prefix “de-” in decaf means “away from” or “off.” Decaf is not 100% caffeine-free, but it is a good alternative for people trying to lower their caffeine intake. The most popular decaffeination process, described by Julia Calderone, involves using liquid carbon dioxide to open the coffee bean’s pores and extracting the caffeine that way. Ethyl acetate is also used in this process. The liquid carbon dioxide does not pose health risks, but we cannot say the same about the ethyl acetate. Calderone states that “when inhaled in small doses, it can cause coughing, wheezing, and shortness of breath. At higher doses, it can cause headache, confusion, nausea, vomiting, dizziness, and fatigue” (n.p.). Although these are symptoms that nobody longs to experience, do the benefits of decaf coffee outweigh these cons?

I stated above that a chemical used in the decaffeination process has adverse effects, but it also effectively decaffeinated the beans by 97%. This means that an average cup of decaf coffee contains two milligrams of caffeine and no more than 15 milligrams. These amounts are much safer than consuming an energy drink, which contains up to 300+ milligrams of caffeine. Although exposure to ethyl acetate could lead to harmful health effects, think about the damaging health effects that arise from the overconsumption of caffeine. If decaf coffee is going to reduce the intake of this drug for an addict, then isn’t it worth the slight risk? It would be much easier to wean yourself off of decaf coffee. Since it contains so little caffeine in the first place, it is not likely for a person to become physiologically dependent. There are many health benefits to lowering caffeine intake. Better sleep is an example of a benefit that comes from lowering intake. It is simple: less caffeine equals better sleep. This is because the adenosine receptors are able to easily get into their home and rest without caffeine blocking them from getting in. Another benefit, according to

Dan Simms, is that “decaf may help reduce the risk of getting cardiovascular diseases.” Referring to the statement above about norepinephrine “increasing heart rate,” it should not be a surprise that caffeine can cause cardiovascular diseases. It is important for people with heart defects to consider how much caffeine they are consuming, as caffeine causes their faulty heart to work way harder than it should. Decaf is a great alternative for people who have health problems, and for people trying to quit their horrible addiction to caffeine.

Reflecting upon my research, I have come to the conclusion that caffeine is diminishing to one’s mental and physical health if consumed regularly, in large doses, or both. Being a former addict, I understand the pain of withdrawal. I understand how it affects relationships with others as I had to fight to stay away from the psychoactive drug. I understand the pain of feeling like caffeine is a necessity to function in everyday life. Many people have struggled with caffeine addiction because of its many addictive properties. The way it affects us psychologically, making the consumer feel like they could sit down and write their whole research essay in an hour, is not worth the damaging long-term effects. The way it affects the body physically, making consumers feel like they can do a five-kilometer marathon in 10 minutes, is not worth the daytime sleepiness or insomnia. Stimulants like this one are slowly changing the shape of the brain, which changes the way the brain works. Caffeine can change the way we feel, think, act, and perform. It is not fully understood how multiple stimulants (ginseng plus caffeine plus L-theanine etc.) work together, but “many experts say it appears to be a risky mix” (Sifferlin 22). Why are energy drink ads so bright and fun? This is appealing to children, teenagers, and young adults. Energy drinks have many different effects on people (an effect on me being nosebleeds, and extreme jitteriness in my sister). The problem of caffeine consumption in the U.S. and in the world demands to be recognized. We can fix this problem by not keeping the effects of consumption quiet, and requiring that companies label how much caffeine is really in each of their beverages. These facts do not need to be swept under the rug, people call for information. The evidence is all around us, every day. The evidence is us. Do we need caffeine to function? The answer is no, but how many people think that this is the case? How many coffee cups and energy drink cans do we see in our classrooms every day? How many of these beverages do we see in hand at large events? Think about it next time, and remember everything you have learned about caffeine. It will really show you how deep the world’s caffeine addiction really goes.

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**Mass Shootings, Firearms, & the Media:
How the media capitalizes on mass shootings through their criteria
and how they ultimately affect future shooters, firearms, and gun control**

Herbert Grimm

Introduction

Mass shootings have become relatively commonplace within the United States in the last few decades. Unfortunately—but not surprisingly—media portrayals of these events are often skewed and diverge from reality across several dimensions. Furthermore, many partisan media outlets, such as Fox News and MSNBC, capitalize on these events to gain viewership and garner support for policymakers. To the chagrin of gun control advocates, the extensive coverage and often partisan portrayals of these mass shootings might be pushing people away from supporting gun control legislation. Alternatively, by highlighting the scope and frequency of these shootings, it is also possible that the widespread coverage of mass shooting events is mobilizing more support for gun control. Given these two plausible possibilities, my study asks: How does the media portray mass shootings from 2009 to the present day, and what type of effect does the media have when it comes to mass shooters, weapons, and public opinion on gun control?

In this paper I argue that the media portrays mass shootings with certain criteria, such as identifying the shooter and portraying the dead rather than the injured. The effect of this portrayal of mass shootings has led to a “contagion” effect on future mass shooters, a rapid rise in weapons purchased, and conflicting shifts in public opinion when it comes to gun control. There are certain aspects of mass shootings that will bring in more viewers, such as casualties, victims, or the shooters themselves. The most prominent aspects of mass shootings that media outlets focus on include fatalities, fatal injuries, and the extensive coverage of the shooter following the event. The “contagion” effect spreads throughout communities, which could influence other groups or possible perpetrators through influence, coverage, or other actions. In the end, I conclude that the desired impact on firearms and gun control that the media is trying to bring about might not be met, and that this coverage is, in fact, turning the public’s view away from these goals.

Mass Media's Criteria

The way the broadcast media portrays the victims shows that the depiction is based around specific criteria. In particular, the media primarily focuses on aspects such as type of injury, fatalities, race, gender, and age of the victims. For example, the work of Otto (2020) shows that around 80% of victims in mass shootings were black, but only half of them were portrayed in the media. This same study went on to show that while only around 16% of victims in these shootings died, they accounted for 83% of cases depicted in the news, thus suggesting that the media tends to focus on fatalities, white victims, and younger victims (Otto, 2020).

Portrayal of the perpetrator throughout the event is another aspect of criteria that the media focuses on. This facet of the media's involvement in these cases can lead to "contagion," or imitation, effects on future mass shooters. Whether it is live, through film, or another type of media, the consumer is more than likely to imitate that person, but not focus on the supposed danger or effects that could emerge from these actions (Lee, 2018). With mass shootings, this likelihood of imitation is increased because of the extensive media coverage of the "shooter's image, manifesto, and life story and the details of the event" (Meindl et al., 2017). These are a few of the conditions that the media uses when portraying the victims of mass shootings.

Another aspect of criteria that the media focuses on is the portrayal of the perpetrator throughout the event. The portrayal of these shooters gives a viewpoint that might benefit investigations but influences future shooters. The media's extensive coverage of the shooter can have undesirable effects. One of these effects is the media sensationalizing the shooter, where the media includes exaggerated or vivid details of the shooting to arouse interest from the viewers. This portrayal brings the shooter into the spotlight and entices the viewers to want to learn more about the perpetrator. An example of this taking place is with the Parkland Shooting in 2018, where several news groups animated a detailed layout of the area and mapped out the shooter's actions before, during, and after the shooting.¹ The portrayal of mental illness is another effect when it comes to events following a shooting. After a shooting, the media follows a trail of evidence and information about the shooter such as manifestos, how they acquired the

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ures5yv6pkM>

weapons, how they prepared for the shooting, and sometimes a mental health evaluation. One study with a treatment and control group showed that the extensive media coverage of the shooting caused the public to have a negative attitude towards those with mental illnesses because of the portrayal of the shooters (Lee, 2018). The exposure that the perpetrator receives from the media has an impact on future mass shooters, one example is the growing negative public opinion on mental illness.

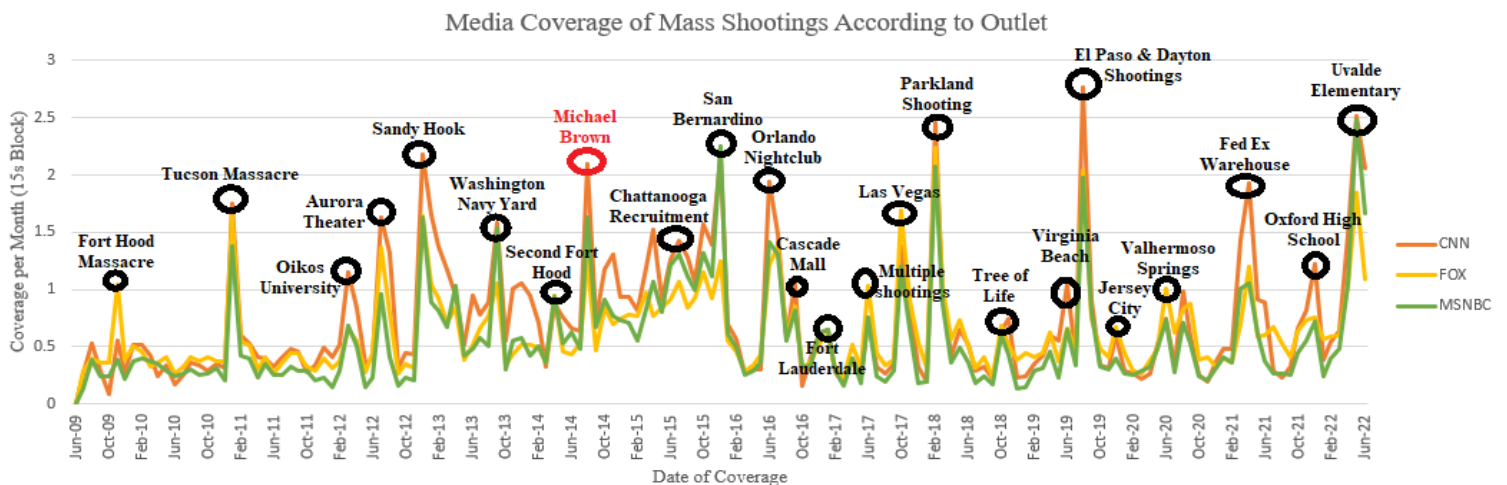
Another aspect of media that is regularly used is framing, specifically episodic framing and thematic framing. Episodic framing is when the media portrays the event as is and tends to keep outside context away from the story (Iyengar, 1991). An example would be a local homicide detective who is looking for the suspect and interviewing the victims. Thematic framing is when the media outlet portrays the event in a way that is part of a larger picture or meaning, which draws attention to that picture rather than the event. An example of this would be a mental health follow-up on the mass shooter, creating a negative connection between mental illness and mass violence. Since these mass shootings are relatively sporadic compared to other stories, they use this thematic framework to paint a bigger picture, such as the debate on what to do next: violent video games, gun control legislation, mental illness, or other topics (Guggenheim et al. 2015, 210). These aspects of media criteria pave the way for the big picture through the victims, the perpetrator, and the framing of the event.

Media Coverage

With the use of the GDELT television program, I will be examining the average broadcast times on mass shootings through several media outlets to determine if these events bring a rise in attention and coverage. The GDELT program allows me to measure the average broadcast time of a term or event over time since 2009. The main broadcast networks that I will be focusing on are polarizing outlets, such as CNN, Fox News, and MSNBC. The broadcast times of these outlets over mass shootings will be shown on a graph in comparison to each other. However, there are several limitations that arise from the GDELT program. When looking at mass shootings portrayed in the media, the data over broadcast television is limited. With the GDELT Television Explorer program, there are a few constraints when it comes to measuring broadcast volume over certain terms. With the search engine, the terms need to be either

separated or put within a (A or B) bracket to yield results, this one being (mass OR shooting). Another constraint is the limit on broadcast time and number of stations per summary. The search engine used went back only to July 2009 and was limited to three broadcast stations: CNN, Fox News, and MSNBC. The limited number of broadcasts could paint an incomplete picture, but incorporating three of the most recognized and viewed media outlets would suffice for the conclusion.

Figure 1. Average Media Coverage of Mass Shootings According to Outlet by Month



With the results, I’ve managed to locate and align mass shootings with the spikes in average broadcast time of the words “mass” and “shooting” per month. There are two false positives known: February 2012 with the death of Trayvon Martin and in August 2014 with the death of Michael Brown. These false positives arose when both the words “mass” and “shooting” were shown throughout the month. In the example of Trayvon Martin, he received fatal wounds during a “shooting” from a neighborhood watch member, which resulted in “mass” protests. With mass shootings, there are relatively large spikes in media coverage during the month of the mass shooting. Some of the spikes are, at times, double – or even triple - the run time of the average broadcast time for these events. Some of the most notable results are the Sandy Hook Shooting, Parkland Shooting, San Bernardino Shooting, and Odessa-Midland Shooting Spree. Each of these events took up about 2-3% of broadcast media coverage for the month on average. These are some of the results that have arisen through the media coverage chart and their comparison to mass shootings with the data by Follman, et al. (2022). These

results show that media outlets highly prioritized the coverage of shootings compared to other news options.

Another comparison we can look at is how each individual media outlet reacts to these events. The news network that puts the most effort and broadcast time for mass shootings is CNN, where most of the spikes have risen to the 3% mark. The media outlet with the lowest average coverage time is MSNBC, where the coverage during shootings matched that of CNN, but in between these shootings, had lower coverage time. In between the two outlets is Fox News, where they had more time dedicated to mass shootings overall but lower coverage during spikes than MSNBC. The only times that Fox News spent more broadcast time than the other outlets on mass shootings was the Fort Hood massacre and the Las Vegas massacre. These examples of major outlets and their broadcast times over the events paints a trend where these outlets compete over broadcast times at the same time of these events.

Effects of Media Coverage

Some of the effects of media coverage can be seen through the criteria of coverage: victims, shooter, and framing. The portrayal of the victims, and how the media capitalizes on these portrayals, paints an unrealistic picture of mass shootings and gun violence in general. This can be seen in the oversaturated groups and organizations that have formed in such a relatively short time. The portrayal of the shooter and the sensationalizing of the perpetrator creates a “contagion” effect that could influence future mass shooters. The study by Towers et al. (2015) shows that this effect can increase the chance of another mass shooting within a time frame that on average lasts around thirteen days. A similar effect is shown in school shootings, where the contagion period lasts around thirteen days, but has a lower chance of occurring (Towers et al. 2015). The framing of the event also spurs disagreement on the true nature and cause of mass shootings, which leads to debates on violent video games, the possession of firearms, mental illness, and other possible causes.

The effects of the media's portrayal of mass shootings can be seen through the formation of several organizations and campaigns, including the “Don’t Name Them” campaign, the “March for our Lives” campaign, the Coalition to Stop Gun Violence, Americans for Responsible Solutions initiative, and many more. These organizations, through the media’s

involvement in a shooting, allow for gun control advocacy to take the spotlight and capitalize on the event. Their targeted weapons and attachments are mixed across the board but going off the broad definition of a mass shooting, we see that a mass shooting must have a certain number of casualties with a firearm within one episode or span of time. One example would be the inconsistent and rapid influx of support and donations to these advocacy groups following the Columbine Shooting, where the support dropped back to normal after a short time (Goss, 2006, 1-2). Other than those aspects, the lack of support for federal legislation following a shooting does not bode well for gun control. These advocacy groups either must divert away from federal legislation or get bogged down and lose support because of opposing interest groups—such as the National Rifle Association—that wait until this influx of gun control support goes down to normal (Goss, 2006, 4). The result of these actions has led to disorganized groups that lack in funding and relevance with each passing day, such as “March for our Lives” following the Parkland shooting. This brings in an overall lack of support for gun control because of the numerous groups formed and the lack of sustained support from the public and in politics.

The effect of the extensive coverage of mass shooters has led to the formation of “copycat” traits reflected in specific actions taken by the shooter, planning before the event, and the presence of manifestos. These “copycat” traits are passed on and sometimes used by future shooters. The Virginia Tech and Sandy Hook shooters, for example, were inspired by the Columbine massacre, and “...showed signs of infatuation with Columbine through self-recordings, photos, and notes” (Lee, 2018). This is a result of the sensationalized aspects of these shooters, where the follow-up of a mass shooting can be used by future criminals. There is also the problem of shooters’ manifestos being more accessible than ever before. Previously, news outlets had to wait for a report from the FBI to receive word of a shooter’s motivation. Today, they can be found online through social media posts, videos, or blog posts. During the Virginia Tech shooting, several broadcast news stations used the social media platforms Facebook and Twitter to post information about the shooting and the developing story as it was taking place (Lee, 2018). This has allowed for the quick spread of information and has been exploited by shooters in the past to post their intentions, political ideologies, manifestos, and other influences. Before the Parkland Shooting, the perpetrator, Nikolas Cruz, regularly posted on social media about his political views, how he possessed the equipment over time, and several videos

discussing his plans before the shooting (Murphy, 2018). For victims of the Parkland shooting, they maintained communication amongst themselves and their family members through social media programs, such as Twitter and Facebook. The students were able to post their experiences and keep in contact with family throughout the entire event. Social media has allowed for the rapid spread of information that benefits the media outlet, victims, and shooters alike.

Through the thematic framework, we see that the targeted topics that are followed through are gun control and mental illness. Due to the nature of the thematic framework, it implemented these topics in their coverage, but with continued coverage exhausted these topics from gaining support from the viewers. With the media's involvement in both mass shootings and gun control advocacy, we see that it steers people away from the desired effect it aims at (The Economist, 2021). In the same study by the Economist (2021), following a mass shooting, there is a spike both in media coverage and legal firearm purchases. I should note that this uptick in gun sales does not even account for weapons bought and sold without background checks involved, such as through strawman buyers, gun shows, and other more shady venues. While gun control advocacy groups gain a lot of attention through the media's help following a mass shooting, this does not have the desirable effect on firearm sales or legislation. Because of certain interest groups such as the NRA, gun control advocacy is bogged down in federal legislation and either must focus solely on state laws or attempt to go through the federal system. In one study, pertaining to the Parkland shooting, there was a massive influx of state laws passed on gun control, in this case bump stocks. While in the same study, following the Las Vegas Massacre, there were little to no results for gun control legislation at the state level (Vasilogambros, 2018). The effects of coverage on both gun control advocacy and trend of firearm purchases yield the opposite of their desired outcomes on policy and public opinion.

Possible Solutions

There are several solutions that have been proposed by several researchers and reports, each at varying degrees of involvement. One of the most common solutions is to keep the perpetrator as anonymous as possible to prevent the spread of sensationalized coverage. This is recognized by the FBI's "Don't Name Them" campaign, where they keep the details of their reports to a minimum to reduce the spread of the "contagion" effect. Other researchers propose

that the broadcast media should reduce the impact they have on information about the shooting, whether it be through reduced broadcast times, limiting certain information, keeping live press on a leash, and keeping sensationalized aspects to a minimum. Another solution that gains the most support through the media's "big picture" framework is gun control legislation. Some researchers have put gun control forward while others propose that they are ineffective and produce an opposing effect.

The "Don't Name Them" campaign shifts the sensationalized aspects away from the eyes of the public and focuses on the victims. Some aspects the campaign attempts to move away from are shooters' desires for fame and glory, recognition in the media, and a sense of validation. The effect of these efforts is not measurable or could not be linked to any decrease in mass shootings. The effectiveness of the campaign is dependent on the media's efforts to deviate from the norms of broadcast media.

Other researchers have proposed solutions that focus specifically on the media's actions and how to regulate outlets. These include a reduction of broadcast times of these shootings, limiting the amount of information released to the public, and preventing live press from getting too involved in the event. One example would be reducing the information aired regarding the shooter's rationale and personal justification for the attack (i.e., lashing out due to bullying), which could indirectly influence another person in a similar position. Another example is to reduce the broadcast times of these events like the efforts to reduce broadcast times for suicides. In one study, researchers compared the actions taken by media outlets where the increase of suicides portrayed in media resulted in an increase of imitation suicides (Meindl, et al. 2017). These proposals could be measured, compared to other data, specifically with the comparison with imitation suicides, but their effectiveness could not be measured accurately. Yet again, these proposals are dependent on the media outlets' actions.

The framework used by the media has pushed forward the proposal of gun control legislation, where they need to regulate the arms used in these shootings to reduce the number of shootings. These organizations, such as the "March for our Lives" campaign and the Coalition to stop Gun Violence, use these events to focus on the larger picture of gun control and the importance of its implementation. These efforts, however, have also created undesirable effects

such as the negative connection of mental illness with these events. One researcher stated that the focus of gun control has specifically targeted mentally ill people from obtaining firearms, and as an effect created this false connection between violence and mental illness (Wolf et al. 2014). The researchers declare that organizations and policy makers need to focus on modifying existing restrictive regulations and increasing funding for mental health awareness and treatment. The effectiveness of these organizations can be measured by the number of laws passed on either the state or federal level with mixed results.

Conclusion

The media's actions can be seen using various perspectives of the victims, the perpetrator, and the framework they use for the event. The selection of victims creates a warped sense of gun violence when it comes to these events, where many are not accurately represented. The sensationalized aspects of the shooter create a desire for the viewers to look at the shooter's actions, manifestos, and step-by-step reasoning, which creates adverse effects. The framework used by many news outlets paints the event in a larger picture informed by the thematic framework, shifting the focus away from mass shootings.

The effects of these actions can be seen through the organizations created by the portrayal of victims, the "contagion" effect spreading through future shooters, and through the alienation of viewers from the topics portrayed by the media in this big picture view. The response to these portrayals of victims have led to the creation of many different organizations and campaigns which are not unified their targets, creating a disorganized effort for legislation. The "contagion" effect following the sensationalized shooters has spread throughout media and can influence future shooters to follow in their footsteps. The media's push for this bigger picture has led to the lack of support for these organizations and legislations because of the warped portrayal of victims and the disorganized efforts of each campaign.

The solutions proposed by several organizations and researchers have led to a divide between media involvement, media regulation, or no media presence. The "Don't Name Them" campaign has been known as the main effort to move the focus away from the shooter towards the victims and law enforcement. Researchers have proposed either to reduce broadcast times of the events, limiting the exposure of information, containment of live press, or reducing the

sensationalized effects of the media. The use of the media to push a certain topic has allowed for some support for reform but has created undesirable effects on victims and lower support for policy makers.

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Politics and the “Obesity Epidemic”

Emma Peterson

Abstract

This statistical analysis attempts to answer the question, “Why has the governmental response to the ‘obesity epidemic’ been so ineffective?” Before beginning the analysis, a comprehensive literature review regarding American politics and the obesity epidemic is provided. This paper will also address the issue of showing that the governmental response has, in fact, been ineffective, before moving forward with two main hypotheses. Firstly, the governmental response to the “obesity epidemic” was ineffective due to a lack of scientific evidence supporting the foundational goal of reducing Body Mass Index (BMI), which was found to be true by the scientific data available, but could not answer the research question independently. Secondly, the governmental response to the “obesity epidemic” was ineffective due to the focus being placed solely on weight loss rather than health. To test this, a cumulative word count (the number of times a particular word is used within a given document) was generated from four key documents created by American governmental organizations in response to the “obesity epidemic.” By comparing data on size-based, general health-based, and disease-based word usage one can determine the focus of the source materials, which was shown to overwhelmingly favor general health-based word usage, disproving the second hypothesis.

Keywords: American Politics, Obesity Epidemic, Body Mass Index, Overweight, Obesity, Effectiveness.

Introduction

Before the Coronavirus pandemic took hold of the global community in March of 2020, the biggest epidemic of the 21st century was actively impacting human life on a daily basis. It is a disease that impacts more Americans than “breast cancer, Parkinson’s, Alzheimer’s, and HIV put together” (Hobbes, 2018). This disease is overweight and obesity, diagnosed using the person’s Body Mass Index, effectively categorizing individuals based on the size of their bodies. Forty-five percent of adults are preoccupied with their weight some or all of the time and, according to Sharon Hayes’ 2008 research, nearly half of girls aged 3 to 6 report being worried about being fat (Wilke, 2014). While one’s size is not within their control, nor an actual behavior they can “quit,” there is rhetoric that one’s fatness is a result of gluttony, poor choices, laziness,

etc. when it is scientifically shown and generally agreed upon by professionals in the field that no one can control their body's weight.

No country has reduced their population's weight, not even America. Since 2001, the American government has actively been calling for action and reporting that there is a killer in our midst -the size of the population- and yet no program instated has been able to reverse the "obesity epidemic." In the eyes of most, American health politics have not done enough to successfully address the ongoing issue of overweight and obesity, even though the Surgeon General recommended action over twenty years ago. The simple question of "why was the governmental response to the obesity epidemic so ineffective" does not result in a simple answer. My first hypothesis was that the Body Mass Index, the scale used to classify individuals with this disease to begin with, is an inaccurate measurement that led to a lack of success for programs focusing specifically on BMI. Therefore, I had to show that it was firstly an unsuccessful tool of measurement, then continue forward and show that there has not been a reduction in the population's BMI, indicating that the governmental responses were not successful using the faulty system. The bigger question I hoped to answer was "why." I originally believed that the ineffectiveness of the governmental response to the "obesity epidemic" was due to the unbalanced focus on weight and size, rather than the actual health of Americans. This was the hypothesis I tested in my active research. I did this by using the documents outlined by the Surgeon General's 2010 release about the continued addressing of the "obesity epidemic," the ones they claimed to have successfully implemented governmental interventions, and analyzed the words which they used in each document. Therefore, a comparison of sized-based, general health-based, and disease-based word usage could truly show whether or not the actions taken by the American government *were* focused on weight rather than health. Upon collecting my data and analyzing the results, this was not the case. Overwhelmingly, every single document analyzed showed a focus on general-health based words rather than size-based or disease-based words. This shows that the governmental response to the "obesity epidemic" was targeting obesity at all; it was targeting health. Outlined in my conclusion is a more in-depth discussion of what I believe this means and, though my hypothesis was ultimately disproved, how this can further the discussion surrounding the American government and the actions surrounding the "obesity epidemic."

By reading this paper one will gain a cursory understanding of the research and relevant information surrounding the governmental response to the “obesity epidemic” in the Literature Review. I will outline my hypotheses and reasoning in the Theory section before explaining the Research Design and the relevant decisions made when choosing source materials and analytical methods. In the Results and Analysis section, my graphs and statistical information are presented and the conclusions drawn from the data are described. Lastly, any further questions raised and final conclusions made through the research process will be outlined in the conclusion.

Literature Review

History of Obesity

The presence of obesity is not a modern issue. While the term only came into effect in the 20th century, the presence of fat bodies is a constant in human history. As far back as 255,000 BC, there have been depictions of fat people in art, such as the Venus of Willendorf. It is generally believed that, as written in Garabed Eknoyan’s piece titled *A History of Obesity, or How What Was Good Became Ugly and Then Bad*, “In the evolutionary history of humankind, bodily fat seems to have served nature’s purpose by outfitting the species with a built-in mechanism for storing its own food reserves” (2). Food insecurity, such as that plaguing previous eras of human civilization, has been a chronic part of the human condition. Eknoyan mentions the 1993 Nobel laureate Robert William Fogel, who documented that chronic malnutrition has been the norm throughout most of human history. This has culturally led to a previous connotation of fatness being a sign of desirability and wealth, allowing fat individuals to escape the malnutrition most people face.

The medical consequences of obesity (a term that has meant ‘fat’ since it was added to The Oxford English Dictionary in 1611, though it did not have any particular classifications till the development of the Body Mass Index in 1972) began being researched in the eighteenth century. Eknoyan noted the work of William Cullen, who lived from 1710-1790, and addressed things such as “fatigue, gout, and breathing difficulties” (4). While medical research was done on the condition, the social stigma surrounding an individual having fat became present in the early 20th century. Particularly insurance companies perpetuated the stigma in the 1920s when studies of mortality and weight associations were conducted. By 1960, Eknoyan reports that “The study of obesity began in earnest” and it continued to change the medical field when “fat was defined as an organ” (5). This leads up to modern day, where the World Health Organization

(as reported by the article published in 2020 titled *Controlling the Global Obesity Epidemic*) “began sounding the alarm in the 1990s.” By 2001 the panic had settled in America, where the Surgeon General released *The Surgeon General’s Call To Action To Prevent and Decrease Overweight and Obesity* in 2001. This document outlined the official recognition of overweight and obesity (as classified by the Body Mass Index) as “major public health problems” and announced their goal of assisting Americans in increasing physical activity and more balanced, healthful eating, as well as environmental changes to maintain a “healthy or healthier body weight” (3).

Furthermore, in 2010 the Public Health Service released *The Surgeon General’s Vision for a Healthy and Fit Nation*. This outlined the United States Department of Health and Human Services renewed priority outlined in the 2001 call to action. The acting Surgeon General, Regina M. Benjamin, stated that she plans to “strengthen and expand this blueprint for action created by (her) predecessor” (4). They lean into preventing overweight and obesity through focusing on environments that “offer or limit opportunities for positive health outcomes” (8), such as home, school, and workplace environments.

So What’s Next?

The importance of how we frame the “epidemic” cannot be understated. In *The Politics of Obesity: A Current Assessment and Look Ahead*, it is explained how the frame within which we view the issue changes the actions and blame being prescribed to individuals on a societal level. Simply stated, “until fairly recently, (the) dominant frame is described in terms of *personal responsibility*, the view that avoiding unhealthy behaviors... is primarily the concern of individual consumers” (299) which effectively points away from actual legislative solutions to the issue at hand. The second frame is quoted to be “the idea... that an *unhealthy or obesogenic food environment* at least partly encourages rising obesity rates” (300). This provides a change from the responsibility being placed wholly on the consumer and adds the environmental factors into the argument. With this in mind one can move into the ideology around who is responsible. Legislative traditions must be balanced and the public’s best interests must be at the forefront of the changes used to combat the decrease in health for American citizens. Weiss and Smith state in *Legislative Approaches to the Obesity Epidemic* that, “There is a long legislative tradition in the United States of controlling and regulating food production, sales, and transport,” further arguing that, “what is required today is not the invention of a new kind of law, but a collective

will to enact legislation for the public health in keeping with a long history of public health legislation” (11). In short, there has always been a tradition in American politics of regulating the population’s food. However, there is a modern shift towards public health regulation as opposed to food regulations. They continue to state that, “a long-standing tension... pits public health against American individualism” and “health is generally regarded as the sole responsibility of the individual consumer” (2). The regulation of individual responsibility is an impossible task, however the regulation of health is within the reach of American politics.

America's health is a multifaceted issue. As stated by the Journal of Health Politics, Policy, and Law, “In an environment like ours it’s very hard to overcome the impediments to regular exercise”, which is one of the many factors that affect individual health. They continue to explain that, “it requires a lot of self-discipline to exercise in an environment where you don’t have sidewalks to walk on or where it’s unsafe to go out” (888). Urbanization and city planning is a major factor in accessibility to healthy practices, such as exercise. They continue to state that one aspect of addressing America’s declining health is to understand the economic factors that affect citizens on an individual level, such as worse access to healthcare, discrimination, and living in areas with high pollution and high crimes.

It is not any individual’s problem that their environment does not allow safe access to public spaces in which one can exercise safely, or where children can play without fear or danger. It is no individual’s fault that the only affordable food comes from cheap, ultra-processed items that are not as healthful as the unaffordable food prescribed in dietary recommendations. Frei et al. continue to state that “in rich countries the food recommended in healthy eating guidelines are often more expensive than the less healthy options” and that “working and living conditions, such as having enough money for a healthy standard of living, underpin compliance with national health guidelines” (3). They recommend national-level policies ensuring the “global food market does not target vulnerable societies” by creating “binding international codes of practice related to production and marketing of healthy foods” (4). This indicates that there are practical nation-level actions that can be taken on behalf of the American government. Effective public health policies will address vulnerabilities in society, particularly the vulnerabilities experienced by those in lower socioeconomic classes, people of color, and other marginalized populations. By changing the dialogue around the “obesity epidemic” to actionable steps taken to address accessibility to food, healthy conditions, and

increasing the standard of living, there can be an *actual* shift in the statistics around American health.

Theory

Where it All Began

At the same time the car company Honda was founded and the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights was penned, another issue was coming to the forefront of the global political and social institution's mind; The "disease of obesity." 1948 was the year the World Health Organization recognized obesity as a disease, not an individual's failings. Over time research and classifications were solidified and developed, and an urgency to act was blooming across the globe. More interest and awareness of the issue is brought forward in 2001, when, in *The Surgeon General's Call To Action To Prevent and Decrease Overweight and Obesity*, David Satcher, the serving Surgeon General of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, stated, "Overweight and obesity may not be infectious diseases, but they have reached epidemic proportions in the United States" (7). Before the official report began, Satcher called out the tendency to place blame on the shoulders of an individual when addressing the issue of overweight and obesity, and asked that one consider viewing it as "also a community responsibility" (7). This was the beginning of America's "War on Obesity" and the following national efforts to reduce America's BMI.

There is no single pitfall, nor a single solution for the posed problem of "the obesity epidemic," therefore an overarching look at the nature of the successfulness of governmental policies (and the factors that affect them) is the most desirable to understand the work at hand. There are a multitude of factors that play a role in any individual's measurable health. Most importantly, when it comes to national and international policies regarding health, weight is at the forefront of the conversation. However, in the two decades since the obesity epidemic was first pushed to the forefront of American minds, statistically speaking, have the efforts worked? Firstly, it's important to answer the question of whether the governmental response to the "obesity epidemic" has been effective.

Was it Really Ineffective?

The simplest way to quantify the success of any policy regarding the government's attempts to influence individual BMI through policy making is through the simple statistical data quantifying the number of adults in the United States who have been classified as having an

overweight or obese BMI. According to Statista, the rate of overweight among adults in the United States in 2001-2002 was 35.1%. By 2017-2018 these numbers lowered to 30.7%. On paper this seems quite an impressive decline in numbers. However, the picture is not complete. The prevalence of obesity among adults in the United States went from 30.5% to 42.4% in the same respective years. The overweight statistics may seem hopeful, a 4.4% shift downward is fairly substantial. However, the most likely reason is because a large number of those who would have been categorized as overweight are now being categorized as part of the 11.9% increase in obesity.

With the baseline assumption being that the governmental response has been ineffective, the following hypotheses can be seen as an attempt to explain *why* this is so. This baseline will allow policies moving forward can be molded to reasonable and attainable goals, leading to governmental influences having a positive health on the population's health and on creating positive shifts in terms of quality of life, movement, food accessibility, and equalizing institutional inequality as it appears in our structures and policies surrounding food, health, movement, and weight.

Moving forward, analysis must modify the evidence that the governmental response to the "obesity epidemic" was *not* effective. The following hypotheses will be addressed thoroughly utilizing pre-existing research and data to answer the ever-present question of "why?". The first line of questioning regards the Body Mass Index. The BMI is not an effective indicator of health, being ineffective at classifying minorities, and more frequently misclassifying individuals as unhealthy and vulnerable to certain physical illnesses that have questionable correlation to BMI. The flaws in this metric are an important avenue to explore when defining and addressing factors that influence the outcome of the governmental fight against the "obesity epidemic."

Furthermore, weight loss is shown to be an ineffective measure of positive shifts in one's health. The urgency surrounding the "Obesity Epidemic" is rooted in love and concern for the lives and health of the individuals. However, if the statistical analysis and professional data shows that weight loss is first and foremost an unattainable goal, but secondly a completely arbitrary measurement that doesn't indicate an individual's health or health risks, there is an ethical dilemma when using it as a fix-all for health anxiety. If this is the case then the policies must focus on other factors to improve the health of the population for them to be effective at

reaching the true goal at the heart of the “epidemic,” which is most likely to be health, not size change.

Analysis:

How Much “Weight” Should the BMI Have?

Hypothesis One: The governmental response to the “obesity epidemic” was ineffective due to a lack of scientific evidence supporting the foundational goal of reducing BMI.

The Body Mass Index (BMI) is used to classify which individuals are underweight, average weight, overweight, obese, or morbidly obese. In *Obesity and Overweight* it’s stated that “Body Mass Index (BMI) is a simple index of weight-for-height” which is “defined as a person’s weight in kilograms divided by the square of his height in meters squared (kg/m^2)” (WHO, 2021). Overweight is a BMI greater than or equal to 25; obesity is a BMI greater than or equal to 30, and are the relevant definitions for the research regarding the obesity epidemic, acknowledging the fact that underweight and average individuals are not prevalent in the discourse regarding the “obesity epidemic.” The National Health and Nutrition Examination Surveys (NHANES) collected data on the heights and weights of representative samples of the population, and is the strongest data on obesity prevalence rates. It reports that in 2007-2008 “approximately 68% were overweight or obese, and approximately 34% were obese” (Mitchell et al, 2012). According to most governmental and healthcare agencies, this tool is accurate enough to be used as a basis for policy changes and diagnoses. However, the literature touting its shortcomings is clear; The BMI is not an accurate measure of health.

According to Robert H. Shmerling with Harvard Health Publishing, research suggests “BMI alone frequently misclassifies metabolic health” and that “BMI may help predict health status among people who are white, but may be less accurate for people in other racial and ethnic groups” due to the fact that it was based almost entirely on statistics from upper class, white men (Shmerling, 2016). Christian Nordqvist furthers this argument in *Why BMI is Inaccurate and Misleading*, stating that, “a number of studies have demonstrated that some individuals with obesity have lower cardiovascular risk and an improved metabolic profile, while a subset of ‘normal-BMI’ people are metabolically unhealthy and have increased mortality risk.” Furthermore, In a PubMed Central study on just under 15,000 participants it found that there *is* such a thing as “healthy obesity,” and finds that “BMI only moderately increased the risks for diabetes among healthy subjects.” They also state that “over 20 years, 17.5 % of lean subjects

and 67.3% of overweight subjects at baseline became obese during follow-up. Despite rising BMI, metabolic status remained relatively stable.” It also shows that there *is* a way to be obese and healthy, which backs the argument that policy can and should focus mostly or fully on health factors not weight classification when creating policies to encourage and emphasize health for the general population.

Is Weight Loss an Effective Goal for Population-Wide Health?

Hypothesis Two: The governmental response to the “obesity epidemic” was ineffective due to the focus being placed solely on weight loss rather than health.

According to Freil et al. in their 2007 article *Unequal Weight: Equity Oriented Policy Responses to the Global Obesity Epidemic*, Norway had a successful effort to reduce the population-wide shift away from energy dense and high fat diets by using a “combination of food subsidies, price manipulation, retail regulation, clear nutrition labeling, and public education focused on individuals.” However, the National Institute for Public Health cites a consistent increase in Norway’s overweight and obesity levels in the last two decades of statistical data (Eduard Meyer & Holden Bergh, 2017). Why, under our current understanding of the “obesity epidemic” as an issue where the solution is as simple as lowering our average pant size, include the research showing that weight loss is not an indicator of positive shifts in public health?

Not only is health not measured by weight, and changes in health not noticeable in weight statistics, it is measured that “Intentional weight loss is elusive for 75-95 percent of participants of commercial weight-loss programs in one- to three-year follow ups” (Saguy and Riley, 2005). Some sources even tout the numbers to be even more dramatic, showing an unimaginable ineffectiveness for the solution that so often is hailed as the magnum opus of the “war against obesity.” In *Everything You Know About Obesity is Wrong*, Michael Hobbes cites that “chances of a woman classified as being obese achieving a “normal” weight: 0.8% according to the American Journal of Public Health.” These statistics are inexcusable given the current state of the political efforts against obesity, focused almost purely on weight loss and BMI as indicators of progress rather than actually understanding the research that shows weight loss is not only an unachievable goal, but it’s also not an indicator of anyone’s actual health levels.

Criticism of this viewpoint were voiced by Michael Gard in *Truth, Belief, and the Cultural Politics of Obesity Scholarship and Public Health Policy* stating, “science’s preoccupation with numbers and quantification, the fantasy of objectivity, the privileging of whiteness over non-whiteness, Western over non-Western, male over female, ‘man’ over ‘nature,’ order over perversity and reason over emotion, have all been the targets of feminist analysis” (7). He views the critique of the numbers on the part of activists as a more harmful approach. However, it can be easily argued that it is a necessary approach to this issue due to the impact this research and the subsequent political responses have on individuals, and the weight stigma and shame that comes along with the label of overweight or obese on people when it is inaccurate and ineffective on the individual scale. Moving forward while still using such metrics is a recipe for ineffective policies and a continued focus on weight rather than health efforts to change behaviors for the American population. This is the leading hypothesis to be addressed, based on the aforementioned information showing that weight does not equal health, and that the Body Mass Index is an inadequate measure of health.

Research Design

Relevant Definitions

The Body Mass Index (BMI) is used to classify which individuals are underweight, average weight, overweight, obese, or morbidly obese. In *Obesity and Overweight*, it’s stated that “Body Mass Index (BMI) is a simple index of weight-for-height” which is “defined as a person’s weight in kilograms divided by the square of his height in meters (kg/m²)” (WHO, 2021). Overweight is a BMI greater than or equal to 25; obesity is a BMI greater than or equal to 30.

For example, a 5’10, 180 pound adult’s BMI would be calculated as follows:

$5'10 \text{ } 180 \text{ lbs}$

$\xrightarrow{\quad 81 \quad}$

$1.778.65 \text{ } 2 \text{ } kg \text{ } m$

$\xrightarrow{\quad}$

$BMI = 25.8$

Case Selection:

In the US Surgeon General’s 2001 Call to Action they identified and posed potential strategies for addressing the “obesity epidemic.” They organized it around the CARE

framework, standing for Communication, Action, Research, and Evaluation. Secondly, they identified various levels in which change needs to be initiated using this framework: Families and Communities, Schools, Health Care, Media and Communications, and Worksites. These five sectors are stated to be guidelines by which action against the “obesity epidemic” will be taken. Appendix A outlines Federal programs and initiatives that address the research and actions on all levels and across states, tribes, as well as local and private sectors.

While the 2010 *Surgeon General’s Vision for a Healthy and Fit Nation* does not have a dedicated section outlining programs or initiatives in a direct manner as the 2001 Call to Action did, it created an “Opportunities for Prevention” section. In this it lists potential action steps towards making Individual Healthy Choices and Healthy Home Environments, Creating Healthy Child Care Settings, Creating Healthy Schools, Creating Healthy Work Sites, Mobilizing the Medical Community, and Improving our Communities. Of the actions outlined in these two USDHHS reports, they both call for improvements in citizen’s Community and Family, School, Work, and Medical/Health Care to reduce the effects of Obesity, so by focusing on the leading actions on a Federal level taken by the government as the result of one or both of these reports and analyzing them further one can determine their goals and recommendations from the lens of health, and whether they focus solely on BMI/weight loss or other health-increasing factors without relating it to weight loss. Selecting the most appropriate cases was assisted by having a number of factors that excluded or included programs or initiatives. All policies chosen should be after 2010, so that both the *Call to Action’s* goals can be acknowledged, but the updated goals show in the *Vision for a Healthy and Fit Nation*.

Firstly, for the category of Families and Communities the most prominent push for change was through former First Lady Michelle Obama’s *Let’s Move!* Campaign to end childhood obesity. Launched in February 2010, it began to be implemented a month after the 2010 *Vision for a Healthy and Fit Nation*. Specifically focusing on the <https://letsmove.obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/achievements> website page outlining achievements they made as they worked to address the “Obesity Epidemic.” This program helped pass the *Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act* that impacted school meals and snacks for over 50 million minors in the Public School System, assisted in the FDA’s modernized Nutrition Facts Labels, Launched the USDA’s MyPlate program, among other changes. As far as familial

and communal changes it has the widest reaching impact due to its nature and spokesperson, making it an ideal example to analyze.

Secondly, the focus in Schools has been on many fronts, however the largest nationwide school-based health effort seems to be The Presidential Youth Fitness Program. This program was started in 2012 by the President’s Council on Fitness, Sports, and Nutrition, and focuses mainly on physical activity to promote health. This targeted teachers and school administrators in particular and provided their resources to every school in the country. This is not a mandated, rather a voluntary program that provides the information and resources necessary for providing the health-related assessment for fitness in American youth.

Thirdly, healthcare has been a focus primarily in the efforts to make it accessible to all citizens. The issue was specifically addressed by the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, an “all new private health care and Medicaid expansion plans [that] cover obesity-related screening and behavioral counseling,” launched on March 23, 2010. While this act focuses on the issue of obesity indirectly, it was specifically providing access to specific obesity-related treatment that was not previously available in such an overt fashion.

Fourthly, the efforts surrounding Workplace change can be exemplified by the CDC Workplace Health Resource Center, which was last reviewed on February 29th, 2020, focusing specifically on the *Worksite Health 101 Training Manual*. This manual is the base document for their training for training participating working to enhance or develop health programs in the workplace. It addresses the “why” for worksite health, communication from leadership and culture development, data collection, program planning and implementation, and program evaluation (CDC, 2020). As a guideline for worksite health program development it can be used as a representation of ideal workplace health actions, programs, and activities.

Methods:

Analyzing these resources through cumulative word count can determine the factors of health such programs are targeting. By analyzing the number of times a health-related word is stated one can come to conclusions about why these policies were implemented and the results they expected to see. The statistical analysis will compare the rates of the words associated with weight-based goals such as “weight, obesity, overweight, and BMI,” the rates of general health-focused terms such as “health, nutrition, wellness, physical fitness, physical activity,” and the rates of disease-focused terms “asthma, smoking, diabetes, heart disease, and blood pressure”.

Whether the focus is being placed solely on weight loss rather than health, as outlined in Hypothesis Two, can be determined by analyzing the difference between word count of weight-based words as opposed to health-focused and disease-focused terms. If the statistics are even or disproportionately lean towards health-focused and disease-focused terms the conclusion that there is *not* an emphasis being placed on BMI and weight-loss. If the opposite is shown to be true, one can logically reach the conclusion that there has been an overwhelming focus on weight loss that may have been a factor in the governmental response's ineffectiveness addressing the "obesity epidemic".

Findings/Results

Research Question: Why has the governmental response to the "obesity epidemic" been so ineffective?

The number of times the words weight, obesity, overweight, BMI, health, nutrition, wellness, physical fitness, physical activity, asthma, smoking, diabetes, heart disease, and blood pressure appeared were collected, along with the total number of words in the document. As shown in Tables 1-4, each number was furthermore turned into a percentage by dividing the specific word count with the total word count, and then multiplying by 100. This then leads to the rate of use as percentage of total words in the document, a number that is comparable to documents of varying length and word count.

Table 1 (appendix) shows the results for the Let's MoveAchievements page. There is no disease-based word usage (asthma, smoking, diabetes, heart disease, and blood pressure), and minimal size-based word usage (weight, obesity, overweight, BMI), whereas the focus is largely put on general health-based words (health, nutrition, wellness, physical fitness, and physical activity). Under the stated hypotheses, one would assume that there would be a higher rate of size-based word usage, indicating a much greater emphasis being placed on obesity/BMI compared to other health concerns. This is not shown in the collected data. Using the same logic, one can come to the conclusion that Let's Move's Achievement Page has a greater emphasis on general health, as opposed to size-based measures.

Table 2 (appendix) shows the results for the Presidential Youth Fitness Program's *Physical Education Resource Guide*. The research finds little size-based word usage, and marginally more (but still unsubstantial) disease-based word usage. There is the highest rate of general health-based words, with 99 out of the 3234 total words in the document being "physical activity." This

leads to the conclusion that the PYFP may be more focused on general health than size-based health indicators of health.

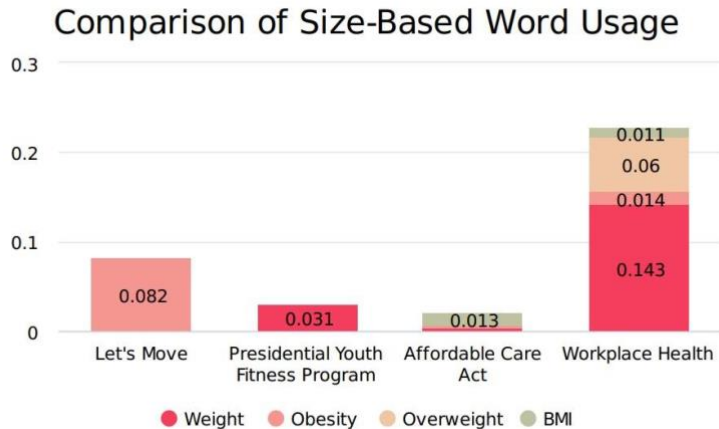
Table 3 (appendix) shows the results for the Affordable Care Act. There is, comparatively, more size-based word usage than the PYFP and Let's Move, however, the percentage of usage is still minimal. Comparably, general health-based word usage is used most often, and disease-based word usage is increased, however it is marginal on a similar scale as size-based word usage. This may lead to the conclusion that General Health is a higher priority in the Affordable Care Act's writing than size or disease.

Table 4 (appendix) shows the results for the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's *Workplace Health 101 Training Manual*. This document mentions almost every word in the Size, General Health, and Disease-Based categories, however a strong emphasis is placed on Health, with it making up 823 out of 18,217 words. This shows a lack of dismissal when it comes to size and disease-based health indicators, but an emphasis on general health in this particular piece of workplace health training material. These same statistics are available in line-graph format in the Appendix for better visualization and understanding of the data.

Analysis

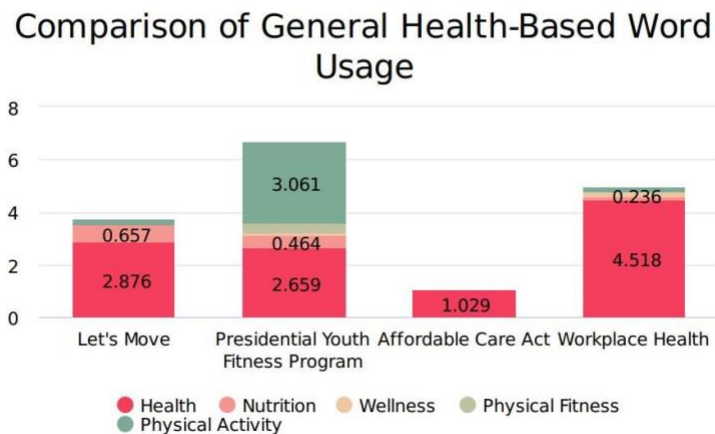
The collected data exemplifies the word-usage in three distinct categories. By comparing the different documents' usage of category-specific words, one can determine whether these particular goals were the emphasis of the program or if their priorities lay elsewhere. The main hypothesis of this research is as follows: The governmental response to the "obesity epidemic" is ineffective due to the focus being placed solely on weight loss rather than health. This would be shown to be true if the size-based word usage was disproportionately larger than the general health-based word usage and the disease-based word usage in the four documents chosen as representatives of the 'successes' in the main areas being targeted.

Bar Graph 1



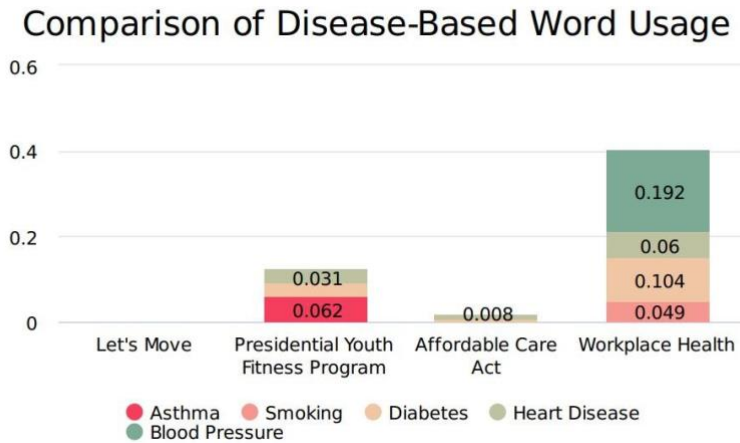
It can be seen in Bar Graph 1 (above) that size-based word usage was used most often in the CDC's Workplace Health 101 Manual, though for all the results are marginal. This does not support the hypothesis that it was ineffective due to an emphasis on weight. Weight was, in the word usage for these documents, not a top priority in any of the reference documents.

Bar Graph 2



Bar Graph 2 further disproves the hypothesis, showing that the majority of repeated words fall under the general health-based word usage. This shows that the emphasis of these documents dramatically favors general health over size-based goals and wording. None of the documents fall below 1 percent usage of these words, compared to the 0.228 percent in the Workplace Health 101 Training Manual, the document with the highest rate of Size-Based word usage.

Bar Graph 3



The usage of disease-based words is comparably marginal to size-based words, indicating that there is very little priority given to disease-specific health changes. Size-based words are used more frequently in every document except the Workplace Health 101 Training Manual, which shows a 0.405 percent disease-based word usage compared to the 0.228 percentage of Size-Based word usage.

The data collected does not support the hypothesis that the governmental response to the “Obesity Epidemic” is ineffective due to the focus being placed solely on weight loss rather than health. In reality, it overwhelmingly focuses on health *rather than* weight loss. While disproving the theory makes the hypothesis unsupported, it does not mean that the question posed is impractical, unimportant, or untrue. The underlying question when it comes to the “obesity epidemic” is actually exacerbated by this lack of proof. Why is the focus, then, for the general public, placed on an individual’s size when the actual mechanics and goals in the actions to curb the “obesity epidemic” are focused on the general health of individuals in the population?

This query centers around the *why* in these policies. If they are emphasizing health, then having the umbrella-term of “obesity” is an untruthful label. If they are emphasizing size (as can be assumed when calling for action to curb the “obesity epidemic,” a term that does not mention health in any way, but centers fully on one’s size according to the BMI scale) why are the policies not focused on size-reduction efforts in the schools, medical system, family, workplace, and community? With all of the collected data and these questions in mind, one may be able to create further research identifying whether the word ‘obesity’ should even be linked to these

actions at all. It may be true that, since the focus is not on size, the labeling of this ‘epidemic’ is in need of changing. The literature analyzed simply does not uphold the hypothesis, meaning that the response to the “obesity epidemic” was ineffective due to one of the many other factors at play. However, this ignores the underlying issue that comes up from disproving the hypothesis: are the goals for curbing the “obesity epidemic” incompatible with the needed changes in the various sectors of American life to allow a more healthful life for individual citizens.

Conclusion

Tying the Bow

In conclusion, it is true that the Body Mass Index is an inaccurate and inadequate measurement tool for individual health, partially confirming Hypothesis 1. While it does indicate the size of the individual it’s measuring, this does not mean that this is a true indicator of their health on a variety of different factors (such as their eating patterns, activity level, blood pressure, cardiovascular health, etc.) that would indicate health for individuals. This shows that, while the tool is ineffective, there is no proof that the use of the BMI as a scale is why the governmental response to the “obesity epidemic” was ineffective. *Let’s Move Achievement Page*, the Presidential Youth Fitness Programs *Physical Education Resource Guide*, the *Affordable Care Act*, and the Center for Disease Control And Prevention’s *Workplace Health 101 Training Manual* do not disproportionately favor size-based word usage. This shows that there is not a focus on BMI or weight in the governmental responses to the obesity epidemic, disproving Hypothesis 2.

Now that the results are collected, moving forward is a complicated endeavor. While the hypothesis that the governmental response to the “obesity epidemic” is due to the disproportionate focus on the size of the population and not the health of the population is incorrect, the research question still stands as something that needs to be addressed and the research should continue. Mainly, since evidence shows that the “obesity epidemic” has done nothing to lower the BMI of American citizens, there is still the question of “why.” Since there is not a disproportionate focus on obesity in the core documents analyzed, the next logical hypothesis is, “The governmental response to the ‘obesity epidemic’ was ineffective because their actions were based on increasing general health and not reducing size.” If this were true, then the labeling of this “public health crisis” as an “obesity epidemic” would be incorrect since the real changes being proposed are health-based. Future research should delve into the true

health risks that affect Americans and create policies that encourage and allow for these programs to address the specific issues successfully.

The contents of this paper have given an overview of the research and relevant information surrounding the governmental response to the “obesity epidemic” in the Literature Review. In the Theory section there was an explanation of the hypotheses addressed and the reasoning behind the proposed hypotheses. In the Research Design section there was an explanation of the source material and the choice of analytical methods necessary to address the aforementioned hypotheses. In the Results and Analysis section the comprehensive graphs and statistical information and the conclusions drawn from the data is explained. The Conclusion relayed information about where the research regarding the governmental response to the “obesity epidemic” should go moving forward.

What has not been addressed since the Introduction is *why*. Why continue further research? Why does it matter if calling the public health issue an “obesity epidemic” is inaccurate? It’s important to return to Michael Hobbes’ article titled *Everything You Know About Obesity is Wrong*. He stated that, while writing the piece, “I have never written a story where so many of my sources cried during interviews.” The emotional costs to people classified as overweight or obese are beyond comparison. Corissa Enneking shared a story where she was congratulated by her doctor for engaging in severely restricted eating disorder behaviors. Her mother brought her to the hospital concerned that she had been starving herself for six months. Eating disorders are the deadliest mental illnesses outside of substance addiction. And yet, because of the rhetoric and harmful ideas surrounding obesity and overweight since the beginning of the “epidemic” in 2001, Enneking was congratulated for showing these behaviors, not offering help. The University of Connecticut released a report in 2017 that 89% of obese adults have been bullied by their romantic partners (Hobbes, 2018). And, may I remind you, there is no way to reduce one’s weight. Diets do not work. It has been shown time and time again that an individual who diets will regain the same amount of weight or more once they stop the diet.

This is concerning, especially regarding the rhetoric surrounding the “obesity epidemic” and the perceived control overweight and obese individuals have over their weight. There is no incentive for individuals or institutions to *not* see weight as indicators of individual health, and a

sign of their own laziness (if the belief is that weight loss is fully within their control). If further research shows that the “obesity epidemic” should be changed to health-based actions that have the goal of increasing the health of individuals, not decreasing their weight, we can begin working on removing the stigma associated with being overweight and obese. The inequality and shame associated with these levels on the BMI scale should not be encouraged by labeling it an epidemic. The stigmatization must change, not the individual. It would show a failing of the government to adequately protect obese and overweight Americans from marginalization, and changing the actions taken on behalf of curbing the “obesity epidemic” must begin promptly. Hobbes reported, “The most effective health interventions aren’t actually health interventions – they are policies that ease the hardship of poverty and free up time for movement and play and parenting.” These are policies that will not be likely to affect the weight of the population. It will, however, increase the health of Americans on an individual level. Basing policies on this will create governmental programs that are actually effective in solving the issues they wish to address, unlike the governmental response to the “obesity epidemic.”

Appendix

Table 1-4 (Let’s Move):

	Word	Word Count	Percentage
1	Weight	0	0%
2	Obesity	1	0.082%
3	Overweight	0	0%
4	BMI	0	0%
5	Health	35	2.876%
6	Nutrition	8	0.657%
7	Wellness	0	0%
8	Physical Fitness	0	0%
9	Physical Activity	3	0.246%
10	Asthma	0	0%
11	Smoking	0	0%
12	Diabetes	0	0%
13	Heart Disease	0	0%
14	Blood Pressure	0	0%

*Total words: 1217

	Word	Word Count	Percentage
1	Weight	1	0.031%
2	Obesity	0	0%
3	Overweight	0	0%
4	BMI	0	0%
5	Health	86	2.659%
6	Nutrition	15	0.464%
7	Wellness	4	0.124%
8	Physical Fitness	12	0.371%
9	Physical Activity	99	3.061%
10	Asthma	2	0.0629%
11	Smoking	0	0%
12	Diabetes	1	0.031%
13	Heart Disease	1	0.031%
14	Blood Pressure	0	0%

*Total words: 3234

Affordable Care Act

	Word	Word Count	Percentage
1	Weight	20	0.005%
2	Obesity	12	0.003%
3	Overweight	1	0.0002%
4	BMI	53	0.013%
5	Health	4359	1.029%
6	Nutrition	37	0.009%
7	Wellness	98	0.023%
8	Physical Fitness	1	0.0002%
9	Physical Activity	10	0.002%
10	Asthma	1	0.0002%
11	Smoking	12	0.003%
12	Diabetes	28	0.007%
13	Heart Disease	33	0.008%
14	Blood Pressure	3	0.0007%

*Total words: 423,638

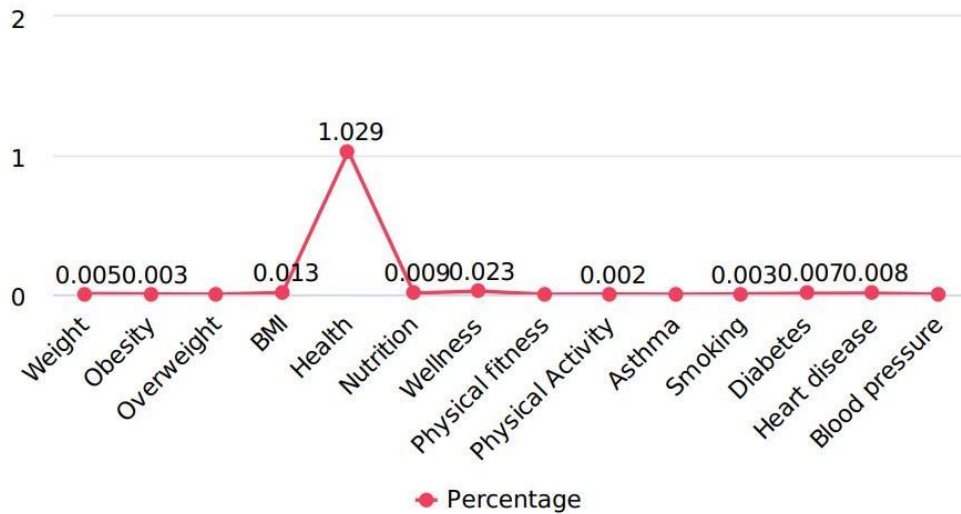
Workplace Health 101 Training Manual

	Word	Word Count	Percentage
1	Weight	26	0.143%
2	Obesity	19	0.014%
3	Overweight	11	0.06%
4	BMI	2	0.011%
5	Health	823	4.518%
6	Nutrition	13	0.071%
7	Wellness	43	0.236%
8	Physical Fitness	1	0.005%
9	Physical Activity	27	0.148%
10	Asthma	0	0%
11	Smoking	9	0.049%
12	Diabetes	19	0.104%
13	Heart Disease	11	0.06%
14	Blood Pressure	35	0.192%

*Total words: 423,638

Graph 1

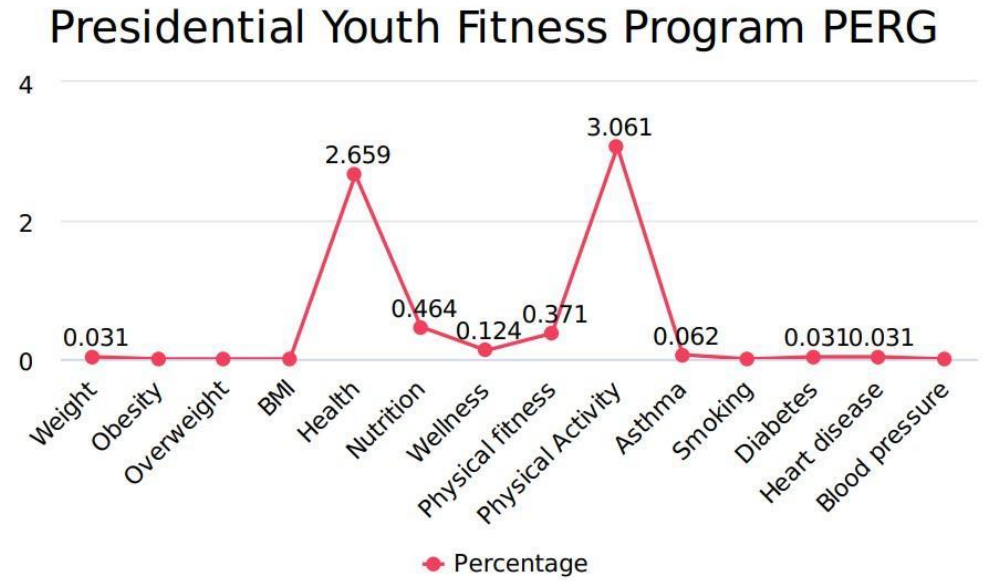
Affordable Care Act



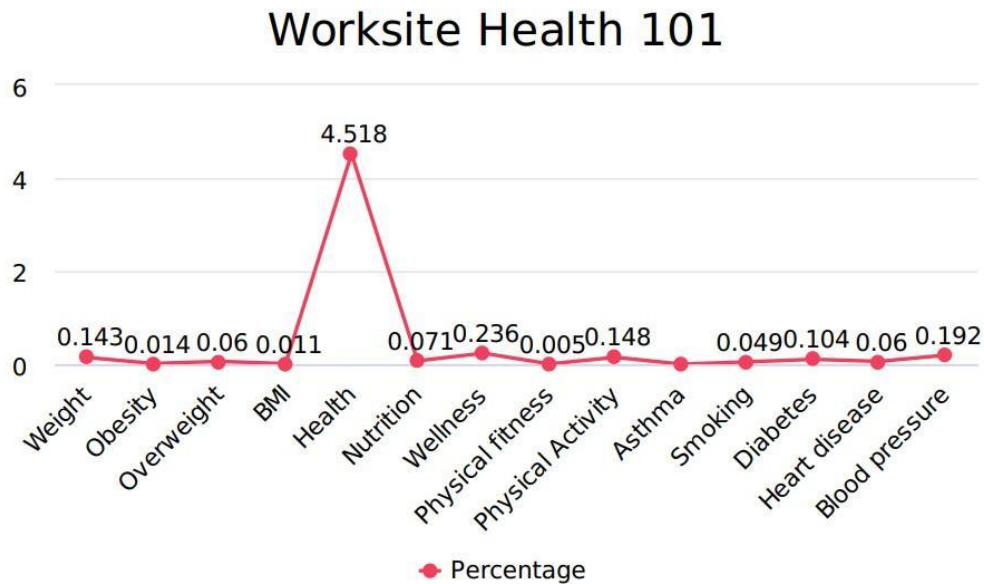
Graph 2



Graph 3



Graph 4



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The Problem with First Past the Post

Maia Sapp

The purpose of a democracy is to grant the people power to control their government and to allow for their voices to be heard. The purpose of representatives is to represent every person in their constituency. Yet, why is it that the current most common voting system in America is a system where only the plurality leading party receives representation? The current system in the US for electing congressmen is called first past the post. This is a system in which members of Congress are elected through single member districts and the candidate with a plurality of votes is elected to Congress. A plurality of votes versus a majority of votes means that the candidate only needs to receive the highest number of votes, not necessarily 50% of them, as would be the case with a majority. Many resulting factors of first past the post contribute to its overall ineffectiveness, such as wasted votes, a decrease in voter turnout, and homogeneity in policies discussed in Congress. There are a plethora of problems with this system of voting that not only negatively affects the voters of America, but also the functionality of Congress. An example of an incumbent official who was elected with a mere plurality of votes is Carrie Delrosso, a former member of Pennsylvania's House of Representatives. Delrosso won the Republican primary with only 26% of the votes, consequently leaving 74% of Republicans unrepresented (Hutchinson, 2023). The voting system of first past the post is accompanied by a wide range of problems and the best solution to this electoral disaster is proportional representation. This system would help third parties into Congress, better represent the constituency of a district, and eliminate wasted votes.

Now that it has been addressed that the current system of first-past-the-post voting is severely lacking, there is a dire need for a solution and the best alternative voting system is that of proportional representation. This is a system where congressmen are elected through multi-member districts rather than the single member districts of first past the post. Proportional representation has its roots in Denmark in 1855 where it was first put into practice and "continuously used since 1867, in the election of 54 of the 66 members of the landsting or upper chamber of the riksdag" (Aylesworth, 1908). The seats are won by parties, rather than individual candidates, and are apportioned to the makeup of a constituency to best represent the electorate. For example, if a district was to be allotted 10 seats, the party to receive 50% of the

votes would fill five of those seats with their politicians, the party to receive 30% of the votes would fill 3 seats and so on. This is a system that is designed to “promote greater fairness to minority parties and more diversity in social representation” (Norris, 1997, pg. 298). These are both qualities which are lacking in the first-past-the-post system.

This solution is preferable to first past the post in many ways. For one, it would get rid of wasted votes. Wasted votes is a problem that appears with a plurality system, and they can materialize in many different ways. Under the system of first past the post, “... the electors ... realize that their votes are wasted if they continue to give them to the third party; whence their natural tendency to transfer their vote to the less evil of its two adversaries in order to prevent the success of the greater evil” (Fisher, 1973, pg. 293). The consequence of this is higher polarization, as third parties are rarely able to conquer the idea of a wasted vote and gain enough support. Wasted votes are also accompanied by the phenomenon of vote splitting. Vote splitting is when votes are distributed across similar candidates, which reduces the chances of any of those candidates winning and results in many wasted votes. Even if the majority of the population was Democratic, a Republican could win the seat if the votes were split amongst different candidates. Such an event occurred in Canada during their 2006, 2008, and 2011 federal elections, when vote splits between the two major parties, Liberals and NDPs, led to the election of the Conservative Party (Heard, 2021). Proportional representation by party lists would completely get rid of vote splitting. The idea of wasted votes also inhibits voter turnout. When people become aware that their vote does not matter, they are less likely to vote at all. For instance, if a person lives in a predominantly right-leaning area, then they would feel as though it would be a waste of time to vote for a left-wing candidate. Proportional representation using party lists would be able to solve this dilemma because instead of votes being wasted on a candidate that would not have any chance of succeeding, votes would act as a measurement of the presence of supporters of a party in a district and help that party have a seat in Congress. Undoubtedly, proportional representation would create a better Congress because of the diversity that it would bring. Due to the two-party system in America, third parties have little to no chance of being elected. Congress is solely composed of either Republicans or Democrats and it makes for a very polarized and consistent system. The major parties continue to have the same ideas, and they tend to focus on the same issues. This lack of diversity has made for a stagnant and unproductive legislative branch. The use of this new system would bring new ideas

to Congress and new representation. Issues that have thus far been overlooked could finally be addressed, and progress would be seen from across different policy areas.

Finally, proportional representation effectively represents the entire constituency. Subsequently, this ensures that a single person's vote matters more with proportional representation than under first past the post. Essentially, this means that a minority would not be swallowed up by a majority party. This fact is enough to restore the public's faith in America's democracy and there would be a significant rise in voter turnout, which is a goal that the federal government should strive for because a larger voting body means a more successful democratic nation. Representation is the entire point of a democratic government. It is the official duty of any incumbent to represent their constituency and under the current system that is impossible to do. The fact that proportionate representation achieves the goal behind democracy is reason enough to ensure its implementation.

Delineating the structure of an ideal congress is essential to affirming the validity of the argument of this essay. An improved Congress is one that has more diversity in its members, so that new ideas and issues can be brought up and addressed. Having a two-party system has made for a polarized and outdated Congress, where innovation and progress has been hard to achieve. A better Congress is also one that better represents the people. Under a plurality system, not even the majority of the people in that constituency are represented. To have such a system in place is a failure to the democratic ideals this country is built upon. Congress must be adapted to better represent the people so that a content public body may be acquired and peace in the nation achieved.

An alternative voting method that differs from the proportional representation is ranked-choice voting. Ranked-choice voting is when the electorate ranks their candidates, from most preferred to least, on their ballot. The issue with this alternative is that it makes it even harder for third parties to have any sway over the two major parties. Under the plurality system, a third party is able to draw voters away due to the aforementioned vote-splitting concept. Major parties, being aware of this phenomenon, would acquiesce to some of the issues of importance to third parties so as to not lose their voters and, therefore, the election. Under a ranked-choice system that incentive to adopt aspects of the third-party platform is gone, making it impossible for third parties to make any impact on the political system. Approval voting is another proposed alternative to first past the post. This is a single-member district system as well, where voters

choose any number of candidates and the candidate chosen the most would win (“Approval Voting,” 2022). The reason that approval voting is not as sufficient of a solution as proportional representation is because picking multiple candidates would hurt a voter’s chances of their first choice being elected. Essentially, a voter would be both a supporter and also create direct competition for their candidate.

One fallacy found by opponents of proportional representation is that “any political association can call itself a party” and therefore be elected to Congress, even if their platform is only one issue. Allowing a party whose sole purpose is to further the agenda of one issue to be voted into Congress would cause chaos. To solve this problem, a plausible solution would be that to be considered a party, the group must meet a cohesive list of standards that would prohibit the aforementioned phenomenon from happening. It would be fairly straightforward to compile a list of stipulations concerning what can be considered a political party and judging potential parties by it. Another argument made against proportional representation is that voting for parties rather than an individual would decrease the value of the politician and increase the value of the party. In many ways, this is already the situation we find ourselves in. Many people see their party on a ballot and automatically vote for it, perhaps without even knowing the names of those they voted for. This is illustrated in the results of a poll conducted by the news agency, Reuters. In the aforementioned poll it was determined that 34% of registered Republican voters and 32.5% of registered Democratic voters did not know the names of the candidate that they voted for (What's in a name?, 2018). While it is true that proportionate representation would perpetuate this phenomenon, this in no way decreases its superiority to first past the post, as it does the same thing.

To conclude, first-past-the-post voting is an extremely flawed system that, unfortunately, rules elections in the United States. Its use is undemocratic and outdated, and the best alternative voting practice is proportional representation. Proportional representation provides a solution that addresses most, if not all, of the problems in the first past the post system and eradicates them. It ensures a chance for third parties to make it into Congress, eliminates wasted votes, and better represents the wants of the public. Overall, it is a system that would give new hope to the citizens of America and bring the country into a new political age.

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Imperialism, Water Scarcity, and Human Rights

Cecily Wisdom

Masses of people marched in the streets of Cochamba, a city located in the Latin American country of Bolivia, in 1999. People were yelling and chanting, all with one shared goal. These people were coming together to draw attention to an issue that was very important in the country. Signs that said, “agua para el pueblo,” or “water for the town” were being carried by exhausted protestors. They were calling for change regarding the most basic human necessity: water.

These protestors were specifically speaking out against the privatization of water. Bolivia is nestled in the western part of South America.² Notable for its numerous natural resources, the highlands of Bolivia in the Andes Mountains attract a large amount of mining, commercial, and business investment.³ Contradicting this, the country is extremely impoverished. Known as one of the poorest countries in Latin America, Bolivia also takes the title of the country with the highest income inequality in the western hemisphere.⁴ Bolivia’s key issues include high infant mortality rates, chronic malnutrition in children, and a lack of access to clean water and sanitation.⁵

The twentieth century for Bolivia included reforms and revolts as an act of protest against a troubled past. Colonialism in the Americas had lasted for three hundred years and independence was relatively recent. Economic experiments were conducted within the country post independence, which ultimately resulted in debt for Bolivia, thus creating the necessity to rely on international lenders. This debt was owed to foreign investors, most of which were western powers. This serves as a model of neocolonialism or the continued economic superiority of the colonizer over the formerly colonized. In an effort to remedy all of the turmoil, it was a natural progression to utilize natural resources to help with the issues. What ensued was even more detrimental to the people of Bolivia, with one example being the privatization of water.

² “Bolivia,” Britannica.

³ “Bolivia,” Britannica.

⁴ Morgan, Eliza. Poverty in Bolivia: Dimensions, Political Conflict and Strategies. *Global Majority E-Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (June 2011), 46.

⁵ Morgan, Eliza. Poverty in Bolivia: Dimensions, Political Conflict and Strategies, 47

Cochabamba felt the effects of the privatization of water with a vast water shortage. As the population of Cochabamba grew, what followed was scarce resources and the aforementioned poverty. Long before Cochabamba was the target of companies that would privatize essential resources, there were issues such as deforestation and chronic poverty that led to a shortage of water.⁶ People were not able to obtain one of the most important necessities for life, as the local organizations who took ownership of the water supply sold it at such high prices that no one could afford it. Water is essential to human life, as a human can live for only three days without water. Not only is water in its natural form a human necessity, but water is also required to grow crops and maintain agriculture, which feeds the world. With the government trying to profit from something people cannot live without, protests and resistance followed.

Beginning in the countryside, Bolivians were angered when small trenches, most of which had been built by farmers for their crops, were made a part of the privatization plan.⁷ Bolivians took this situation personally, and they had the right to. Bolivians in rural areas had first-hand experience digging trenches and building wells within their communities. The belief system surrounding water in Bolivia is akin to naturalism. Water was seen as a naturally occurring resource that should not be taxed. This is a matter about which Bolivians felt passionate enough to take the cause to an urban setting and force leaders to act. Protests began officially with the creation of the Coalition for the Defense of Water and Life.⁸ This cause is one of great challenges as it is hard to gain ground when one's own government is the main culprit in exploiting its people. This was seen as "the total failure of the local institutions that were supposed to look out for the public's interest."⁹ The devastation from exploitation at the hands of those seeking gain is unimaginable to some, but certainly not unprecedented.

While Cochabamba is a great model for depicting this historical problem of colonization's continued impacts in the Americas, there are numerous examples across continents and regions that follow a similar path. By looking at Asia, and even the United States, a common theme can be traced regarding water scarcity. This revolves around exploitation. The Bolivian Water Wars are a strong example of a linear progression of exploitation. This

⁶ Schultz, Jim and Draper, Mary Crane. *Dignity and Defiance: Stories from Bolivia's Challenge to Globalization*. University of California Press, 2008, 10.

⁷ Schultz, Jim; Draper, Mary Crane. *Dignity and Defiance: Stories from Bolivia's Challenge to Globalization*. 16.

⁸ Schultz, Jim; Draper, Mary Crane. *Dignity and Defiance: Stories from Bolivia's Challenge to Globalization*, 17.

⁹ Schultz, Jim; Draper, Mary Crane. *Dignity and Defiance: Stories from Bolivia's Challenge to Globalization*, 17.

movement, known as the Water Wars, pushes back against ideals that were echoed at the starting point of oppression in the sixteenth century, when Spanish colonizers exploited the indigenous Taíno people for resources and profit. Similarly, the current government takes advantage of the Bolivian people and makes obtaining a necessity much harder, and for some, impossible.

This is an issue of human rights. Human rights can be defined as rights believed to belong to every person, which is an idea that can be traced back to the development of ideas of equality and natural rights during the Enlightenment. Many years of control held by one group of people over another resulted in the exploitation of resources in the area. The goal of the colonizer (Spain in this case) is to maximize the profit of the colony so that the colonizer is able to draw a large benefit. In this discussion, neo-imperialism takes on new meaning when attached to continued government involvement in, and exploitation of, resources. The early sixteenth century was a time of exploration and colonization coming from Europe. Specific to this case, Spain began their exploration by looking for a way to gain resources after seven hundred years of war known as the Reconquista.

In seeking to remedy their economic problems, Spain took action to take land and utilize the people on it in order to work on the land. Similarly, government involvement in the modern day is a form of utilizing resources as a tool for power. By evaluating the Bolivian Water Wars alongside other examples of water scarcity and government intervention, continued colonial impact is revealed. Looking at these eras alongside one another is essential in understanding neo-imperialism. Government intervention in matters of human resources and the negative effects it had on exploited populations reveal the strife for power and money throughout the world in both the 1500s and the modern era. While European colonizers placed great value on money and power, little value was placed on the lives of natives, which led to exploitation on a large scale.

Important factors of this era include government action and society's response in both Spain and Bolivia. This paper will reveal that capitalistic privatization is the motivation behind water colonization. The lens of social history provides context on how everyday Bolivians addressed the issue, and the lens of economic history provides a look into how this conflict impacted the country. It is important to recognize that the exploitation of native people in the early sixteenth-century Americas was a direct result of the value placed on money and power, and a disregard for the humanity of non-white, non-European peoples. At this time, an early form of capitalism drove rulers and leaders to go to great lengths for money. Even more important for

early sixteenth-century Spain is the debt they were hoping to remedy with exploration. Just as the oppression of indigenous peoples stains the history of 1510, the year 2000 held a similar fate for Bolivians. The privatization of goods is a large part of what the country was forced to do in an effort to bring money back into its economy.

Notable scholars also hold the belief that water scarcity is inherently tied to Imperialism. Jim Schultz writes extensively on the topic of the Bolivian Water Wars as he was the first reporter in the United States to uncover the connection to Bechtel, one of the world's largest engineering companies involved in the water provision plan for Cochabamba and the Bolivian countryside.¹⁰ He also provides context for how the government's involvement in the taxation and supply of water exploited people in Cochabamba, Bolivia. Schultz also begins to explain how Bolivians addressed this exploitation and resisted the gain that water companies were trying to make at the expense of the lower classes in the area. Another important contribution to the conversation happening around the Bolivian Water Wars is Oscar Olivera's first-hand account of the protest. Olivera served as an important leader for the Coalition for the Defense of Water and Life, which kickstarted efforts of resistance in Cochabamba in 2000. Though many have developed opinions on water scarcity and subsequent government intervention throughout the world, one fact remains constant. Water is used as a tool for control, power, and money.

Colonial Era

With the idea that resources can be utilized as a tool for power, this water issue serves as a model of neo-imperialism and the lasting fallout of the colonial era. By presenting the Bolivian Water Wars alongside other examples of water scarcity and government intervention, the colonial ties that remain are exposed. Government intervention in matters of human resources and the negative effects it had on people reveal the continual battle for power and money throughout the world, a battle which can be traced back to the mid-1500s during a time of colonization and Spanish takeover.¹¹

Spain began their involvement in the era of exploration by looking for a way to gain resources. Spain was disadvantaged after the Reconquista, which was seven hundred years of fighting for Christianity to prevail in Spain. As a result, Spain was in debt to such an extent that

¹⁰ Hines, Sarah. "How Bolivians Fought For- and Won- Water Access for All." University of California Press Blog. March 22, 2022.

¹¹ Schultz, Jim; Draper, Mary Crane. *Dignity and Defiance: Stories from Bolivia's Challenge to Globalization.*, 10.

they sought something that would help and had no potential for loss by investing in Christopher Columbus, a sailor from Italy who found sponsorship with Spain in 1492. Though he famously did not know this is where he was going to end up, Latin America was a significant target for Columbus as it quickly revealed to be rich in natural resources. For instance, Potosi, a mountain of silver, was located in the Bolivian Andes Mountains.¹² This supplied the world with silver, a significant commodity in worldwide trade, and in turn, the city consumed the world's top commodities and manufactures.¹³ After arriving in the Caribbean and enslaving many of the native people, Columbus received even more support from Spain. What ensued thereafter included continual oppression and harsh treatment of the people of the Americas.¹⁴ The native tongue and religion was stripped from Indigenous Americans as they were forced to assimilate to the ways of the Europeans. Indigenous populations were enslaved and used for labor that would benefit European colonizers. The exploitation of the native people in the early sixteenth-century Americas was a direct result of the value placed on money and power. With capitalism in its earliest form driving rulers and leaders to go to great lengths for money and hopes of remedying debt with exploration, the oppression of indigenous peoples that is apparent in 1510 lays a foundation for the oppression of Bolivia in the year 2000. This is representative of cyclic oppression or neocolonialism.

21st Century Oppression for Bolivia

The Cochabamba Water Wars began as a national water law was developed in Bolivia that would provide complete control of rural water systems to the United States corporation, Bechtel.¹⁵ This would take the water from the hands of rural Bolivians and place it into the hands of companies focused on profit. The significance of this goes beyond taking advantage of people who live in the area. The people affected by this change were the same people who had dug the wells where entire communities found their water supply, and the people who carried buckets of water from the well to their homes just to cook and clean up after one meal that feeds their family.¹⁶ The Quechua, indigenous people of Bolivia, held strong beliefs about the importance of

¹² Lane, Kris. "Potosi: the mountain of silver," AEON.

¹³ Lane, Kris. "Potosi: the mountain of silver," AEON.

¹⁴ Elliott, John Huxtable. *Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America, 1492-1830*. Yale University Press, 2006.

¹⁵ Schultz, Jim; Draper, Mary Crane. *Dignity and Defiance: Stories from Bolivia's Challenge to Globalization*, 9.

¹⁶ Schultz, Jim; Draper, Mary Crane. *Dignity and Defiance: Stories from Bolivia's Challenge to Globalization*, 10.

water. In the way that they had been living, the idea that water may cost something was unthinkable. It is naturally occurring, falls from the sky in the form of rain, and is a human right—not something that should be taxed. Oscar Olivera, leader of the resistance against the privatization of water, was interviewed for the *Journal of Public Health Policy*. In this interview, he notes the value that was placed on water in saying, “The people look at water as something very sacred. Water is a right not something to be sold. It is also tied to traditional beliefs for rural people, since the time of the Incas.”¹⁷ This reveals the value placed on water by Bolivians and speaks to the reason they were in opposition to the privatization of water for Bolivia.

This idea held by the indigenous Bolivians is depicted in Icíar Bollaín’s film *Even the Rain*¹⁸. It would be remiss to not discuss *Even the Rain* as it uniquely weaves together these two distinct time periods to depict the commonalities among the time of colonization and the more recent Bolivian Water Wars. A common theme within this is the beliefs that people of Bolivia held in both the 1500s and in 2000. Just as they were exploited in the 16th century, Bolivians in 2000 were forgotten when the government needed to monetize something naturally occurring and absolutely necessary to life. The production of the film in itself speaks to the importance of this issue as it places this history in the mainstream of popular culture to call light to the events of 1500 and 2000.

Water scarcity became a problem for Bolivia around the mid 1900s. The wealth of water had dried up in an area known for and drawing its name from water. In translating to the indigenous language of Quechua, Cochabamba means “swampy land.”¹⁹ The city was running out of water around the same time that a demand for it was spiking due to deforestation and drought in the surrounding area.²⁰ *The Economist* reported in February of 2000 that “some areas of the city now receive water for only a few hours every two or three days, and farmers have had to shift to crops requiring less irrigation.”²¹ The challenge that Bolivians faced led them to disrupt their typical crop rotation and choose options that they could fulfill with the limited resources they had.

¹⁷ Olivera, Oscar. “The Fight for Water and Democracy: An Interview with Oscar Olivera.” *Journal of Public Health Policy* 22, no. 2 (2001) 228.

¹⁸ *Even the Rain*, directed by Icíar Bollaín (Spain: Morena Films, 2010). Netflix.

¹⁹ Schultz, Jim; Draper, Mary Crane. *Dignity and Defiance: Stories from Bolivia’s Challenge to Globalization*, 10.

²⁰ Schultz, Jim; Draper, Mary Crane. *Dignity and Defiance: Stories from Bolivia’s Challenge to Globalization*, 11.

²¹ “Water War in Bolivia.” *The Economist*, 2000.

A land that was once fertile because of the amount of water it naturally had began to dry up. This was largely due to three key factors. First, a growing population throughout the 20th century in Cochabamba caused the city's population to top half a million at the turn of the century.²² Second, silver and tin mines that were once the key factor in the economic prevalence of Bolivia had fallen to economic collapse.²³ Finally, Cochabamba was subject to chronic poverty as Bolivia is the most impoverished nation in South America.²⁴ Bolivia was set up to be in a large amount of debt due to the issues they were facing. This created the necessity to rely on international lenders and as problems became more significant, the leaders of Cochabamba began looking for assistance from abroad in the mid-1960s, and eventually gained assistance from a Washington based development bank.²⁵ Bolivia's debt was owed to mostly western powers, and in an effort to remedy all of the turmoil, it was a natural progression to utilize natural resources to help with the issues.²⁶ Thus, the taxation of water began in order to produce revenue to address the issues.

A requirement of international lenders was that Cochabamba set up a public water company that would serve to handle water development and would be led by the city's mayor, thus SEMAPA was birthed.²⁷ SEMAPA stands for "Servicio Municipal de Agua Potable y Alcantarillado", and in translation is the "Municipal Drinking Water and Sewage Service."²⁸ The people of Cochabamba were promised that this foreign intervention would remedy the issue that plagued Bolivia: the city's inability to supply water to half of its population.²⁹ This fostered the conditions for corruption and mismanagement in which the politicians involved were able to utilize the water company for payouts and help secure their positions of power.³⁰ Although the company worked to expand the capacity of city water, this was not enough and overpopulation continued to foster a need for water.³¹ Part of the issue was that rural neighborhoods were left out

²² Schultz, Jim; Draper, Mary Crane. *Dignity and Defiance: Stories from Bolivia's Challenge to Globalization*, 11.

²³ Schultz, Jim; Draper, Mary Crane. *Dignity and Defiance: Stories from Bolivia's Challenge to Globalization*, 11.

²⁴ Schultz, Jim; Draper, Mary Crane. *Dignity and Defiance: Stories from Bolivia's Challenge to Globalization*, 11.

²⁵ Schultz, Jim; Draper, Mary Crane. *Dignity and Defiance: Stories from Bolivia's Challenge to Globalization*, 10 and 11.

²⁶ Schultz, Jim; Draper, Mary Crane. *Dignity and Defiance: Stories from Bolivia's Challenge to Globalization*, 12.

²⁷ Schultz, Jim; Draper, Mary Crane. *Dignity and Defiance: Stories from Bolivia's Challenge to Globalization*, 12.

²⁸ Schultz, Jim; Draper, Mary Crane. *Dignity and Defiance: Stories from Bolivia's Challenge to Globalization*, 12.

²⁹ Bjork-James, Carwil. *The Sovereign Street: Making Revolution in Urban Bolivia*. U. Arizona Press, 2020, 71.

³⁰ Schultz, Jim; Draper, Mary Crane. *Dignity and Defiance: Stories from Bolivia's Challenge to Globalization*, 12.

³¹ Schultz, Jim; Draper, Mary Crane. *Dignity and Defiance: Stories from Bolivia's Challenge to Globalization*, 12.

as SEMAPA focused their aid in the wealthier neighborhoods, which developed a social strata that determined which people were able to obtain water.³² In addition, independent water committees had residents join together to solve the issue, which further tied the people of these regions to the cause.³³

Fighting Back

The spark of protest occurred when the Bolivian government placed irrigation canals built and used by farmers under their control, so that the water could be monetized and utilized by SEMAPA for profit.³⁴ People immediately mobilized to stop this exploitation of natural resources by staging a blockade of the highways coming from and going into Cochabamba.³⁵ This rebellion was organized by the Federation of Irrigators, which was a united front, gathered together to reclaim what they believed to be theirs. At this point, a key feature of the resistance to water privatization came into play, when the Federation of Irrigators visited Oscar Olivera who served as president of the Cochabamba Federation of Factory Workers, a labor union to unite those working in industry. Their visit occurred in hopes of joining forces to build a stronger group that had the potential to enact change.³⁶ The alliance these two groups established came to be known as the Coalition for the Defense of Water and Life, which lit the match in resistance against the Bolivian government.³⁷

Oscar Olivera was a leader of the movement. In an interview with the *Journal of Public Health Policy*, Olivera notes that the success of the movement relied on unity from all Bolivians. He describes that they were in contact with the campesinos, people from poor barrios, and people within the city.³⁸ They refused to pay the water bills that had been imposed upon them, and when they had united together, they were able to enact change.³⁹ One of the most important lines from this interview is Olivera's statement that "all of the people were united against the water company."⁴⁰ With this united front, protestors were able to address water rates that had increased

³² Schultz, Jim; Draper, Mary Crane. *Dignity and Defiance: Stories from Bolivia's Challenge to Globalization*, 12.

³³ Schultz, Jim; Draper, Mary Crane. *Dignity and Defiance: Stories from Bolivia's Challenge to Globalization*, 13.

³⁴ Schultz, Jim; Draper, Mary Crane. *Dignity and Defiance: Stories from Bolivia's Challenge to Globalization*, 16.

³⁵ Schultz, Jim; Draper, Mary Crane. *Dignity and Defiance: Stories from Bolivia's Challenge to Globalization*, 16.

³⁶ Schultz, Jim; Draper, Mary Crane. *Dignity and Defiance: Stories from Bolivia's Challenge to Globalization*, 16.

³⁷ Schultz, Jim; Draper, Mary Crane. *Dignity and Defiance: Stories from Bolivia's Challenge to Globalization*, 17.

³⁸ "The Fight for Water and Democracy: An Interview with Oscar Olivera." *Journal of Public Health Policy*

³⁹ "The Fight for Water and Democracy: An Interview with Oscar Olivera." *Journal of Public Health Policy*

⁴⁰ "The Fight for Water and Democracy: An Interview with Oscar Olivera." *Journal of Public Health Policy*

on an average of fifty percent when Bechtel's company sent out monthly bills, while the company claimed that price rates increased by, at the most, ten percent.⁴¹ This encouraged a full blockade of the city that lasted for three days, going as far as closing the airport.⁴² Signs that said, "agua para el pueblo," or "water for the town," like the one seen in figure one (see appendix), were being carried by exhausted Bolivians fighting for change.

The Bolivian government, led by President Hugo Banzer Suárez during this time, initially declared that it would not address the protest and sought to dismiss it in hopes that it would collapse on its own.⁴³ Banzer went as far as to sign the Aguas del Tunari water concession contract, which acted to confirm the deal with Bechtel, as protesters declared their disagreement outside of the building.⁴⁴ He even declared, "I am accustomed to that background music."⁴⁵ This makes the ignorance of the government evident in a situation where the government itself was responsible for exploiting its people. Bolivians did not give up. The actions of protesters were declared illegal as heavily armed police began to populate the area, and in just two days, 175 people were wounded as a result of tear gas and police beatings.⁴⁶ An article published by *The New Yorker* in 2002 was significant in informing the world of the brutality of the war on water, describing the body of a seventeen-year-old student, Víctor Hugo Daza, who had been shot in the face by the Bolivian Army while participating in protests.⁴⁷ The horrors of protest made international headlines and served its purpose to reveal the oppression happening at the hands of the Bolivian government.

People protested with everyday acts of resistance by refusing to pay their water bills, which in collaboration with the protest happening in the streets of Cochabamba, fostered a compromise of a temporary rate rollback that would last for six months.⁴⁸ With continued resistance, Bolivians sought more and continually fought for their rights. The goal of protestors was for the Bolivian government to cancel the contract with Bechtel and to repeal the national

⁴¹ Schultz, Jim; Draper, Mary Crane. *Dignity and Defiance: Stories from Bolivia's Challenge to Globalization*, 18.

⁴² Schultz, Jim; Draper, Mary Crane. *Dignity and Defiance: Stories from Bolivia's Challenge to Globalization*, 20.

⁴³ Schultz, Jim; Draper, Mary Crane. *Dignity and Defiance: Stories from Bolivia's Challenge to Globalization*, 20.

⁴⁴ Bjork-James, Carwil. *The Sovereign Street: Making Revolution in Urban Bolivia*, 72.

⁴⁵ Bjork-James, Carwil. *The Sovereign Street: Making Revolution in Urban Bolivia*, 72.

⁴⁶ Schultz, Jim; Draper, Mary Crane. *Dignity and Defiance: Stories from Bolivia's Challenge to Globalization*, 21.

⁴⁷ Finnegan, William. "Leasing the Rain: The world is running out of fresh water, and the fight to control it has begun." *The New Yorker*. April 8, 2002.

⁴⁸ Schultz, Jim; Draper, Mary Crane. *Dignity and Defiance: Stories from Bolivia's Challenge to Globalization*, 21.

water law that would seize control of rural wells and irrigation systems.⁴⁹ This was unthinkable to the Bolivian government as breaking this agreement was not a wise decision for the government both financially and politically.⁵⁰ Breaking the contract that had been signed would have decreased foreign confidence in Bolivia, which is essential in a region where national governments and economies rely on international involvement.⁵¹ Still, the goal of protesters was achieved in April of 2000 when the contract was broken, giving power back to the people of Bolivia.⁵² This was an important win for Bolivia as it represented that people had power to enact change. This is also significant in that it began a grassroots movement for Bolivia in the early twenty-first century.⁵³ Grassroots movements are characterized by resistance fostered by the actions of everyday people within lower levels of society, or “near the roots,” which then, hopefully, works up from the bottom to the top of society.

The lasting impact of the Bolivian Water Wars can be seen for years after the conflict and still impacts the lives of Bolivians to this day. Protests against the privatization of water and government intervention may have ended as the contract with Bechtel was voided, but the memory of the Water Wars that Bolivians share are still significant and serve as a reminder of what can be accomplished with unity. Ten years after the end of the war on water, the Federation of Factory Workers of Cochabamba, an essential piece to this puzzle, held events in celebration of the shared defense of water.⁵⁴ The streets of Cochabamba hold the story of resistance and shared experience, both figuratively and literally as a mural, which can be seen in Figure Two, titled “La Lucha Por El Agua Continúa”, was painted in celebration of “the coming together of different sections of the population in the struggle, as well as the sustainability issues still present in the aftermath” (see appendix, figure 2).⁵⁵

While Cochabamba can celebrate that the issue of water privatization has been solved, the topic at hand remains relevant in the issues this region still faces. The region still sees an

⁴⁹ Schultz, Jim; Draper, Mary Crane. *Dignity and Defiance: Stories from Bolivia's Challenge to Globalization*, 22 and 26.

⁵⁰ Finnegan, William. “*Leasing the Rain: The world is running out of fresh water, and the fight to control it has begun.*” The New Yorker.

⁵¹ Finnegan, William. “*Leasing the Rain: The world is running out of fresh water, and the fight to control it has begun.*” The New Yorker.

⁵² Schultz, Jim; Draper, Mary Crane. *Dignity and Defiance: Stories from Bolivia's Challenge to Globalization*, 28.

⁵³ Bjork-James, Carwil. *The Sovereign Street: Making Revolution in Urban Bolivia*, 72.

⁵⁴ “*Water War mural in Cochabamba, Bolivia.*” Mona Caron, 2010.

⁵⁵ “*Water War mural in Cochabamba, Bolivia.*” Mona Caron, 2010.

increased demand for water and is facing water pollution.⁵⁶ This is an issue not unlike water scarcity scenarios faced by the world at large. Many areas throughout the world struggle to meet the needs of the people populating the area, and water remains a common thread to follow in examining this.

Global Water Scarcity

In the modern era, climate conflict and the war on water are common themes for many areas throughout the world. As this paper has shown up to this point, continued government involvement in matters such as this seems to foster a continued cycle of oppression. Seeing this as a global issue helps to reveal the importance of it, and also points out the involvement of the United States in this matter of human rights. This is not an issue far from the reach of Americans. For instance, a water crisis began in Flint, Michigan in 2014.⁵⁷ Flint's issue with water came when the city decided to switch its water supply from Detroit, Michigan's system to the Flint River, which fostered the conditions for inadequate treatment and testing of the water.⁵⁸ This resulted in water quality and health issues that were ignored by government officials, which serves as a great example of government involvement in exploiting citizens.⁵⁹ The model of Flint looks a lot like Bolivia in the year 2000. Flint was in debt and fell under state control which led them to seek a cheaper option for water. While this has been solved, for the most part, due to citizens of Flint taking the issue to court and taking to the streets to protest the actions of the government, the city of Flint is still impacted by this. Ensuring that the demands of the settlement citizens garnered in 2017 is still a task taken on by citizens of Flint.⁶⁰ This example of water scarcity, in a country that is economically stable such as the United States, is significant in the fight against a lack of resources.

The impact of water scarcity on the world at large is a significant one. This is an issue that goes beyond politics, but rather represents an issue that impacts each and every human. Water is a right that should belong to every person. Colonial influence and continued neo-imperialist inequalities result in the exploitation of resources in areas throughout the world,

⁵⁶ Escobar, Marisa, et. al. *Water management in Cochabamba: 20 years after the "Water War."* Stockholm Environment Institute, 2020.

⁵⁷ Denchak, Melissa. "Flint Water Crisis: Everything You Need to Know," NRDC, November 8, 2018.

⁵⁸ Denchak, Melissa. "Flint Water Crisis: Everything You Need to Know," NRDC, November 8, 2018.

⁵⁹ Denchak, Melissa. "Flint Water Crisis: Everything You Need to Know," NRDC, November 8, 2018.

⁶⁰ Denchak, Melissa. "Flint Water Crisis: Everything You Need to Know," NRDC, November 8, 2018.

evidenced throughout this study. By looking at this through the lens of neo-imperialism, the ongoing fallout from the colonization era becomes apparent. The goal of the colonizer was to maximize the profit of the colony so that the colonizer is able to draw a large benefit—no matter who is impacted. Upon seeing opportunity in a resource necessary to human life, government involvement in matters of natural resources works to maximize profit and disregards the impact it has on people. Neo-imperialism looks like continued government involvement in, and exploitation of, resources. What everyone on Earth has in common is humanity. Thus, the issues surrounding water throughout the world is something to not only be aware of, but as evidenced by protests such as those found in early twenty-first century Bolivia, something to stand up for.

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Appendix

Figure 1:



Figure 2: “*Water War mural in Cochabamba, Bolivia.*” Mona Caron, 2010.



Iola Leroy or Shadows Uplifted: Black Feminism in African American Literature

Shelby Armstrong

Throughout the nineteenth century, gender and race were two significant political concerns. The woman question was spreading through the nation, not only in the United States but also in England and other parts of Europe. The woman question was essentially the question of what women's proper place and role was in society. For most, the answer was simple: women did not belong in society, they belonged only in the home. This traditional answer to the woman question was a British ideal that was referred to as "The Angel in the House." In America, the woman question began in the nineteenth century, but it was not officially referred to as "The Cult of True Womanhood" until the 1960s. Women did not work outside of the home and their education was restricted to knowing how to perform as a good housewife and hostess. The women in these homes were also required to be pure in all aspects, including religion.

While the Cult of True Womanhood affected almost all women, the ideals of the Cult of True Womanhood were based upon white women. Black women were very much aware of the Cult of True Womanhood and while it was degrading, they still wished to be included in it. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, most Black women were unfortunately still enslaved, and therefore on the opposite end of the spectrum from white women. During slavery, Black women were forced to work in both the field and the home, and after slavery ended, most Black women did not have the privilege of staying entirely in the domestic sphere. Due to the legacy of slavery, Black women were also judged on different standards of purity by their white counterparts, since historically on plantations they were often subjected to constant rape. In the eyes of the white women, there was no way Black women could be pure, also giving the white women another reason to see them as outcasts from ideals of true womanhood. Many feminists of the nineteenth century worked to change the discourse of how Black women fit into true womanhood especially through literature. Representations of Black women in literature, particularly when written by white authors, often gave the impression that Black women were inferior to their white counterparts. This changed with the rise of racial uplift, which brought educated Blacks together and made them recognize it was their responsibility to uplift their race, often through literary representations that served as a counterpoint to the racist stereotypes dominant to that point.

Frances Ellen Watkins Harper's novel *Iola Leroy*, published in 1892, is one such racial uplift novel that pushes back against the notion of the Cult of True Womanhood only applying to white women through the novel's representation of Iola as an African American feminist. The main character of Harper's novel is a biracial woman named Iola, who is unaware of her race until her father dies and she is forced to become a slave. Although many literary critics interpret the novel through the Cult of True Womanhood, they fail to analyze the novel in terms of its connection to British ideals of the Angel in the House. All four of the tenets from the Cult of True Womanhood—piety, purity, domesticity, and submissiveness—were major ideals in the mid-nineteenth century that stemmed from the British notion of the Angel in the House. Both concepts enforce the notion that women belong in a different, largely domestic, sphere separate from men. The character of Iola represents Harper's feelings that these notions are harmful to women and devalue them, particularly when it comes to African American women and the different expectations placed on them as opposed to their white counterparts. Yet Harper also employs certain aspects of these tenets, especially those that stem from the British concept of the Angel in the House, in order to confer respectability by white standards onto characters like Iola. In *Iola Leroy*, Harper both uses and critiques the Cult of True Womanhood as a form of racial uplift for African American women.

The Rise of First Wave Feminism

In the mid-nineteenth century, the first wave of feminism was rapidly spreading through the nation. First wave feminism, which started in 1848 with the Seneca Falls Convention, included women like Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony. The first wave fought for temperance, suffrage, abolition, and separate spheres ideology. Black women and white women worked together to bring reform to the states, but Black women were often viewed as less important than the white women. Black women had a different experience during first wave feminism than that of white women. Most of the white women believed that their problems were the only ones that truly mattered because they wanted the focus to remain on the majority groups, not minority groups. White women wanted people to believe that they were fighting for the rights of all women, so therefore there would be no need for minority groups. While first wave feminism had benefits for Black women, most of the benefits were left for the white women; this caused a lot of people to critique first wave feminism. The biggest critique being that it completely left out an entire group of people, mainly women of color.

While the Cult of True Womanhood had been around for a long time, women began to truly question it during First Wave Feminism. The Cult of True Womanhood was officially given its name in 1966 by historian Barbra Welter. Welter focuses on sexual stereotypes in the antebellum southern era. Welter suggests that “The attributes of True Womanhood, by which a woman judged her-self and was judged by her husband, her neighbors and society could be divided into four cardinal virtues--piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity” (152). Most women realized how damaging these ideals were and decided it was time for a change. Other women were oblivious to the ideas of how the Cult of True Womanhood affected their everyday lives, knowing it was easier to conform to it rather than try and reject it (hooks).

Victorian Culture in America

Victorian culture worked its way into American culture, but it did not appear to be the same in all places. As Victorian culture made its way through the United States, it became more prominent in certain parts of the country. From 1880-1910, there was a small Black community in Illinois that viewed women in an entirely different way. Shirley Carlson, Associate Professor of Historical Studies at Southern Illinois University states, “The Victorian view that ‘a woman’s place is in the home’ found support among blacks. But even the most conservative expression of the sentiment was often mitigated by the assertion that a woman should not confine herself exclusively to the private sphere” (Carlson 69). The people in this specific Illinois society were already advanced in their beliefs and unlike their white counterparts, they did not believe that a Black woman should be confined to the home, although certainly not all Americans at the time believed this. Carlson makes a case for why this is, “Slave women worked outside their own households, usually in the fields, though sometimes in the Big House, or elsewhere. Obviously, then, slave women did not view their domain as confined to the household, as white women did” (Carlson 63). While this was more than just the case for this small society, this society was more progressive in their beliefs. This was very significant for Black women—because they were required to work in both domains, they were not seen as inferior to the men.

In the late 1800s, African American female writers began to analyze the effects of true womanhood and worked to incorporate that into their literature. One example of an African American female writer who worked to do this was Frances Harper, who was a prominent abolitionist and first wave feminist. Valerie Palmer-Metha, a Professor at Oakland University in Michigan argues, “Frances Harper stands as one of the most prolific black feminist writers and

orators of nineteenth-century American literary and political culture, yet her contributions to feminist philosophy and theory largely have been overlooked” (192). Palmer-Metha argues that Harper’s contributions to feminist theory have been overlooked because of her literary works. While Harper has plenty of literary works, her work as an orator is often forgotten. Along with her poems, short stories, and novels, she also wrote speeches. In all of Harper’s works, her feminist ideals can be analyzed to form a deeper meaning. Some of the ideals she incorporates into her works include separate spheres ideology, intersectionality, and the right to pick a marriage partner. Harper was not shy about putting her political opinions in her works, even if they were subtle.

Victorian culture was very prevalent in America and that can also be demonstrated in the analysis of African American literature. Daniel Hack, a professor of English Language and Literature at the University of Michigan, first uses a historical analysis of Black women and how their stance on feminism and how it applies to literature. Hack then analyzes how these politics are represented in literature. Hack states “Recovering the African American uses of Victorian literature not only increases our knowledge of its dissemination, mobility, and adaptability but also, and thereby, contributes to our understanding of that literature itself” (3). Since Victorian culture is so prevalent in all other aspects of society, it is no surprise that it is also prevalent in literature, particularly African American literature. Understanding the time period in which the literature was written is also extremely important to understanding the text. Hack argues:

As I show, Victorian literature has a distinct status and appeal for literary African Americans during the time covered in this book...British literature was widely viewed as superior to American culture in the nineteenth-century United States, and African Americans had heightened “anglophiliac” tendencies due to Britain’s history of support for abolition and the freedom from the racism or even racial identity it putatively offered to African American travelers and refugees. (19)

In other words, African American writers viewed Victorian literature as a form of uplift because they were already in support of African Americans when American culture was not. Victorian literature had also proven to be very successful, and the African American writers also wanted that for themselves. African American writers imitated British literary conventions in order to gain respectability; they wanted to be viewed as superior to their white counterparts. Harper is seen doing this in her works to gain further access to status and respectability; something that

Hack analyzes, specifically in *Iola Leroy*.

Living in a “White Supremacist Capitalist Patriarchy”

After the failures of first wave feminism, second wave feminism came shortly after. Second wave feminism focused heavily on integrating women of color, especially Black women into society. A huge part of second wave feminism was understanding how Black women are regarded in society as opposed to white women; this is where the idea of intersectionality begins. One of the biggest contributors to feminist theory in the twentieth century is bell hooks. hooks, a Kentucky native, spent her life exploring the relationship between Black women and feminism. She is known worldwide for her works, and she taught at Berea College in Kentucky until her death in 2021. One of the terms she coined is also her most famous: white supremacist capitalist patriarchy. This concept is closely linked to intersectionality, which means that Black women are subjected to two or more kinds of discrimination (racial, gendered, and based on their sexuality if they are LGBTQ+). This intersectionality is compounded by the discrimination Black women face under a capitalist patriarchy. hooks states:

I began to use the phrase in my work “white supremacist capitalist patriarchy” because I wanted to have some language that would actually remind us continually of the interlocking systems of domination that define our reality and not to just have one thing be like, you know, gender is the important issue, race is the important issue, but for me the use of that particular jargonistic phrase was a way, a sort of short cut way of saying all of these things actually are functioning simultaneously at all times in our lives.

(hooks)

For hooks, it is important that people understand how race and gender are linked. For Black women to feel a sense of belonging in society, they often must conform to the standards within that society. While race and gender are two issues that are important, there are also more that overlap such as sexuality, religion, class, and more. In using the term “white supremacist capitalist patriarchy,” hooks is explaining the dynamic that lies between the power structures of patriarchy. A white supremacist capitalist patriarchy works by putting white men in power on a pedestal, therefore this works as a system of oppression for women of color. hooks argues that in analyzing issues in our culture, race and gender are not the only things that need to be accessed, especially in terms of capitalism.

hooks explores intersectionality further in her book *ain't i a woman*, through the

institution of slavery. In her book, hooks argues that the basis of intersectionality began with the institution of slavery. Enslaved Black females were subjected to multiple forms of violence because they were not seen as humans, they were only seen as property. Because of this, hooks argues that Black women wished to get out of their situations and were jealous of their white counterparts. hooks states, "...the 19th century had an intense demoralizing impact on enslaved black females. They were not proud of their ability to labor alongside men in the fields and wanted more than anything for their lot to be the same as that of white women" (48). Black women wanted to be respected in the same ways that white women were and because of slavery they were unable to have that. Black women knew that the Cult of True Womanhood was degrading but if they were accepted into the cult, then they would be accepted as true women. Black women wanted to be perceived as feminine, they felt inferior for being so masculine. Black enslaved females wanted to feel a sense of belonging, not just to other Black enslaved women but also to their white counterparts. For most enslaved Black females, they realized that the white women were not their enemies, it was the white male masters who were. While some white women owned slaves, the majority of slave owners were men.

The effects of slavery continue to have a hold on the people involved for centuries to come, the shadows of slavery carry on. hooks argues, "by completely accepting the female role as defined by patriarchy, enslaved black women embraced and upheld an oppressive sexist social order and became (along with their white sisters) both accomplices in the crimes perpetrated against women and the victims of those crimes" (49). While the Cult of True Womanhood was demoralizing, Black women could not help but want to be a part of it because then they could feel more feminine. Black enslaved females wanted to feel a sense of belonging, one of the ways they felt they could do so was through the Cult of True Womanhood. By doing this, Black women were not just simply reinforcing the Cult of True Womanhood, they were changing the way that it was viewed within the culture. For many women living in the nineteenth century, whether white or Black, everything was a double edged sword. This also shows how men were not held to the same standards and therefore given the advantage.

Reconstructing Womanhood

Beginning in the mid-1970s, Critical Race Theory (CRT) was introduced and led many literary scholars to analyze literature through a CRT lens. Critical Race Theory states that race is socially constructed and is used to oppress people of color in all aspects of life. One of these

literary scholars is Hazel Carby who is a professor at Harvard and one of the founders of African American studies in literature. Carby analyzes African American women's literature in four separate parts: the definition of “woman,” the sisterhood between Black and white women, women's literary contributions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and the literary history of Black women emerging as writers. Carby argues:

This book works within the theoretical premises of societies “structured in dominance” by class, by race, and by gender and is a materialist account of the cultural production of black women intellectuals within the social relations that inscribed them. It delineates the sexual ideologies that defined the ways in which white and black women “lived” their relation to their material conditions of existence. (17)

Carby adds to feminist theory and intersectionality in terms of literary theory. Carby states that gender and race are also influenced by class, but more importantly that race takes precedence over gender. Carby is also focusing on how capitalism is about the exploitation of Black women, not just in terms of their labor but also their sexuality. Carby argues, “Ideologies of white womanhood were the sites of racial class struggle which enabled white women to negotiate their subordinate role in relation to patriarchy and at the same time to ally their class interest with men and against establishing an alliance with black women” (17-18). Here, Carby describes intersectionality like hooks in that instead of white women working together with Black women to work against patriarchy, they realized that they would have more power if they were to side with white men.

Since Carby’s focus is on literary criticism, she does an analysis of Black women writers and how their works contribute to the larger theme of intersectionality. Carby states, “On the contrary, my basic premise is that the novels of black women should be read not as passive representations of history but as active influence within history” (95). Carby argues that within reading these novels, it should be analyzed in terms of its historical significance. Just because a novel was written in 1892 does not mean that it should not be seen for its political significance today. These novels should not be forgotten just because they were written over one hundred years ago. In order to understand the true meaning of the novel, it is necessary to think about the past and the present.

In terms of the novel *Iola Leroy*, it is important to think about the effects the novel has on the readers who read it today. In her introduction to the novel, Carby states, “Rather, to

understand the historical significance of *Iola Leroy*, we must consider the wider discourse of black women intellectuals at the turn of the century” (xiv). Carby argues that in order to think about the true meaning of the novel, it is important to look back on first wave feminism. First wave feminism shaped the way that Black women began to write their works, especially within a feminist discourse. Without knowing the full context of first wave feminism, the reader would not understand the true meaning of the novel. Through Harper’s character Iola’s rejection to pass, Harper is uplifting her race to show that good things can still happen without passing.

Secondary Criticism

Many literary critics interpret *Iola Leroy* through gender and the Cult of True Womanhood, but most critics fail to interpret the novel in terms of its relation to British literature and the specific British version of the Angel in the House. John Ernest, one of the world’s top scholars in 19th century African American literature argues that Harper uses *Iola Leroy* as a form of mutual uplift in the aspect that its representation of race is unique. The novel discourages the idea of passing, giving the impression that Iola cannot be truly happy unless she embraces her ethnicity. Ernest states, “Still others have seen in *Iola Leroy* an idealization of the nineteenth-century cult of true womanhood that amounts to an acquiescence to standards of identity established by the dominant culture” (Ernest 498). While there are certainly no doubts that the novels incorporate representations of The Cult of True Womanhood, Harper uses it in a different way than others have. I argue that Harper is critiquing but also reinforcing the Cult to represent how depictions of Black women in the nineteenth century were often biased. Harper wants Black women to be able to make their own decisions about the life they chose to lead, whether that is or is not reinforcing the Cult of True Womanhood.

An important aspect of the novel that is often overlooked is the subtitle which is *Shadows Uplifted*. Ernest argues that:

“Shadows,” of course, was a culturally prominent metaphor for in comprehension or for otherwise incomplete understanding...But you can see in this subtitle something else as well, for “shadows” was also, at least by the nineteenth century, a derogatory slang term used by whites in reference to African Americans. In our subtitle, then, Harper appropriates this word, and combines it in interracial politics, interracial aims, and educational ideals. (Ernest 502).

While at its base the term shadows has many meanings, the way that Harper uses it is explicit.

Harper in this way is clearly using the subtitle as a form of racial uplift. Within using this metaphor, instead of using it as a derogatory slang, Harper is taking back the slang and using it for a positive connotation. In this way, Harper is also linking her subtitle back into intersectionality and how the “interracial politics, interracial aims, and educational ideals” Ernest mentions all link together. Of course, shadows also represent something else entirely, Harper is referring to the shadows of slavery. The shadows of slavery continue to carry on even after slavery ends. Harper is hinting at the fact that no one can escape the shadows of slavery, no matter where they go.

Like Ernest, Michael Borgstrom, an Assistant Professor of English and Comparative Literature at San Diego State University, evaluates the novel in terms of its rejection of racial passing. Borgstrom analyzes the novel through its racial uplift and how Harper is successful in doing so throughout the novel. Harper’s use of reinforcement and critique of the Cult of True womanhood shows how women are expected to conform to society’s standards. Borgstrom states, “By refusing to pass as white, Iola does more than assert her black identity; she also signals a specifically female form of social activism by subverting traditional gender roles” (781-782). Borgstrom is showing not only how the novel is using racial uplift but also how the novel is using mutual uplift. In the end, first wave feminism really tore women apart instead of drawing them together. Through the character Iola, Harper wants to show that instead of tearing each other apart, women should cross racial boundaries to work together to combat their shared issues.

Iola herself breaks a lot of standards of her time, she holds a representation of a feminist. Other literary critics have also looked at this trend throughout Harper’s works. For instance, Beverly Holmes, a doctoral student at Florida State University, wrote her dissertation on the influence of the sentimental novel through the Cult of True Womanhood. She evaluated four different novels written by African American women, one of the novels being *Iola Leroy*. Holmes argues that these novels were written largely for women, and they embraced Victorian decorum (ideals of true womanhood). Holmes states:

Why did Harper choose as her protagonist the octoroon Iola Leroy: well-educated, refined, virginal, pious, heroine so far removed from the realities of the post-reconstruction South where most of the women lived in poverty as sharecroppers, servants or laundresses? The answer is, of course, that Harper wrote what would sell and what the white publishers would print. Her audience had the same demographic mix of

readers who had always bought sentimental novels: white women (4). Holmes argues that Harper chooses to reinforce but also critique the Cult of True Womanhood for more than the reason for uplift: she also knew that she needed to appeal to white audiences too. Harper wanted to use her novel as a consciousness raising tool. If Harper were to completely critique the Cult of True Womanhood, the chances are that she would not get as many readers. In order to have a big enough readership, Harper knew she had to write something that would appeal to white female readers.

One of the ways Black female writers knew their books would sell was by incorporating Victorian values into their novels. Laurie Kaiser, a student at Gulf Coast Community College, argues that Black female writers wanted to assimilate values of Victorian society in their writings, so they incorporated the idea of true womanhood. Kaiser states, “Iola is the black answer to the calling of true womanhood” (98). While Iola holds some attributes of the Cult of True Womanhood, she does not hold them all, therefore she could not be the “black answer.” Harper’s novel *Iola Leroy* works to combat issues of gender and race in its relation to the Cult of True Womanhood. While many critics have analyzed the novel through true womanhood, critics have failed to realize its comparison to British Literature. Through my analysis of the novel, I plan to evaluate how the novel shares a deliberate affinity with British literature and how that affects the meaning of the novel. Since the idea of true womanhood stems from Victorian culture, it is crucial to compare the two. Harper is using the British model of writing in order to gain literary respectability and superiority. The British were viewed as superior to the Americans so for Harper to gain respectability, she had to conform to what was favored and desired by the audience. Harper also wanted to write something to represent herself and her race. In her novel, there are both sides shown to represent the standards in which she had to go through in order to have her book published. Through Harper’s critique and reinforcement of true womanhood, she brings racial and mutual uplift.

Representations of The Cult of True Womanhood in *Iola Leroy*

Every tenet of true womanhood--piety, purity, domesticity, and submissiveness--is present in the novel. Harper separates them into the ones she critiques, reinforces, or both. One of the tenets that Harper is reinforcing but critiquing is piety. Religion is a significant theme in the novel, but Harper uses religion in a different way compared to other 19th century writers. Instead of simply accepting religion for how it is, Harper analyzes the ways in which religion

needs to change. While many of the characters are religious, they also realize that the foundations of religion have been corrupted because of the way the slave owners have twisted the meaning of the Bible. Harper states “‘This is not a heathen country. I hardly think barbarians would have done any worse; yet this is called a Christian country.’ ‘Christian in name,’ answered the principal” (161). Here, Harper is not necessarily critiquing religion; she is critiquing the institution of Christianity. The slave owners often use Christianity as a justification for slavery. This also connects back to hooks’s point of how religion as an institution is used in a white supremacist capitalist society to continue to put white people and men at the center of the power structure. Especially during this time, women were not allowed to have a huge part of religion. Iola asks:

“Mother, are these people Christians who made these laws which are robbing us of our inheritance and reducing us to slavery? If this is Christianity I hate and despise it. Would the most cruel heathen do worse?” “My dear child, I have not learned my Christianity from them. I have learned it at the foot of the cross, and from this book,” she said, placing a New Testament in Iola's hands. “Some of the most beautiful lessons of faith and trust I have ever learned were from among our lowly people in their humble cabins.” (137)

Iola feels that the institution of Christianity is degrading, and she does not understand how anyone wants anything to do with it. Iola sees how white slave owners and whites in general have used religion as an excuse for the way they have treated people. Iola here is directly referring to her father’s family who manumitted her parents’ marriage and therefore forced her into slavery. Iola does everything she can to ensure that her brother does not endure the same fate as her and fortunately for her brother that ends up happening; but Iola knows that if it were not for this white man, they would not be in this circumstance in the first place. Harper sees how the religion learned from the white people is not true religion; religion comes from within and from the small communities in which they harbor. Harper does not understand how these white people can call themselves Christians with the way they treat people. Harper is stating that they are hypocrites because they are only picking out the parts of the Bible that serve them in ways they want.

Harper also sees how religion can be used as a form of uplift. Harper argues that institutionalized religion is where the problem lies, not religion in general. Harper states:

He was spit upon by the mob, smitten and mocked by the rabble, and died as died Rome's meanest criminal slave. To-day that cross of shame is a throne of power. Those robes of scorn have changed to habiliments of light, and that crown of mockery to a diadem of glory. (331)

Here Harper is making a comparison between African Americans and Jesus. Despite all their suffering, in the end they will be rewarded. Harper believes that religion needs to be rebuilt from the ground up because the foundations it stands on are corrupt. Harper is using imagery here to heighten the meaning of her words. Harper is also making a comparison to how Jesus was treated like a slave.

Beverley Holmes argues that these novels were written largely for women, and they embraced Victorian decorum (ideals of true womanhood). Holmes states, "In *Iola Leroy* her (Harper's) purpose is twofold: (1) to send a message about the failure of conventional religion to minister to Blacks and (2) to establish Marie and Iola as pious, true Christians, as pious as any white woman living out of the cult of true womanhood" (11). It seems like Holmes is making a contradictory statement here in itself, as she argues that Harper is upholding religion while also saying that Black ministry was a failure. Black people knew that the religion that they were being ministered was incorrect, therefore they did not need someone to tell them that. Harper is arguing that the Black people were working to change the view white people had on religion. If the Black people could realize that the religion they were being taught was wrong, why could the white people not realize it too? I also do not agree with Holmes's second statement because I do not think that a truly pious woman would be allowed to question religion. Iola is different because she can see what is wrong with Christianity and try to make a difference because of it. While Iola might be conforming to some aspects of piety, she is also pushing against it, just as Harper is pushing back against American ideals here. The British had already had to fight for their religious freedom and knew that the indoctrinations of religion in which they were being forced to conform to were wrong. Harper also understands that the American (specifically the white way) of religion is not true religion. Harper wants all her readers to see that—the Black ones but also the white ones too.

Purity is another tenet that is shown throughout the novel. Iola is presented as a very strong female character in the novel. Literary theorist Hazel Carby states "Physically, Iola met the requirements of acceptable standards of womanhood. She was beautiful, fair, and virtuous

yet not compliant or passive; her spark of defiance Harper often accented in terms such as ‘spitfire’” (74). Harper creates a juxtaposition within the character of Iola, stating, “She has the proud poise of Leroy, the most splendid eyes I ever saw in a woman's head, lovely complexion, and a glorious wealth of hair. She would bring \$2000 any day in a New Orleans market” (Harper 99). By stating that she has “the proud poise of Leroy,” Through the character of Bastine, Harper is showing what that sentence really implies; that Iola has the best qualities of her father, including his complexion. Bastine also says “glorious wealth of hair,” implying the fact that he only sees Iola as a commodity and nothing more. Iola is seen as white passing so therefore she is more desirable to the market. Bastine does not understand why Lorraine isn’t taking Iola to the market to be sold instead of sending her away to be a slave considering how much money she would make. Iola is also a virgin which reinforces the purity tenet. Harper is reinforcing the tenet of purity in the novel, not because she believes in the Cult of True Womanhood, but because most African American women were unable to do that at the time. This is a form of racial uplift because Iola had the opportunity to choose her own virtue. An aspect of the novel that is very interesting is the relationship between Mrs. Johnson and Robert. Mrs. Johnson is a white woman who uses Robert as an “accountant.” She treats Robert like a pet but because she is kind to him, he does not see anything wrong with it. Harper states, “If asked if he desired his freedom, he would have answered, very naively, that he was eating his white bread and believed in letting well enough alone; he had no intention of jumping from the frying-pan into the fire” (43). Harper wants readers to acknowledge that while technically Mrs. Johnson is married, it does not mean that therefore she is staying “pure.” Harper also wants readers to realize how problematic the relationship between the two of them is and that this is not something that was rare. Men were taken advantage of too during slavery and it was just accepted as the normal.

Submissiveness is a tenet that is present throughout the novel and is very important to Harper. Iola is given two marriage proposals, both of which she turns down because she simply can. She would be unhappy with her marriage to the doctor because she is not ready for it. Iola rejects the idea of having to always obey the male or make the male happy. Harper states “No, Doctor; that can never be. I am very grateful to you for your kindness. I value your friendship, but neither gratitude nor friendship is love, and I have nothing more than those to give” (109). Iola knows that the doctor would want her to conform to white ideological notions. Iola is intent

on other things in life, like finding her mother and her brother after escaping from slavery. Iola also does not want to pass; she wants to embrace her ethnicity. Her marriage to the doctor would not allow that, she also knows that if their kids were to be black the doctor would not be happy. Harper states ““Doctor," she said, and a faint flush rose to her cheek, "suppose we should marry, and little children in after years should nestle in our arms, and one of them show unmistakable signs of color, would you be satisfied?”” (152). Of course, the doctor doesn't have the courage to tell Iola no, but she already knows the answer. Harper is critiquing the tenet of submissiveness through the opportunity for Iola to choose her own husband. Iola does not have to do what the doctor wants in order just to please him. She can make her own choices and therefore, she is getting the chance to do what a lot of Black women did not get to. Harper states:

“Yes,” she said to herself, “I do like him; but I can never marry him. To the man I marry my heart must be as open as the flowers to the sun. I could not accept his hand and hide from him the secret of my birth; and I could not consent to choose the happiest lot on earth without first finding my poor heart-stricken and desolate mother. Perhaps some day I may have the courage to tell him my sad story, and then make my heart the sepulcher in which to bury all the love which might have gladdened and brightened my whole life.” (142)

Iola eventually does get married and within her marriage, she does not have to hide her racial identity. She can truly be herself and that is what she wanted in a marriage. Iola speaks of how she cannot marry a man until she first accomplishes her own life goals such as finding her mother. Here Harper is showing the feminist ideal of being able to choose a marriage partner. Which is also something that some women are not even able to do today. Iola also speaks on how she would have to hide her race from the man and how she does not believe that that would be right, nor does Iola believe that she should have to do that. Iola feels that she should not have to hide anything about herself for the man she marries, and she knows that if she were to marry this man there would be a lot for her to sacrifice.

Domesticity is another tenet that is seen throughout the novel, Iola is very intent on being able to provide for herself. Harper states, “I have a theory that every woman ought to know how to earn her own living. I believe that a great amount of sin and misery springs from the weakness and inefficiency of women” (205). Harper is directly referring to the tenet of

domesticity in this passage. Harper does not believe that a woman should have to be confined to the home, unlike the tenet suggests. Harper wants women to realize that by confining themselves to the home they are limiting themselves and making themselves miserable in the long run. Women who are unable to take care of themselves are also weak and inefficient which causes a lot of problems for them. Women are often taught from a young age that as long as they find a good man in life, that is all they need; Harper is arguing against that notion. “I am going to join the great rank of breadwinners. Mr. Waterman has advertised for a number of saleswomen, and I intend to make application” (205). Typically, when someone refers to the term “bread-winner,” they are referring to a male, Harper is flipping this by using talk of Iola as the breadwinner. Iola gets a job as a schoolteacher which represents that a woman can have a job outside of the home. Harper states, “Soon after Iola had settled in C—— she quietly took her place in the Sunday-school as a teacher, and in the church as a helper” (278). Iola can have a job and make a living for herself; this is important because she is rejecting the idea that women need a man in order to be taken care of. This also goes back to the other tenet of piety, Iola chooses to be a part of religion but within her own terms. She is not conforming to the white standard of religion and instead is reshaping the foundations of religion for herself and her students.

Representations of British Literature in Iola Leroy

There are many examples of how British Literature is incorporated into the novel, the main being the idea of true womanhood. The reason why this is important is because it shows how African American writers wanted to be like British writers because British society was viewed as superior to American society. Hack argues:

And while these writers’ attention to Victorian literature has been largely denigrated and neglected, we will see that they themselves often inscribed this attention in ways that suggest an awareness of similar attention on the part of earlier and contemporary African American writers. (74-75)

These authors set up a foundation for other African American writers and since their works encompassed ideals of British society, it explains why other African American writers would want to do the same. British society was advanced in everything in comparison to American society, but one of the primary advancements lay within their literature. In his novel, Hack compares the work of George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans) to the work of Frances Harper and shows

the similarities of the two, comparing *Iola Leroy* to *The Spanish Gypsy*. Hack argues that no literary critics pay attention to how African American writers take the plot from *The Spanish Gypsy* and turn it into the tragic mulatto/a plot, which is exactly what Harper does. The main difference between Harper's tragic mulatta plot and other African American works of the tragic mulatto/o plot is that Harper's has a happy ending. Hack states, "In stories with this plot, the discovery that a character who has believed him- or herself to be white has some African ancestry is cataclysmic, leading directly to enslavement, sexual violation, madness, and/or death" (80). This is also true of Harper's story, after Iola learns of her African ancestry, she is directly led to enslavement. Iola's mother constantly worries about this happening to her family, but Leroy tells her that she is just being anxious and that nothing of that sort will ever happen. Harper uses many literary aspects in the novel, but foreshadowing is one of the most prominent ones. Of course later that is exactly what happens. Many times, the reason why it is called a "tragic mulatto/a plot," is because the character dies at the end, but this is not true of *Iola Leroy*. While Harper broke that norm, she is still sticking to the other themes in a tragic mulatto/a plot. Hack argues:

As striking as the fact that Eliot saw fit to tell this story of what I will call unwitting passing and voluntary racial affiliation twice is the fact that virtually no other major British writer ever told it at all. By contrast, a number of nineteenth-and early-twentieth-century American writers—most of them African American—constructed this same scenario, almost invariably in stories about African American identity; the best-known example is Frances Ellen Watkins Harper's novel *Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted* (1892). Within American literary history, such stories are legible as refutations of what has come to be known as the tragic mulatto/a plot. (80)

Here Hack is explaining how the concept of the tragic mulatto/a plot was invented and it started from Victorian writing. While Eliot's poem does not necessarily deal with African American women, it still deals with intersectionality. Harper was not only one of the first African American writers to use this plot, but she was also one of the first women to use this plot. This clearly shows how African American literature can be directly linked to Victorian literature. Eliot's poem was very successful in telling the story of Fedalma and African American writers were aware of this. Since Eliot wrote her poem first, however, many scholars did not see the connection between the two works. In many ways the two works are almost identical and carry

the same meaning, as they both show that embracing one's identity is empowering and should be encouraged no matter the circumstances. African American writers already wanted to imitate Victorian authors' works and with their own experiences, they could write a work very similar to this one. African American writers use their works specifically to write about the horrors of slavery, but they also used it to shed some positivity onto a dark situation.

Depictions of slavery had been written about before by African American writers, but most were autobiographical. During the late 1800s, African American writers started using fiction to boost readership, but also to shed light onto the aftereffects of slavery. The end of the Civil War was one of the first times where it seemed like things were looking up. While the Southern people were still not very friendly towards African Americans, a lot of progress was being made. Black men gained the right to vote, slavery was abolished, and they were finally free. The intentions of Harper's novel overall are positive, much like that of Eliot's poem as well. During the time in which Harper was writing, it seemed like things were turning around for African Americans. While Harper's work has a more positive ending than that of Eliot's, both of their protagonists embrace who they are by the end of their stories, and both works demonstrate how intersectionality impacts the structures of society.

Conclusion

Through the representation of Iola as a feminist in Harper's novel, it shows how the notions of the Cult of True Womanhood were degrading and had a negative impact on women. The novel also shows how African American women had different expectations placed on them than their white counterparts and because of that, it was harder for them to conform to the standards of the Cult of True Womanhood. The use of British ideals in Harper's novel shows how African American literature and British literature are very similar. It is important to think about these histories because it impacts the way that novels are analyzed today, and it also shows why feminism is so important. The history of first wave feminism and the rise of female African American novelists is an important literary history that needs to be discussed. It is also important to look back on these notions of true womanhood or "Angel in the House," to see how far women have come and why it matters in terms of literature. Through Harper's critique and reinforcement of the Cult of True Womanhood, the novel *Iola Leroy* is used as a form of racial uplift and can still be used for that same reason today. Harper's novel shows how resisting the patriarchal standards of society, but also resisting to pass as white, can be rewarding. Through

this, she wants her readers to see that they do not need to change themselves for good things to happen to them and for others to accept them.

Harper's novel was one of the first novels to use intersectionality and show why that is such an important concept, especially when it comes to feminism. Harper's novel revolutionized the way that African American feminist novels are viewed during and after her lifetime, and her novel will continue to do so for many years to come. The comparison to George Eliot is especially important when recognizing where the tragic mulatto/a plot comes from. Harper places important late nineteenth century and early twentieth century issues within her novel to expand on how important African American women's rights were for her. Harper's use of critique but also uplift for the Cult of True Womanhood shows just how important these beliefs were for her and how hard she fought for them. Harper's novel will continue to make an impact on its readers for decades to come.

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