WRT 150
A Guide to First-Year Writing at Grand Valley State University

9th Edition
2010-11

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TAPESTRY PRESS, LTD.
Littleton, MA 01460
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Introduction

Welcome to the Department of Writing’s first-year writing program at Grand Valley State University. As a department, we strive to create a consistent program for all students taking the required first-year writing course, Writing 150. It is our hope that the skills and strategies you attain in this course will be carried over into the rest of your university curriculum.

Although our faculty members have the flexibility to teach WRT 150 using various pedagogical methods, there are important elements that remain consistent across sections. We have standardized many foundational elements such as course objectives, grading criteria, and departmental policies—all of which are included in this book. In addition, each semester we, as faculty, meet once a week in portfolio groups to discuss papers and to support an ongoing dialogue about course goals and expectations.

We also realize that quality research skills are key to being a successful writer on campus. Therefore, we have included a section in this text that highlights important documentation issues. And, during the semester, we work closely with the Grand Valley librarians, who can tailor research strategies that will help students locate and utilize high-quality professional sources for papers.

In addition, we have published here our criteria for evaluating writing at various stages. You will find process- and product-skills checklists as well as guidelines for responding to student writing. Because we know that students appreciate writing samples that spur classroom discussion and guide revisions, there is a section that showcases quality portfolios from last year’s WRT 150 students and a section that displays good student writing from a range of academic courses around campus.

To help you understand your course requirements, we have included our WRT 150 portfolio submission guidelines and answers to frequently asked questions about the portfolio grading system.
The goal of *A Guide to First-Year Writing at Grand Valley State University* is just that—to guide you in your writing endeavors. As a community of writers, we have worked to create a text that is both consistent and enjoyable and that celebrates student writing at all stages.

**Writing Course Selections**

After considering information about our departmental requirements and consulting with advisors during orientation, you determine which of the three first-year writing courses you should take first:

**ESL 098**, offered only in the fall, is for second-language students making a transition to standard written English.

**WRT 098**, also offered only in the fall, is for students who need more practice and instruction to develop fluency and fullness in their writing.

**WRT 150**, offered in both the fall and winter but not in the summer, is for students who write fluently but who need to be introduced to college-level academic writing, including writing with sources.

About 85 percent of freshmen entering GVSU place themselves into WRT 150—a four-credit course designed to prepare you for the writing you’ll be doing in your college classes. Below you will find a more detailed description of the primary departmental writing courses: WRT 098 and WRT 150.

**WRT 098**

WRT 098 focuses on bolstering students’ confidence, assisting them in gaining agency and control over their writing and education, and encouraging them to value a lifelong engagement with writing and reading. WRT 098 features peer workshop groups with trained writing consultants from The Fred Meijer Center for Writing leading those groups for an hour every week. The course invites spontaneity and discovery, seeking to develop in students the kinds of habits and writing strategies that will enable them to succeed in WRT 150 and beyond.
WRT 098 emphasizes immersion and invention as well as revision. Students are expected to write continually, generating new drafts all semester long, building their confidence and sharpening their skills by immersion in the act of writing. Fluency—one of the course goals—is best accomplished by continual practice (immersion) and an increased awareness of invention techniques. WRT 098 emphasizes strategies to get papers started, keep the writing process going to produce a substantial volume of writing, and develop positive attitudes toward writing in addition to introducing students to global revision and proofreading.

In WRT 098, students can expect to develop:

- Greater confidence as writers.
- Greater fluency in composing.
- Greater awareness of their strengths.
- New strategies for tackling writing problems.
- Experience with “writing to learn” techniques, using freewriting and drafting to discover what they know and what they want to say.
- Experience with global revision and multiple drafts.
- Familiarity with the Fred Meijer Center for Writing in LOH 120 and the resources available there.
- Awareness of how useful Writing Consultants can be during the drafting stage of papers in any discipline.
- Awareness of a variety of types of academic writing.
- Basic research skills, including productive use of the Internet.
- Understanding of the value of peer feedback.
- Increased skill at providing helpful feedback to others.
- Comfort using computers and word processors to generate and edit drafts.

WRT 150

As the single writing course required of all students, WRT 150 focuses on academic writing informed by scholarly research. Instructors assume that
you can read, summarize, and analyze a variety of college-level published material. They also assume that you have experience with narrative, descriptive, and argumentative writing. Typically, you write four or five four- to six-page papers, at least one of which involves significant research.

Half of all WRT 150 class meetings take place in a computer classroom. Each computer is connected to the library, the Internet, and electronic mail. WRT 150 instructors assume that you have a basic familiarity with computers, web browsers, and word processors.

By the end of WRT 150, you should be able to:

• Read and understand material written for college audiences.
• Develop clearly focused written summaries and analyses that demonstrate an understanding of the material you have read.
• Develop ideas using a variety of prewriting techniques, which may include brainstorming, freewriting, journal-keeping, consulting with others, conducting library research, and analyzing audience.
• Develop writing from early, writer-oriented drafts to later, reader-oriented drafts.
• Produce effective writing for a variety of purposes, ranging from narrative to expository to argumentative.
• Demonstrate the ability to build supportable generalizations using selected details that are suggestive, concrete, and relevant.
• Revise writing with the expectations of particular audiences in mind, including academic audiences.
• Conduct scholarly research and integrate facts and opinions from a variety of sources into your own writing.
• Edit writing so that it conforms to the general conventions of academic prose—that is, so that academic audiences can read the writing without having their attention and understanding diverted by numerous problems in grammar, spelling, punctuation, and format.

In WRT 150, you are exposed to challenging reading material—whether you find it in assigned readings or in your own research materials—and you practice discussing, summarizing, and analyzing that material. You
also learn to develop a writing process that helps you take on new writing
tasks, from prewriting, planning, and drafting to revising, consulting, and
editing.

You must pass WRT 150 with a grade of C or better to satisfy the univer-
sity’s Basic Writing Skills Requirement. A description of the departmental
criteria for determining A, B, C or D papers can be found on pages 20-23.
We as a program strive for consistency across sections of WRT 150. We want Grand Valley students to have a shared first-year experience and to carry into the general university curriculum a common set of writing-related skills and strategies. Our primary means of achieving the desired consistency across sections is to establish and publicize the outcomes of the course. That is why we publish this book: to be as clear as possible about our goals, our evaluation methods, and our grading criteria; and to offer examples of what we view as successful student writing.

As part of our effort to ensure consistency across sections, all WRT 150 teachers adhere to the following university and departmental policies.

**Course Design**

WRT 150 teachers are free to choose their own texts, design their own syllabi, and create their own assignments. But all teachers and all sections of WRT 150 aim to achieve the stated goals of the course and program, particularly those summarized on pages 4-5 of this book.

**Attendance**

Regular attendance is required to succeed in WRT 150. According to the GVSU catalog, “In case of excessive absences, the instructor may refuse to grant credit for the course” (94). Missing class more than four times constitutes “excessive absences” in WRT 150 (and coming unprepared may also count as an absence or partial absence according to the teacher’s discretion). Your instructor will send you an email warning (to the e-mail account you registered with the university) after the fourth absence. If you miss class or come unprepared after the warning, you will be ineligible to submit a final portfolio for the course, which means you will fail and have to retake WRT 150 another semester.

**Midterm Evaluation**

The GVSU catalog requires midterm grade reports “for all freshmen and for any undergraduate student in other than good standing” (87). Midterm grades are available on the web but not recorded on your official transcript.
Because WRT 150 grades are based on the quality of your writing at the end of the term (see pages 20-23), midterm grades are a general assessment of the overall quality of your work in the class up to that point and have no direct bearing on your final grade as determined by your teacher and the portfolio grading group. For a full explanation of your midterm grade, please consult with your instructor.

Learning or Physical Disabilities

If you have any special needs because of learning, physical, or any other disability, please contact Disability Support Services (DSS) at (616) 331-2490. Writing faculty work with the DSS to accommodate students’ special needs and devise a plan that is fair to all students. Furthermore, if you have a disability and think you will need assistance evacuating a classroom and/or building in an emergency situation, please make your teacher and DSS aware so Grand Valley can develop a plan to assist you.

The Writing Labs

WRT 150 classes generally meet twice a week, once in a traditional classroom and once in a computer classroom, referred to as a writing lab. We use several labs, both in Allendale and on our other campuses. The personal computer you use in the lab is connected to a hard drive (the “R” drive) that is shared by everyone in your lab. You also have the option to save items to a personal drive (the “N” drive), also known as your network account. Items saved to your network account can be accessed from various campus locations, such as your living quarters, as well as from other GVSU campuses. However, you cannot retrieve items on the N drive from your home computer unless you use FTP (see www.gvsu.edu/it for help).

We use Microsoft Word, which is different from Microsoft Works, as the primary word-processing software in the lab. This means that Microsoft Works documents do not open in the writing labs unless they have been saved in rich-text format (.rtf).

The labs are sometimes used simply for writing drafts, but your instructor may introduce a range of activities—brief in-class writing exercises, peer-review sessions, and research assignments, for example—to help you gain expertise in a range of writing skills and strategies.
The Fred Meijer Center for Writing

The Fred Meijer Center for Writing (LOH 120) provides assistance to writers at all stages of their writing processes: brainstorming ideas, developing and supporting an argument, organizing a paper, or even polishing a final draft. Students enrolled in any courses at Grand Valley State University—including WRT 150—can work one-on-one with a trained undergraduate or graduate consultant at the center during drop-in hours. Consultants are available to work with students Sundays through Fridays at the Allendale, downtown Grand Rapids, and Holland campuses.

Drop-in hours are as follows:

Allendale, LOH 120
- Monday through Thursday, 9 a.m.–8 p.m.
- Friday, 9 a.m.–3 p.m.
- Sunday, 3–8 p.m.

Downtown, DEV 101B
- Monday through Thursday, 2–7 p.m.

Holland (see www.gvsu.edu/wc)

You can also visit the website (www.gvsu.edu/wc) for handouts and other resources you’ll find useful as you write and revise your papers for WRT 150 and other courses.

The center also sends undergraduate consultants into all WRT 150 classrooms to work with you one-on-one or in small groups. The consultants are there to help you think about how you might revise your papers throughout the semester and as you prepare your final portfolio. The consultants aren’t teacher assistants; they don’t create assignments or grade your writing. But because they undergo quite a bit of training to learn how to respond productively to your writing, the consultants are great resources for you. Talk with your consultants often about your writing!

The Library and Online Library Sources

The goal of library-related instruction in WRT 150 is to help you become an information-literate lifelong learner who can use academic and professional research methods and sources. In order to reach this goal, you will learn how to develop and implement a research strategy, locate the resourc-
es necessary to meet your information needs, and evaluate the information that you find.

Many WRT 150 teachers work closely with Grand Valley librarians and bring librarians into class to help you learn how to use Grand Valley’s libraries and online library resources. In addition, each class has a designated library liaison who will work with you on your research for WRT 150. Ask your teacher for the name of your library liaison, or feel free to ask library staff to help you find the right person. Many first-year college students do not understand that librarians in a college research library are eager and ready to offer substantial help to you, both in conducting your research and in learning how to become better researchers. Grand Valley’s librarians are also faculty members who serve as part of our teaching staff. Ask for their help.

**Working with Sources**

As academic writers, we work in a world of information and opinion, so it’s very common for us to refer to facts and ideas originally published in other sources. Consider this passage from Stephanie Hehemann’s essay, “You’re Getting Sleepy: The Effect of Sleep Deprivation on Young Adults”:

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) have identified adolescents and young adults (ages 12 to 25) as a population at high risk for problem sleepiness (U.S., “Problem” 2). Adolescents require at least as much sleep as they did as pre-adolescents (about 8.5 to 9.25 hours each night), but according to Franklin C. Brown and colleagues, only about 11 percent of students are obtaining this (33). Dr. Meir Kryger, Professor of Medicine and Director of the Sleep Disorders Centre, St. Boniface General Hospital, Winnipeg, Manitoba, asserts that in its place, teens are getting little sleep during the week (approximately 6.5 to 7 hours a night) and sleeping in large quantity during the weekends, which is termed rescue sleep. For students, indicators of sleep deprivation include difficulty getting up for school, falling asleep at school, and struggling to stay awake while doing homework (U.S., “Problem” 2).

Citing outside sources accomplishes several things for a writer. First, it shows the reader that the writer has researched her topic and become something of an expert on it, thus establishing the writer’s authority and
credibility. Stephanie Hehemann has clearly done her homework on sleep deprivation. Citing sources also builds the reader’s confidence in the material itself, which is why most academic writers try to find good, reliable sources. In the passage above, we feel confident that a professor of medicine and director of a sleep-disorder clinic should know quite a bit about teenage sleep habits. But what if Stephanie had written, “My friend Gina says that teens get little sleep during the week and large quantities during the weekends, which she calls rescue sleep”? Stephanie’s friend Gina may very well know what she is talking about, but most of us would probably rather listen to Dr. Meir Kryger on this subject! Finally, citing outside sources clearly and correctly gives the reader a chance to explore the topic for him or herself. Because Stephanie tells us where she got Dr. Kryger’s information, we can go directly to the ABC News website and read up on the topic ourselves. In other words, the works cited list at the end of Stephanie’s essay works as a kind of guide for further reading.

Academic writers use any one of a number of documentation styles, depending on the field or discipline in which they are writing. Most writers in the humanities use the documentation system of the Modern Language Association (MLA), and this is the system used most in WRT 150 classes. Writers in the social sciences typically use the documentation system of the American Psychological Association (APA). In the natural sciences, many writers use the documentation system of the Council of Science Editors (CSE). Many other styles exist, and you are likely to learn several during your college career. Here, we briefly discuss the two most common styles in WRT 150 classes: MLA and APA.

Regardless of what documentation style you are using, when you cite a specific bit of information (a fact, a quote, a paraphrase), you need to let the reader know where he or she can find that same bit of information. In general, this is done in three ways: in the text of your writing, in parentheses after references to source-based information, and in lists of sources attached to the end of your paper.

**MLA Style:**

1) *Textually:* This tells the reader who or what is responsible for the cited information: The National Institutes of Health (NIH) have identified . . .
2) *In parentheses*: Immediately after the reference in the paper itself, the specific place where that information can be found—usually a page number—is included, so the reader knows where to look for more information: For students, indicators of sleep deprivation include difficulty getting up for school, falling asleep at school, and struggling to stay awake while doing homework (U.S., “Problem” 2).

3) *Works cited page*: At the end of the paper, all works (books, articles, interviews, TV shows, etc.) that have been discussed in the paper are listed in alphabetical order. This is where the reader can look if he or she wants to look those sources up:


**APA Style:**

Consider this passage from April Miller’s “Privacy in the Workplace”:

Since the dawn of new technology, genetic testing, although not very common, has become an employee monitoring issue. According to Doyle (1999), if there were no longer a federal law preventing genetic testing, it would become widespread if the cost continued to decline. The results of a 1998 survey conducted by the American Management Association showed that approximately 10 percent of employers are commonly testing employees for genetic predisposition to diseases (Repa, 2001c).

1) *Textually*: This tells the reader who or what is responsible for the cited information, along with the year in which the information was published: According to Doyle (1999) . . .

2) *In parentheses*: Immediately after the reference in the paper itself, the specific place where that information can be found is included: The results of a 1998 survey conducted by the American Management Association showed that approximately 10 percent of employers are commonly testing employees for genetic predisposition to diseases (Repa, 2001c).

3) *References page*: At the end of the paper, all works (books, articles, interviews, TV shows, etc) that have been discussed in the paper are listed in alphabetical order. This is where the reader can look if he or she wants to look those sources up:

Writing As a Process

When we think of writers, we might imagine people who possess some magical talent that allows them to sit down and instantly put their thoughts into writing. But after observing experienced writers working from start to finish through real writing projects, researchers have concluded that writers do not simply sit down and “put it in writing” in one magical step. Rather, real writers work through a fairly complex process, or series of steps. Different writers follow different steps depending on their needs and personal preferences, but in general all writers experience a writing process.

For instance, when faced with the need to communicate to an audience, writers begin by exploring their own knowledge, feelings, and beliefs and often consult the knowledge, feelings, and beliefs of others, searching for something specific to say; then they explore their communication options—the various forms available to them—before sketching out, reconsidering, revising, and polishing their message, making sure they are sensitive to their audience. Often, at several points during the writing process, writers ask friends or peers to take a look at their drafted material and give advice or feedback. Finally, when satisfied with their efforts, writers deliver their writing to their intended audience.

The example above illustrates five basic parts of the writing process:

- **Prewriting:** generating ideas; collecting information; identifying possible subjects, purposes, audiences, and forms
- **Drafting:** trying out ideas and approaches; zeroing in on a single focus and a single form
- **Revising:** considering additions and deletions; reshaping and refocusing existing material; editing for smoothness and mechanical correctness
- **Consulting:** talking with people about preliminary ideas, plans, and drafts; soliciting oral and written feedback from friends and colleagues concerning content, structure, audience appeal, style, and correctness
- **Publishing:** delivering the final product (paper, letter, proposal, report, article, etc.) to its intended audience (teacher, relative, client, committee, editor, etc.)
Although the steps are unique for each writer, these five areas comprise the general “process” of writing.

Because writing is a process, or activity, you need to develop effective ways of going about the physical and mental acts of writing. As instructors of WRT 150, we are not merely judges of your writing; in fact, we might best be viewed as coaches whose primary goal is to help prepare you for the writing “performances” you will be asked to do in WRT 150, in future GVSU classes, and on the job. We facilitate your exploration of the writing process through handouts, class discussions, stimulating writing assignments, and responses to your writing.

**Process-skills Checklist**

Sound writers always have a system that works for them and that involves a series of steps. Below you will find a checklist that we have devised to help you question your methods when drafting ideas on paper. While engaged in the writing process, you should:

**Prewrite:**

- Use a variety of brainstorming techniques to generate, develop, and focus topics.
- Write informally in journals or notebooks as an ongoing writer’s activity.
- Use writing as a tool for learning as well as communicating.
- Analyze audience as a method of planning and focusing.
- Consider purpose, style, and form in relation to audience during the planning stages.
- Draw from a variety of formal and stylistic options during the planning stages.
- Sequence and initiate your own writing process to suit immediate purposes.
- Generate and select your own methods of development.
- Engage in prewriting conferences with your instructor and peers.
- Read as a writer; read published material critically.
- Write and speak about yourself as a writer.
- Use basic reference materials (dictionary, thesaurus, encyclopedia).
- Use research as a form of generating ideas and planning writing.
Draft:

- Translate prewriting activities into early drafts.
- Adapt your writing for specific audiences, including academic ones.
- Write for broad, public, academic audiences.
- Vary diction and tone according to audience.
- Establish and maintain a focus.
- Maintain a consistent style throughout individual pieces.
- Support ideas and observations with details.
- Integrate ideas and information from outside sources.
- Vary sentences for effect.
- Achieve “closure” in later drafts.
- Work productively in writing groups.
- Use a word processor to draft papers.

Consult and Revise:

- Write multiple drafts.
- Write and use self-evaluations.
- Use feedback from peers.
- Give feedback to peers.
- Engage in revision conferences with your instructor and peers.
- Survey and integrate audiences’ needs and interests.
- Adapt your writing style to suit purpose and audience.
- Revise for focus, development, structure, balance, and emphasis.
- Add, delete, change, or recast material to suit purpose and audience.
- Establish a clear focus throughout the paper.
- Align writing with the paper’s focus.
- Target completed pieces to a variety of audiences.
- Proofread all writing intended for public audiences.
- Use word processing editing software.
- Use a dictionary, thesaurus, and handbook for editing.
Responding to Peer Writing

While reviewing the written “Process-Skills Checklist” can be instrumental in improving your papers, you will find that spoken feedback can be particularly helpful as well in the drafting process. Therefore, you will play a vital role in this information exchange. By offering valuable feedback on students’ papers, you will increase your ability to think critically about your own writing and at the same time receive valuable feedback to help you improve your paper drafts. As you consider this part of the process, you should avoid closing the door with negative or positive evaluations on students’ papers. If you judge early drafts by saying “your opening is great” or “this is already an A paper,” you unwittingly encourage your peers to stop rethinking and rewriting their papers.

Here are three kinds of responses that you might find helpful when working with your peers in small-group workshops or in one-on-one feedback sessions:

• **Provide a window**

  You can simply receive: “Tell me about your paper.” “Read it to me.” By serving as an audience, you can help your readers think about their drafts as pieces of communication. As you read or listen, you should let your reactions show—by laughing, shuddering, nodding in agreement, etc.

• **Hold up a mirror**

  You can report back what you’ve received: “You seem to be focusing on . . .” “Your opening leads me to your topic by. . .” “One image that I kept hearing was . . .” By describing what you hear or read, you can help peers to see their writing from the reader’s perspective—particularly from the college-level reader’s perspective.

• **Open the door**

  You can question or prompt: “What about . . .?” “Are you suggesting that . . .?” “How did you come up with the idea to . . .?” With questions, you can help your peers to see alternatives and possibilities for their writing without ordering changes. Writers need to learn to
make their own choices, but you can help them conceive alternative options.

Writing as a Product

As you strengthen the writing process through self-exploration and critical thinking, naturally the product that you produce will improve in many ways; thus, the process is distinctly connected to the product. However, the end product—your portfolio—will be evaluated in terms of its quality, so as your instructors, we must serve as both “coach” and “judge” of the writing you produce. Team grading is one way we separate our roles. Like gymnastics coaches, we work with you, offering the best advice possible to help you create a quality product. Then we send your work to “officials”—the portfolio group—for evaluation. Whether we are judging your writing or the writing of other instructors’ students, we always keep in mind the general characteristics of “acceptable” college writing summarized below.

Product-skills Checklist

By the end of WRT 150, your published writing should demonstrate that you have achieved the program’s goals:

Content and Development:

• Offer a purpose that becomes evident early on.
• Maintain a single focus through the entire paper.
• Present ideas and descriptions with a college-level audience in mind.
• Present a focus that is developed with details, examples, and discussions, including material from outside sources.

Organization:

• Establish an overall pattern for the paper to follow.
• Progress from one point, idea, or scene to another in a coherent, logical way.
• Construct paragraphs that are generally well-organized within the overall pattern of the paper.
• Offer transitions to help the reader move from one part of your paper to another.
Style:

- Structure sentences effectively in a variety of ways.
- Appear to have carefully selected words and phrases.
- Maintain an overall tone in your paper that is appropriate to your purpose and audience.

Mechanics:

- Adopt a format that is generally acceptable and appropriate.
- Refer to outside sources that are introduced, integrated and documented.
- Illustrate few problems with regard to grammar, spelling, punctuation, or usage.
Evaluation Procedures and Criteria

Many professionals use portfolios to show other people what they are capable of producing. Your WRT 150 portfolio represents your own end-of-semester writing capabilities. The portfolio includes three fully revised and polished papers, including at least one that integrates outside sources and accurately credits the ideas and language drawn from those sources. Together, these three pieces of writing constitute the bulk of your final course grade.

Submission Guidelines:

Papers should be printed on a letter-quality printer, such as the laser printers in the writing labs. Margins should be at least one inch all the way around the page. Papers can be double- or single-spaced (ask your professor). Fonts should be standard (Arial, Times New Roman, etc.), and the point-size should be close to standard typeface (11 or 12 points). Note: The default font and margin settings in Microsoft Word are fine.

Submit your papers in a standard manila file folder with your first initial, last name, and section clearly printed on the filing tab. Your portfolio is due to your teacher by the end of the last class before finals week. If your portfolio is late, you may fail the course.

Since the portfolio grading groups do not comment on portfolios unless they are graded a D, portfolios are generally not returned. You should keep copies of your work and wait for grade reports to see your course grades. If there are questions about your grade, you should speak with your instructor.

Evaluation Procedures:

Your WRT 150 portfolio is read and evaluated by at least two members of a team of teachers, including your own professor. This group meets regularly throughout the term to discuss grading criteria and expectations. Each
portfolio is given a grade based on the characteristics of A, B, C, and D papers as outlined in the evaluation section below. If the first two readers agree on a grade, the grading is complete. If the first two readers disagree, a third reader is consulted and the two matching grades are paired together as the final grade. For example, if your portfolio receives a B, you receive a B on your portfolio. If your portfolio receives an A and a B, and a third reader gives it an A, you receive an A on your portfolio. If your portfolio receives a D and a C, and a third reader gives it a D, you receive a D on your portfolio. Graders write brief explanations of grades of D so that students receiving this grade understand the graders’ reasoning.

Your readers supply one grade per portfolio: that is, they do not grade the individual papers, but rather the entire portfolio. With this in mind, you should strive to strike a balance in your submissions, demonstrating the fullest possible range of your writing abilities. Your first priority should be to include your best writing, but your second priority should be to demonstrate your ability to perform a range of academic writing tasks, including the integration of a variety of reputable sources.

**Evaluation Criteria—Characteristics of A, B, C, and D Papers**

Each week, your professor and his or her fellow portfolio group members meet to examine and evaluate several pieces of writing, identifying the characteristics of A, B, C, or D writing based on the criteria listed below. By continuing to discuss the criteria all semester, the portfolio group reaches a consensus or “norm” by which to examine and evaluate the final portfolios submitted at the end of the term. The characteristics are provided for you here so that you can identify precisely how your work is evaluated. Therefore, it is advisable for you to use these grade characteristics to help you determine the level of your writing as you progress through WRT 150. You can also use these characteristics as a guide for offering feedback on peer papers.
Characteristics of A Papers

Content

• The material challenges the intelligence and sophistication of a college-level audience.
• A single focus is emphasized through the entire paper.
• The writer appeals effectively to the intended audience.
• The focus is consistently developed with significant and interesting details, examples, and discussion.
• Relevant outside sources are clearly introduced and integrated into the surrounding discussion.
• The paper demonstrates a clear purpose.

Organization

• The focus of the paper is clearly emphasized.
• The overall pattern is artfully conceived.
• The focus is developed through a sequence of related paragraphs.
• Paragraphs are purposefully organized and substantially developed with supporting evidence or detailed examples.
• The opening is inviting, challenging, and appropriate.
• Transitions between and within paragraphs are explicit, clear, and purposeful.

Style

• Sentence structure varies according to the content, purpose, and audience.
• The sentences are clear, logical, and enjoyable to read.
• Word choice is precise, interesting, and appropriate to the writing task.
• The language is mature and idiomatic.
• The writer’s tone complements the paper’s purpose and suits the audience.

Mechanics

• Format is appropriate.
• References to outside sources are cited and documented according to the appropriate style sheet.
• Problems in grammar, spelling, punctuation, or usage do not interfere with communication.
Characteristics of B Papers

Content

• The material is thoughtful and engaging.
• A single focus runs through the entire paper.
• The writer clearly acknowledges the expectations of the audience.
• The focus is developed with appropriate details, examples, and discussions.
• Outside sources are used clearly and purposefully.
• The paper demonstrates a clear purpose.

Organization

• The focus is clearly identifiable.
• The overall pattern is clear and sensible.
• The focus is developed through a sequence of related paragraphs.
• Paragraphs are clearly organized, but some may lack richness of detail or evidence.
• The opening is appropriate to the focus.
• Transitions between and within paragraphs advance the writer’s ideas.

Style

• Sentences are varied in structure, only occasionally choppy or repetitive.
• Sentences are generally clear, logical, and readable.
• Writer demonstrates general control over vocabulary appropriate to the writing task.
• The language is idiomatic.
• The tone is consistent and appropriate to the writer’s purpose and audience.

Mechanics

• Format is appropriate.
• References to outside sources are generally cited and documented according to the appropriate style sheet.
• Problems in grammar, spelling, punctuation, or usage rarely interfere with communication.
Characteristics of C Papers

Content
• The material is reasonable, but may not fully engage the abilities of the audience.
• A single focus runs through the paper, although parts may wander from the central idea.
• The writer appears to present ideas and descriptions with an audience in mind.
• The focus is generally developed with details, examples, and discussions.
• Outside sources are generally relevant, although not always clearly introduced or integrated into the discussion.
• The paper has a purpose, but that purpose may need to be more clearly conveyed.

Organization
• The paper has an identifiable focus.
• The writer establishes an overall pattern for the paper to follow.
• The focus is generally developed throughout the paper, although some paragraphs may appear out of sequence or slightly off-track.
• Paragraphs tend to lack richness of evidence or detailed examples.
• The opening generally matches the topic and focus.
• Transitions are evident, but may be abrupt or mechanical.

Style
• Sentences tend to be basic, choppy, or structurally repetitive.
• Sentences are generally readable, but ideas may be hard to follow from one part of the paper to the next.
• Although most words appear to be well chosen, some may not be as precise or apt as they could be.
• Occasional lapses from standard idiom occur.
• The tone, though generally consistent, at times appears inappropriate to the writer’s purpose and audience.

Mechanics
• Format is generally appropriate.
• References to outside sources are generally cited and documented, but not always in the appropriate style.
• Problems in grammar, spelling, punctuation, or usage occasionally interfere with communication and damage the writer’s credibility.
Characteristics of D Papers

Content
• The material does not fully engage the abilities of the audience.
• No single focus runs through the entire paper.
• The writer doesn’t appear to have the needs of an audience in mind.
• Ideas are stated, but not developed with details, examples, and discussions.
• Outside sources, if used at all, are not clearly introduced or integrated.
• The paper’s purpose is unclear.

Organization
• The paper’s focus is overly general, missing, or unclear.
• The writer hasn’t established a clear pattern for the paper to follow.
• Attempt at development is evident but unsuccessful; paragraphs frequently seem unrelated or repetitive.
• Paragraphs are poorly constructed and contain little supporting detail.
• The opening is overly general, missing, or misleading.
• Transitions are weak, ineffective, or missing.

Style
• Sentences are frequently basic, choppy, or repetitive.
• Sentence problems impede effective communication.
• The reader must reread many sentences in order to comprehend them.
• The writer displays inadequate control of diction; word-choice problems are frequent.
• There are many problems with standard idiom.
• The tone frequently appears inappropriate to the writer’s purpose and audience.

Mechanics
• Format is not always appropriate.
• References to outside sources are not clearly cited; documentation style is generally inappropriate.
• Many errors in spelling, grammar, punctuation, and usage impede communication and undercut the writer’s credibility.
1. Why is a group of WRT 150 teachers reading my papers and determining my final grade rather than just my own teacher?

A group of five or six teachers (including your teacher) reads samples of your class's writing throughout the semester to discuss and agree about what are A, B, C, and D papers. The goal of the instructors in the group is to set fair and accurate grading standards for this university-wide course requirement. The standards begin with those established by the Writing Department and develop more specifically as your teacher's grading group discusses samples from your class and other classes throughout the semester. This agreement between two or more writing professors constitutes your letter grade in the class.

2. Does my teacher have any say as to what grade I get on my portfolio and what grade I receive in this class?

Yes. Your teacher will always be one of at least two portfolio readers of your work at the end of the term. If the second reader in the group agrees with your teacher about the grade for your portfolio, then that agreement will determine the grade you receive on the portfolio. If the second reader does not agree with your teacher, then a third reader will be asked to read your portfolio. If the third reader agrees with your teacher, then the grade stands. If the third reader agrees with the second reader, then your grade is based on the agreement of readers two and three. The goal is to arrive at a “community” grade rather than a grade based solely on one teacher's preferences.

3. What happens if one person in the portfolio group grades much harder than the others? Doesn't this mean I'll probably get a low grade if that person reads my portfolio?

No, not necessarily. If the second reader does not agree with your teacher, a third reader is asked to read your portfolio and decide which of the first two readers is closest to the standards that the portfolio group has agreed upon during the semester. (See question #2.)
4. I think each teacher should grade his or her own students’ work.

Each teacher does have a hand in grading his or her students’ work, but the portfolio groups assure students that their grades are a reflection of community standards—both departmental and university-wide. Teachers of WRT 150 also have the option of adding a “plus” or “minus” to the final letter grade based on other aspects of a student’s performance—class participation, effectiveness of peer-review work, completion of reading assignments, and so on.

5. How can the portfolio group grade my papers if they haven’t seen the assignment?

WRT 150 is a course designed to give you practice and instruction in the various kinds of writing that you will be asked to do throughout college. The portfolio group therefore wants to be general in their assessment of your writing. They want to look at three samples of your writing and describe the group of three as “excellent,” “good,” “average,” or “below average.” Ideally, this grade reflects what most professors would say if they picked up your portfolio and read it. We want your grade to be based on the general quality of your writing, not on how well the writing satisfies teacher-specific instructions. Readers of the portfolio assume that the essays they read meet the basic requirements of each teacher’s assignments.

6. My teacher said that I have to type single space, have fewer than two sentence fragments, and underline the thesis statement in every essay just to get a C. If the portfolio group doesn’t know this, then what happens?

Teachers often have “minimum requirements” that they want every paper to meet. For example, some say that a paper can’t be handed in more than one day late. When teachers have such requirements that may not be the same as other teachers in the portfolio group, they will enforce those requirements by making sure you meet them before you submit a portfolio to the portfolio group at the end of the term. This way, everyone who reads your portfolio will assume it has met any teacher-specific minimum requirements. If you don’t meet minimum requirements that your teacher sets, your teacher
won’t allow you to submit a portfolio at the end of the term. Again, the portfolio graders are interested in how your writing matches up against the general expectations of a college-level reader.

7. Could two people in my portfolio group agree that I deserve a B and then my teacher give me a C anyway because of absences or class participation?

No. The portfolio grade is the “bulk” of your grade for the semester. You should not expect your grade to be adjusted beyond a plus or a minus for the grade the portfolio group (which includes your teacher as first reader) gives you. If your grade needs adjusting down a whole letter grade, you probably didn’t meet the minimum requirements (e.g., too many absences) and you should not have been allowed to submit a portfolio in the first place and should have been given an F. Teachers across campus should be assured that your WRT 150 grade reflects how well you write, not your attendance, your improvement, or your attitude.

8. Just looking at my portfolio at the end of the term doesn’t show how much I’ve improved. Shouldn’t my grade be based, at least in part, on my improvement?

Your grade in WRT 150 is based on the quality of your writing at the end of the term. Our intention is that what counts as A, B, C, or D be roughly the same for every student. Teachers can adjust grades (usually with a plus or a minus) based on your participation, improvement, or other factors. The grade of F is generally reserved for students who do not meet the minimum requirements of the course.

9. I like to have grades during the semester so that I know how well I am doing. I don’t want my grade at the end of the term to come as a big surprise.

We agree. Your teacher should be reading your writing throughout the semester and responding to it with comments, personal conferences, and suggestions for revision. Most WRT 150 classes have consultants from the Writing Center who work with you and point out
strengths and weakness in your writing. And many teachers will have you read and comment on other students’ work. For most students, a grade is not necessary for early drafts because the proper focus is on what the paper could be, not on what it is. But if you want a grade on an assignment and your teacher has not given one, just ask. The teacher will be able to tell you where she thinks the paper falls within the range of A to D. The teacher will probably tell you what the portfolio group has been saying about writing like yours. Don’t be surprised if the teacher says, for example, that some in the group might say C, and she, or others in the group, might say B. Group members often disagree, especially early in the semester, about what is an A, B, or C. If the teacher says your paper is probably a low B or a C, your next question should be: “What could I work on in this paper that would improve it?” But it’s important to remember that all grade estimates—whether they are by your teacher, your Writing Center tutor, or your Uncle Lou—are just that: estimates. What you really need to do is just keep on working. It’s a 15-week course. Improve your writing until the very last day.

10. It seems to me that the portfolio grading system is all about judging final products. I thought we were supposed to be interested in the writing process.

At GVSU we use portfolio grading groups to respond to the need to develop community standards and to respond to the university’s desire for a “check” on how well students can write before they move on to the upper-level courses. One aim (there are others) of the portfolio system is to protect students from being misled by “easy” graders and being treated unfairly by “hard” graders. Nevertheless, our writing program is very much concerned that you are learning strategies and skills that help you develop your own writing process. In fact, because the portfolio group grading system focuses on what you can do at the end of the semester, as represented by your portfolio, it encourages and gives opportunities for many papers to be revised throughout the term. How well you develop your writing process will largely determine how well you do in your final portfolio. Revision is the heart of the writing process. And final written products are the result of the writing process.
11. The portfolio group read my paper but didn’t give me feedback. Why not?

The portfolio groups are chiefly concerned with grading—an end-of-semester form of feedback. You need more substantive feedback throughout the term. Your teacher is part of a portfolio group and his or her feedback on your drafts and revisions should be counted as feedback from the portfolio group. Your teacher is helping to set standards in the portfolio group, so his or her comments will be particularly helpful. Don’t overlook the value of getting help from the Writing Center tutor and other students in your class, as well. It is your teacher’s job to make sure that you receive feedback and help on your writing throughout the term. If you aren’t getting it, ask again.

12. What is supposed to be in my portfolio?

Every student submits three papers, one of which must include citations and references. Keep in mind that the three papers represent your abilities as a college-level academic writer—so you probably don’t want three very short papers, for example, since that would fail to “represent” your ability to write a longer paper. Ask your teacher if you are not sure. Your teacher and other students should help you make good choices about what goes in the final portfolio. Also, read the five full portfolios published in this book, and together with your teacher and classmates, try to generalize from them what constitutes a strong WRT 150 portfolio.

13. One of my portfolio papers must integrate outside sources. How many?

The quantity and nature of outside sources required for your papers will be determined by your individual instructor in consultation with the portfolio group.

14. Can I include a paper in my portfolio from another class?

No. All papers in your portfolio must have been assigned and seen by your teacher in draft form. Students who submit work from another college class, work from high school, or work that is not their own may be failed and the dean of students will be notified.
When we set out to choose portfolios to be published in this handbook, we don’t try to anticipate which ones will serve as perfect models for future students. So what are we looking for when we begin the portfolio selection process? Our goal is to select writers who understand their papers’ purposes, know what it is they are trying to accomplish in their work, and we look for authors who keep their audience in mind as they write. No matter what your assignment may be, the keys to good writing remain consistent—a solid sense of purpose, focus, and audience. But there are many portfolio essays that meet these requirements that are submitted for possible publication, so we try to choose pieces from writers that tackle diverse subject material. In showcasing work from previous WRT 150 students, we hope to open up classroom dialogue about the content as well as the writing. We have chosen six writers to showcase in this year’s edition of the book and each has something special to offer.

In Portfolio One, Shelby Powers DeGalan sneaks readers into a packed Detroit arena where we get a realistic perspective on the lives of Phans, the loyal followers of the band Phish. Through her use of richly textured description, Shelby crafts the story of Phish heads like Esther, Character Zero and Bliss, giving the audience a true sense of the group’s large and dedicated fan base. Her vivid portrayal of Phish culture—tie-dyed t-shirts, life on the road, drug use, and jam music—helps us better understand the deep popularity of their concerts and the colorful community that follows them around the country. “The Fiction of Race” is a thought-provoking discussion of the state of racism within the millennial generation. Shelby argues that Generation Y/Z possesses a vastly different, almost “colorblind” view on race than prior generations. She utilizes significant and attention-grabbing details and examples from the 2008 presidential election and her own life experiences to develop her focus. Her commentary on how the U.S. is becoming a more post-racial society will surely lead to some interesting classroom conversations. In “Eleven Months” Powers DeGalan narratively chronicles her team’s pain and triumph of rowing for a national
title. Through her generous use of dialogue, she not only establishes a solid tone, but also successfully reveals character and motivation while moving the plot forward. As Shelby’s portfolio demonstrates, the mark of a quality portfolio is its ability to effectively address and engage the audience with challenging purposes.

With his use of mature language, precise word choice, and enjoyable sentence structure, Portfolio Two by Samuel Rogers offers readers a collection of essays with a strong sense of style. With teens becoming one of the largest target markets for credit card companies, Sam decided to write “Credit Isn’t Free” to warn about the financial costs of buying on credit. Through the use of credible financial sources, he reinforces the importance of educating today’s youth about fiscal responsibility. Roger’s second piece, “Cleanup in Aisle Tut” recounts the grandeur and magnificence he experiences traveling to Giza, Egypt. While greatly impressed by ancient monuments such as the Great Sphinx and the Great Pyramid of Giza, he is dismayed at the extent of the area’s commercialization. The sight of western chain restaurants, landmark graffiti, and strewn trash make him question how Egypt can strike a balance between allowing visitor access and preserving the integrity of the site. In “One Flu Over the Cuckoo’s Nest,” he leads readers through a thoughtful discussion of flu vaccinations and antiviral medications in a clear, and purposeful manner. He ultimately concludes that while he agrees with the practice of immunology, he is uncomfortable with coercing people into believing they need to be vaccinated with hastily formulated vaccines and giving patients direct access to antiviral medications with dangerous side-effects. Roger’s entire portfolio showcases his ability to professionally use college-level academic research as a significant means to develop his own ideas as a student writer.

Portfolio Three by Shayla Henrikson opens with “Social Networking Sites and Student Image Portrayal,” a response to a study conducted on why so many college students are using social networking sites as marketing tools to promote themselves to peers. Shayla’s essay is highly persuasive in that she cites facts, examples, and personal experiences that both refute and support points made in the article. She discovers that while most students have harmless intentions with the images they portray online to peers, they
must be aware of the negative ramifications. “Tag, You’re It” is an autobiographical narrative about serious life lessons learned from a simple game of tag. In the story we see her favorite pastime become a metaphor for life as the characters’ desperation to succeed and the desire to be on top overtakes the laughs and simplicity of the game itself. Shayla’s work is not only vivid, precise and well-constructed, but also intellectually and emotionally inviting. In the “Bare Naked Truth: Full-Body Scanner Use in Airports” Henrikson confronts the issue of using full-body scanners in U.S. airports. From the beginning, she takes a clear stand that despite the perceived privacy invasion, scanners are a necessary security measure to protect airline passengers and ensure the nation’s safety. While the art of argumentation is not an easy skill to acquire, Shayla does an excellent job making a convincing argument. An argumentative essay shouldn’t merely assert an opinion; it presents an argument, and that argument must be backed up by data that persuades readers that the opinion is valid. In addition, strong persuasive essays, like Henrikson’s, maintain a reasonable and professional tone. By anticipating objections and making concessions, she inspires confidence and shows goodwill towards her audience.

Eric VanMiddendorp begins Portfolio Four with a piece on a rite of passage experienced by most American teens—getting your first car. In the “Car—Driver Link” he explores our cultural connection to automobiles and the relationship between gender, age and car preference. Like most male teenagers, Eric wants to drive something cool and fast to impress his peers and fit in with popular culture expectations. Instead of getting the muscle car of his dreams, VanMiddendorp’s parents purchase a 1997 Volkswagen Golf hatchback for him. As he articulately asserts, culture plays a significant role in the conflicting views between what parents and kids think teenagers should drive. “Taking the Work out of Homework” has Eric investigating a major debate among teachers and parents: whether to abolish homework or increase the homework load in schools. Integrating effective, significant, and scholarly research into his paper, he is able to argue for a middle-of-the-road approach to the dispute in which homework is not abolished, but simply limited for elementary students and expanded for higher level students. Essentially, he views homework as an effective learning tool when properly standardized. In “Fighting Foreclosure Fraud”
we learn that the U.S. loses nearly six billion dollars annually from mortgage fraud. He continues to engage the audience in the academic discussion by not only informing them of the most common forms of fraud, but also providing ways to avoid it. Like the rest of the papers in his portfolio, Eric supports his focus by using well-selected details that are suggestive, concrete, and relevant.

Continuing with engaging topics, in **Portfolio Five** Kenneth Metz discusses how the increasing popularity of mountain climbing is negatively impacting mountainous regions around the globe. As an avid outdoorsman and mountain climbing enthusiast, Kenneth is greatly disturbed by the environmental damage being caused in Nepal by fellow climbers. He argues that in order to protect Mount Everest from the litter, deforestation and native exploitation brought by expeditionary mountaineering, the Nepalese government needs to take drastic measures. Like other writers in this book, his dedication in investigating a serious issue and offering potential solutions reveals his maturity as an author. “Convalescing in Colorado” is set in the state’s backcountry where Metz and his older brother Dave set out on a backpacking adventure. He recounts spending several difficult hours attempting to climb Mount Yale in an intense snowstorm. With the stakes of the climb nearing life or death, they decide to retreat. Although the rest of the trip is spent trekking in the Colorado wilderness, Kenneth is able to reconnect with his brother and rekindle their friendship. In “Starving Off Starvation” Metz ponders how something as simple as a steak can send shockwaves halfway around the world. Through his research, he uncovers how humans have contributed to the current international food crisis. He suggests that it’s everyone’s responsibility to work towards a solution to the problem. Whether through carpooling or choosing a salad over a burger, he challenges readers to help in alleviating this global issue. His portfolio demonstrates how writers can learn to communicate their ideas with originality, clarity and academic correctness while developing their own voices in the process.

Deborah O’Brien’s work in **Portfolio Six** leads readers through her material in ways that are explicit and clear. In “The Kindness of Strangers” she reflectively ponders how her teenage son would rather “open a vein in
shark-infested waters” than take advice from her. She longs for him to understand that her rules, restrictions, and even occasional nagging are done out of motherly love. A brief encounter with a stranger not only changes the way she parents, but also how she perceives her son. While reading this essay be sure to notice her carefully crafted sentences with purposefully selected words and phrases. When words flow effortlessly together, their significance is easily revealed. O’Brien’s second essay “The Effect of E-Books on Reading” questions whether or not e-books are signaling the end of “real reading.” Through extensive research, she discovers that based on its portability, distinctive attributes and potential use for textbooks and handouts, the e-book is here to stay, and may actually increase the amount of casual and educational reading we do. The academic writing captured in this book highlights how students, like Deborah, borrow and integrate the ideas and research of other sources to clarify and support their own ideas. Writers showcased in this text have successfully integrated sources into their academic papers via the techniques of summary, paraphrase, and direct quotation. O’Brien ends her portfolio collection with “Should We Erase Cursive Writing From Our Future?,” a well-researched argument on why it’s time to say goodbye to such an outdated form of written communication. Deborah’s portfolio, like many others, demonstrates her ability to introduce and integrate material from relevant outside sources in ways that advance the purposes for the writing and meet the expectations of a sophisticated college-level audience.

We invite WRT 150 instructors and students to read and discuss these six portfolios as a way to generalize about what characterizes good writing in the first-year writing program at Grand Valley State University. As you read, notice the similarities and differences from portfolio to portfolio—the kinds of writing included, the number and types of sources cited, the length of the papers, and so on. Keep in mind that hundreds of other students wrote quality portfolios last fall and winter, and although they were probably as diverse in subject material as the essays exemplified here, all the writers understood the keys to good writing—composing with a solid sense of purpose, focus, and audience.
Ticket scalpers hold up shiny, paisley-printed pieces of gold. “$50 a ticket!” the scalper’s voice rings through the street. A woman weaves in and out of the crowd, trying to reach the scalper. Her long, red, dirt adorned skirt drags on the concrete. With every leap she takes, a cheery jingling resonates from her bell-encrusted belt. Her long, multicolored dreadlocks are pulled back by an ikat-print scarf, which reveals a face weathered by age and the elements. The ticket shimmers in the scalper’s hand the golden lettering snaking around revealing the reason for the woman’s fervor: PHISH.

“I’m in.” she whispers, “I’m gonna see Phish.” This woman is not alone. Other hungry “Phans” (Phish phollowers replace a f- with a ph- whenever appropriate) gather around the scalper.

“I haven’t missed one yet,” she looks at me, her eyes wild with delight, “I’ve been with Phish all year.” The woman stops and looks at the ticket, examining every inch of the remote-sized stub. This woman, we’ll call her Esther (all interviewees are renamed with a Phish song title to ensure confidentiality) lives out of a beat-up 1991 Saab Turbo. Esther pays for gas, food and Phish tickets. To make ends meet she sells and trades handicrafts at concerts and music festivals. When I ask to see them Esther shimmies down the street and ducks behind a tenuous city tree. A minute later she limps back, handicapped by a swollen, dusty garment bag. Bungee cords and duct tape hold the colossal bag together. “The zipper is broken,” Esther explains as she slips off the cords and pries open the luggage. Intricate hemp necklaces, Phish patches and a plethora of tie-dyed t-shirts spill out of the overstuffed luggage. “On average I’ll make about $200 a concert, more at festivals.” For her, this is enough. Esther is living a life of simplicity, “I am happy: no possessions, no worries, just the road and Phish.” While Esther’s lifestyle may seem abnormal to the general public there are hundreds of Phans just like her.

Jefferson Avenue is the most prevalent street in Detroit. It hugs the Lake St. Clair coastline and Detroit River bank. Jefferson ends where the grounds of Cobo Arena begin. Normally flooded with half-starved, half-crazy, desperate residents looking for a drug fix, on November 18th,
2009, Jefferson Ave. was taken over by an equal counterpart: Phish. Phans are equal to Detroitsers in that they are hungry, insane and desperate to see Phish. Phish’s jam-band sound attracts crowds at an upwards of 75,000 at a concert (Hendrickson). This Phan phenomenon is equal to no other modern band, the only viable comparison is that of the Grateful Dead. Followers of the Grateful Dead, or “Deadheads” abandoned all societal norms and adhered to a different aesthetic. This Deadhead culture included drugs, a life on the road, following the Dead and jamming at every concert it was possible to get in to. While Phish and the Grateful Dead’s music is different stylistically, the similarities in followers have caused modern culture to dub Phans as “Phish heads”.

Phans and Deadheads overlap in many instances. I was the child of two self-proclaimed “hippies”, my mother a true blue Deadhead. She took me, as a three-year-old, to the last Grateful Dead concert at Pine Knob in Clarkston, Michigan, before front man Jerry Garcia died.

Looking around Jefferson Ave. I may have been shoved into a time warp.

The vendor stands guard on his corner, beckoning people forward. I’ll call him Character Zero. He is dressed in a knit marled sweater; holes reveal a tie-dye shirt underneath, fabric from another lifetime. His jeans are threadbare and held together by multiple patches.

“Each patch is from an individual Phish concert.” Character Zero claims. “They each have a story, a life, like the shows. Everyone remembers specific shows.” He sheepishly smiles, as if each stitch of the jeans were memories, sewn together by him and Phish. The squeaking of balloons and the soft hiss of a gas tank busy Character Zero’s steady hands. He proceeds to fill balloons, tying them and placing them periodically between his fingers. “Nitrous!” he shouts, “Five dollars!” Holding the balloons like beacons. Phans passing by stop. They scramble up five dollars, some offering sandwiches or bracelets. Character Zero takes them all, and hands over a balloon of what is commonly known as laughing gas (nitrous oxide).

One phan, referenced as Bliss, inhales some of it on the spot, holding it in his lungs for an upwards of 30 seconds. Bliss’s eyes grow wide and frantic as he quickly ducks and stares at the sky. A drunken smile spreads on his face and he stumbles and sits on the curb. I look at Character Zero for an explanation. “He heard the helicopters.” Dubbed “hippie crack” ni-
trous oxide has a short-lived intense high. “You experience some auditory hallucinations, most people hear the helicopter sound, and when it goes away the trip is over.” Two minutes elapse and Bliss comes to. He gets up, shakily, and says, “That was fucking amazing! Enjoy the show phriend!” Character Zero nods his head in agreement and resumes his work.

The exchange between Bliss and Character Zero is commonplace at Phish concerts. “It’s all about the community,” a drug-eyed college student, Mexican Cousin, tells me. Mexican Cousin runs a hand through his overgrown chestnut hair and takes a tenuous white joint out from behind his ear. He lights up “a homegrown mixture of weed and hashish” breathes deeply and exhales, “Going to a Phish show is like coming home. Everyone has different backgrounds, experiences, lives, but we are united by one thing: the music. I have phriends I only see at shows, but I feel worlds closer to them than some people I see daily.” He passes the joint down the line for the will-call ticket booth. The line is short and the joint is quickly passed back to Mexican Cousin. “Like this,” he says referring to the spliff, “Everyone just takes a hit, and gives it to their neighbor—we share. We’re a Phamily.” He continues to smoke until we approach the Cobo entrance.

Arches of metal detectors on every doorway welcome the phans into the arena. The security guards usher people through, checking bags. A burly black man, dwarfing my not too slight 5’10 frame comes up to me, “Open your purse miss,” he inquires, a NO SMOKING sign peers at me from overhead. Mexican Cousin’s pack of Marlboro Reds float on the top of my bag, next to a marijuana leaf-printed lighter. The corners of the security guard’s mouth curve into a slight smile. “You can pass.” his open arm leading me, like runway lights on an airport landing strip. Mexican Cousin gathers his cigarettes, “Thanks,” he sighs, “Have phun at the show, hope to see you around phriend!”

The air is thick with sweat, smoke and anticipation. I am sitting with two of my close friends Meagan and Meghan, my boyfriend, Derek, and three Phish head stragglers. The stragglers, friends of friends, push through the crowd and land us seats an entire balcony down from where our tickets say we should be sitting. They share what they have in exchange for a ride and a place to sleep. Their knowledge, and boldness, pays off when we are sitting front and center in the first row balcony.
When the overhead lights dim to black the crowd roars with insanity. The 12,000 seats in Cobo Arena are filled. The darkness is filled with the dim neon light of glow sticks. Glow sticks are everywhere and on everyone. My straggler phriends throw them to the phans on the floor. After about a minute, beams of snow white light cut through the crowd and end on the stage. The stage is graced with the four members of Phish: Page McConnell, Jon Fishman, Trey Anastasio and Mike Gordon. The crowd swells and unanimously begins dancing as the set opens with “ACDC Bag”. Fans layered in tie-dye, tent dresses, scarves, tattered jeans and moth-bitten sweaters sway back and forth, gyrating and shimmying their hands. The crowd is no longer individuals, but a breathing, moving being: a school of Phish.

Outside of the balcony the long circular hallway is scattered with a few phans. Walking around I hear and see a multitude of things. A man in a 1997 Phish Christmas Tour t-shirt passes me and hisses in my ear, “Mushrooms, PCP, Acid...” A group of girls are sitting on the dirty, sweating concrete floor. One girl, we’ll call her Down with Disease, heaves over and pukes in an empty plastic cup. Another phan rushes over giving her a fresh glass of water. Security guards see the commotion and bring her a bottle of water. Down with Disease, obviously underage, thanks them as her eyes roll back into her head. The security guard quickly calls a medic over his walkie-talkie. A few minutes pass, Down with Disease is sitting upwards and sipping silently out of the water bottle. The medics arrive and the security guard talks to them quietly, “I think she’s okay, just a bad trip. Her friend says she took some “molly” (pure MDMA or ecstasy) and drank alcohol...” The medic proceeds to take Down with Disease’s temperature and blood pressure. “You’re going to be okay,” the medic coos. After taking all the stats he concludes, “I think your system is just a little overheated, drink lots of water and sit here for a while.” Down with Disease thanks them, and the security guard and medic walk off.

Back in the stadium Mike and Trey serenade the phans with their most popular ballad “Waste”. Thousands of lighters sway back and forth in the audience, fireflies in the forest of Phish.

Two sets, two encores and three and a half hours later Phish is over. The phamily trickles out of Cobo. No one is in a rush, there’s no pushing, shoving, or angry car horns--only happy, tired faces. Phans walk out
with hair plastered to the back of their necks, salty skin and dry throats. Boogieing to a three and a half hour jam fest has taken a toll on them and many head home. Home for some is closer than others. Home could be anywhere for these good-natured phans: New York, Chicago, Washington, Oregon. For the phamily, home is where Phish is, and tonight, it was Detroit.

Works Cited

Bliss. Personal interview. 18 Nov. 2009.

Character Zero. Personal interview. 18 Nov. 2009.

Down with Disease. Personal interview. 18 Nov. 2009.

Esther. Personal interview. 18 Nov. 2009.


Mexican Cousin. Personal interview. 18 Nov. 2009.
Eleven Months

My calloused hands grip the oar and pull through, past my ankles, knees and finally end at a perfect parallel to my abdomen. “Five seat and seven seat, touch lightly,” our faithful coxswain Kitty whispers, lining us up for the race. Seven boats are simultaneously doing the same thing. This is summer nationals. Rowers of every age, from premier boat clubs across the United States gather in Indianapolis to duel. Our boat, the Vespoli, gleamed silver like a bullet in the summer sun.

The eight boats competing are perfectly aligned. We wait like chickens for slaughter.

I am sitting in five-seat, the “steam engine” of a rowing shell. All the strength comes from the center of an eight-person boat. An eight consists of eight rowers and a coxswain. Our coxswain, Kitty, is five feet tall, and weighs 110 pounds—the exact weight limit of a coxswain. Her main purpose is to motive rowers and to steer the boat. The rest of us are objects, utilizing our bodies to propel carbon fiber as fast as the water will allow.

Kitty’s soft whispers resume, “This is our chance girls. We have been training for this race for the past eleven months.” Chrissy, six-seat (the seat in front of my own) turns her anxious neck from side to side, sizing up the competition. My facial expression: stoic.

It’s true, this race is the culmination of eleven grueling months. Elevens months of two practices a day, everyday. Eleven months of four activities: row, eat, school, row, eat, sleep. And the cycle repeats. Eleven months of competition to make the top eight, in and out of the boat. Eleven months of exhaustion. Eleven months of racing 20 kilometers a day. Eleven months of seeing my boat more than my family. Eleven months with eight other girls.

And for what?

The answer: the title of national champions.

We hand electrical tape down the boat. Every girl unravels the tape, wrapping it around their hands, weaving through half-broken fingers. Covering and sealing all wounds. Eleven months ago these hands were milky, white, and soft. Now they are adorned in badges of honor. Ripped
and raw skin grips to flesh, torn from the constant motion of the wooden oar. Like the rubbing of faux leather shoes on bare heels, these hands have been broken down.

“What are you thinking?” Sam inquires, leaning towards me from the three-seat. I turn around to see Sam’s green and brown kaleidoscope eyes staring back at me, full of apprehension. I return the gaze, and respond, “Absolutely nothing.” This was always my attitude at races, Sam knew. Our pre-race styles were different. Sam bubbles over, can’t sit still on the fiber-glass seat, and rocks up and down the slide of the boat. Her slides were always creaking, only slightly, under the weight of restlessness. On the other hand, I was as still as possible. I didn’t want to talk, I wanted to race. I didn’t want to think, but thoughts were the sole domination of my body. I couldn’t hear, couldn’t see, couldn’t feel, only think: win.

The race official raises his flag, “This is it.” Kitty’s voice floats through my brain.

We all assume the race position, at “the catch”. Sitting at the catch means extending your arms fully and sliding your body up into as tight of a ball as possible. The oar floats above the crystalline water, waiting for a chance to chop and sink, pull at the water, grasp at the chance of gold.

Five seconds elapse.

“GO!” Kitty screams. The race begins.

Following Megan, our eight-seat stroke, and the head of the boat, we dive our oars into the glassy river. After the blade is in I flex my leg and arm muscles. My right hand grasps the outside of the oar and drags it through the aqua abyss, my legs extend out pushing against the foot stretchers. Pushing through, pushing for first. The seven other girls in the boat repeat the same motion.

“Power ten to get us started!” Kitty growls.

“One!”

“Two!”

Eight bodies move, swiftly, perfectly, up to the catch and drive down the slide, the boat gliding through. The boat resembles a well-oiled machine. Each gear, wheel, and turbine moving, grinding, pushing. All nine bodies in the boat are working in overdrive. Kitty spits into the boat microphone, “We’re in second place, 1,500 meters to go.” The race is a fourth over. Each girl is heaving, red, determined. We all know that anything can happen in 1,500 meters. Races change in an instant.
Eleven months of racing.
Eleven months of an eight-person shell.
Eleven months of nine minds, all focused on the same goal.
Eleven months of 20 kilometer rows and ten mile runs.
Those eleven months would not be spent in defeat.
The morning of the race was unusually bright. The sun had never seemed so hot, or light in the preceding days. And now, the sun permeated on us. Blinding. Searing. The sun was the least of our worries. Our hearts beating, bodies moving, pushing harder to the finish was the main focus.

Through the next 500 meters, we were unstoppable. With every stroke we grew stronger, better, becoming an entity. An entity of champions.
“You guys are the first boat, keep it here!” Kitty’s encouragement resounded. I did not hear it, I couldn’t hear anything. Blood pumped through my ears, blocking all noise. Swiftly the boat kept propelling. Gaining speed and meters on our competition.

Eleven months culminated in 2,000 meters.
Eleven months driving myself to a physical breaking point.
Eleven months when nothing went wrong.
In rowing “catching crabs” does not refer to the STD. When a boat is moving fast and the oar is not dropped in at a precise angle, the oar is taken by the water current and flung violently upwards.

Eleven months without catching a crab.
“250 meters left girls. This is it.” Kitty was ecstatic. We were going to win. For a moment I let myself bask in the possibility of gold. The last 250 meters were a piece of cake. Filled with power ten’s and high-velocity rowing. That’s when it happened.

Sliding up to the catch I could feel the energy in the boat. Everyone knew that eleven months wasn’t in vain. We made it. I extended my arms fully and crossed my body over my knees to the left. Starboards always reached out to the left. The sun had yet to peak over the trees because of a forested island in the middle of the river. In the last 250 meters, it was essential that the surveyors were able to see the race. Turning around the bend the island moved passed and the sun spread across the sky like a lit match into gasoline. In my intense rowing stupor I was staring straightforward. Sunlight filled my eyes immediately in the turn.

My oar dipped down and under the water, but this time it was not swift. The power of water and the angle of insertion overwhelmed the oar. Like
a lightning bolt my oar turned and became engulfed by the water. My calloused, trained hands had no control and the handle cracked into my open ribcage. The sickening crack of wood and bone broke through my stoicism. I frantically grasped for the oar.

Eight girls knew that five seconds was all it took. Two seconds to lose control of the oar. One second to fracture my bottom right rib. Two seconds to gain control of the oar.

“Keep rowing girls! 100 meters left!” Kitty screamed. I could hear the forced assurance in her voice.

So we began again. It only takes 10 strokes to move a boat 100 meters. Each stroke was a challenge. With every drive my ribs would shift. My body movements were crippled. Warm iron pumped through my mouth and spilled down the front of my blue Detroit Boat Club uni-suit. It stuck to my hands, my uni-suit, the wooden culprit of an oar, and trickled down to the belly of the boat. My lungs crushed with every meter passing. The sound of my blood-drenched breaths, throaty and gasping were like a foghorn.

My abdomen writhed in pain, and the rib, the lowest on the right, felt like a sharpened pencil penetrating through a plastic bag.

“5 more strokes! Let’s count down the stokes: five, four, three...”

Every descending stroke was a bout of encouragement. ‘Only one more,’ I told myself.

The boat cut through the water, handicapped, yet still strong.

Eleven months to perfect two kilometers.

Eleven months to fail.

“Two, one!” gasps Kitty in relief. “Five seat STOP ROWING!” she says as I clutch my oar and lay it flat on the water. Eight pairs of eyes turn to look at me, my own vision black and blurred with tears.

“What place? What place did we finish?” I blubber. Silence never seemed so loud. Finally Sam answered, “First.” I heaved over my oar letting my rib crack further.

“Do you know what that means?” Kitty chimes in.

“WE’RE NATIONAL CHAMPIONS!”

Smiling they row me into shore.

Eleven months to win a national championship.

Eleven months to work.

Eleven months well spent.
Credit Isn’t Free

If you’ve watched basic cable or broadcast TV in the last year or two, you’ve undoubtedly heard at least one catchy jingle about getting your credit report for free and avoiding some unpleasant circumstances as a result. Frankly, I’m sick of them and I either mute the audio, or change the channel the second I realize one is coming on. “But why?” you ask, “The songs are catchy. What’s not to like about them?” Quite simply, the FreeCreditReport.com (FCR) ad campaign promotes the immediate gratification of purchasing on credit, as well as materialism in young American adults. From trading your fiancée for a nice house, to getting laughed at for driving a used sub-compact car, FCR tells young adults that having expensive material goods will make them happy and should be their primary goal in life. The irony of this message is that materialism has been clinically proven to be directly related to unhappiness and a lower overall quality of life. In addition, FCR touts purchasing on credit as being the primary way to make purchases.

So why does it matter what your credit score is? Your credit score is also known as a FICO score, the numerical rating that lenders use to judge your ability to take on and repay debt. The rating is ranged between 300 (poor) and 800 (perfect). For most Americans, the only way to purchase expensive items is through a loan or on credit. For some items, it is not practical to save up and pay cash: houses and businesses are generally more expensive than the average American makes in a year. According to a report by the US Census Bureau, the real median household income between 2006 and 2007 was $50,233 (“U.S. Census”), well below the price of a new home. But does everything in your life have to be paid for with credit? What many users of credit fail to realize, is that although paying with credit allows immediate access to goods as well as instant gratification, it costs substantially more in the long run.

Let’s take a look at one example. Joe wanted to buy a new motorcycle and chose to apply for credit. Looking at myFICO.com, we can estimate what kind of interest rate Joe could expect to pay based on his FICO score. In our scenario, let’s say his FICO score was 750: good enough to

Sam wrote his portfolio in the class of Professor Amy McInnis Norkus.
be approved for a $5,000 loan at 6% annual percentage rate (APR) for 36 months (“Loan”). While this may initially seem like a good deal, don’t be fooled. A loan isn’t simply repaid by adding the interest to the principle amount one time and paying it down. In the real financial world, loans are calculated using a process called amortization.

Amortization is the process by which interest is calculated regularly—normally monthly—based on the remaining loan balance. Using an online amortization calculator at amortization-calc.com for his loan, Joe could expect to make monthly payments of about $150 and repay over $5,500 (“Amortization”). In some cases, a lender could charge upwards of 25% APR. At that rate, Joe would have monthly payments of almost $200 and repay more than $7,150. Would you pay an extra $2,000 for that motorcycle just to have it today?

Regrettably, many young adults believe that the additional cost is worth the immediate gratification. They may also fail to consider the consequences of being unable to make good on their loan, or a catastrophic loss of the item being financed. If Joe stops making payments, his motorcycle can be repossessed by the bank. If his motorcycle is destroyed or stolen, his insurance may reimburse him some of the value. In either case, Joe is responsible for any remaining balance on his loan and no longer has his motorcycle. There is a very simple remedy for this financial liability: saving up and paying cash.

If Joe has the ability to afford making payments of $150 per month and he set that money aside, he would have enough money saved in just 33 months. If Joe was able to budget the payment for the 25% interest rate ($200) he could save up enough in just over 25 months. What it comes down to is this: having the patience to set the money aside will allow you to own the purchase outright several months before you would with financing and save yourself hundreds or even thousands of dollars in the process, something that no amount of credit report monitoring can do.

The primary service offered by FCR is their “Triple Advantage” program in which FCR will email you when something on one of your three major credit bureau reports changes. Getting your credit report for “free” is contingent upon enrolment in this program. The free report incentive is laughable: American citizens are by law allowed to receive one copy of their credit report from each bureau every year, free of charge. You don’t need
a third party to retrieve it for you—just write to the bureau and request a copy. The only shortcoming of this is that your reports do not come with a calculated FICO score. Most third party companies will calculate this for you, but only if you pay for it either as a one-time fee, or as part of a membership with their services. The service itself is almost as funny, but more funny-sad than funny-ha-ha: in the event of a change to your credit report, they email you. They don’t attempt to stop the transactions, they don’t freeze your accounts, and they don’t verify the identity of the person attempting to open a line of credit in your name. They just send you an email: “Hey, you just got ripped off. Thanks for paying us $15 a month, Sucker!”

Something that isn’t apparent in the commercials is the parent company of FCR. According to their website, they report that they are “part of a family of online consumer credit reporting sites belonging to Consumer-Info.com, Inc., an Experian® company” (FreeCreditReport.com). Experian happens to be one of the three major US credit bureaus. It would seem that there is a conflict of interest arising from a credit reporting bureau wanting you to pay for your credit report on a regular basis despite the fact that you are entitled to a free copy once per year, or any time you are denied credit. What is apparent in the commercials is the message that using FCR’s service will give you access to wealth, material gain and social acceptance.

In the first commercial of the series, “Dream Girl,” The singer of the band—we’ll call him Joe—is lamenting his woes of not running a credit check on his dream girl fiancée before getting married. Apparently she defaulted on one credit card and as a result, they cannot get approved for a mortgage for the “respectable” house of their choice in a “pleasant suburb.” This somehow causes them to abandon any further search for a house that they can afford and move into her parent’s basement. Joe goes on to claim that if he had known about her credit rating prior to getting married, he would have ended the engagement and bought a house with a yard and a dog instead (“Dream Girl”). Apparently for the target audience, having an expensive house trumps having a meaningful relationship with another human being.

The next commercial in the series, “New Job,” features Joe and his band playing in a nautical themed restaurant, again crying about his bad
credit, though this time it was because his identity was stolen and used to make purchases in his name (“New Job”). It isn’t clear if he is working in this restaurant because his credit score was poor when he was interviewed for the job he wanted, or if he lost his previous job as a result of his score changing, but the implied message is that having a less than perfect credit score will land you in a job you don’t want. In a fan blog at *Moon Dreams & Day Beams*, screen name John Doe Waiter makes the point that he waits tables and loves his job regardless of making an estimated $30,000 per year. Another visitor by the possibly self-referencing screen name “youidiot” replied to John Doe Waiter that his own job as a consultant had a salary that was “MUCH higher” than the waiter’s and that John would not be able to purchase a BMW based on his wages (Griner). Our friend the consultant personifies the target audience of the campaign with astonishing accuracy: white-collar males whose primary measure of success in life is the price of the material goods they acquire.

The commercial series goes on to paint similar pictures with other scenarios. Purchasing a motorcycle (“Bicycles”) and cell phone (“Cell Phone”) must be done on credit and you have to take whatever they offer you. Another ad mysteriously connects having poor credit to you catering a rock star’s party instead of being the rock star party thrower (“Rock Star”). The concepts are certainly exaggerated, as are the consequences, but the message is clear: use our service or become a pariah.

The most disturbing theme has to be the “Renaissance Fair” commercial. In this ad, FCR goes so far as to say that the only place you can live with a bad credit score and no one will care is a Renaissance Fair (“Renaissance Fair”). The implied concepts of having poor credit being like living in the dark ages and that engaging in creative fantasy-based recreation makes you an outcast, prey upon the psychological need of humans to be accepted by society.

The idea of using psychology to market goods and services is not new. Dr. Tim Kasser, a professor of psychology at Knox College in Galesburg, Illinois, has conducted multiple in-depth studies into the correlation of materialism and psychological well-being. In his book, *The High Price of Materialism*, Dr. Kasser demonstrates an inverse relationship between materialistic values and quality of life. Subjects in his studies that reported
high levels of materialism also reported low levels of “personal well-being and psychological health” (Kasser 22).

Furthermore, materialistic goals reinforced the negative impacts of using material gain to achieve happiness: earning large sums of money or acquiring expensive possessions resulted in short-lived feelings of gratification that quickly faded, leaving the individual in the same or worse emotional state than before. To compensate, these individuals often set a new goal of greater wealth or more expensive possessions, resulting in a vicious circle of more-is-never-enough, similar to drug addiction (Kasser 57-59). Not only has Dr. Kasser drawn a link between materialism and poorer overall quality of life, he has shown that using materialism to compensate for these shortcomings in our lives exacerbates the problem.

It is important to note that in his research, Dr. Kasser discovered that not only are marketing and consumer research groups aware of the causes and consequences of materialism, they actively make use of these psychological weak points to drive sales (Kasser 17-18). The FCR ad campaign is a shining example of these tactics.

While I won’t disagree that having above-average income can provide you with a higher level of creature comforts, simply having a perfect credit score, new house, expensive car and high paying job will not bring you true happiness. Young Americans also need to exercise self control when making purchases and weigh the benefits and drawbacks of instant gratification against the real financial cost of buying on credit.

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Think of the farthest you’ve ever been from home, the largest man-made structure you’ve ever seen, or the oldest artifact you’ve ever touched. Now imagine you’ve done all three in the same day. Traveling to the Giza plateau in Egypt and touring the Great Pyramids can give you just such an experience. What I saw in Giza opened my eyes not only to the greatness of what humankind is capable of, but the importance of actively preserving those relics for future generations. The Great Pyramids of Egypt are a priceless treasure that draws thousands of tourists to Cairo every year, bringing in a needed source of income to Egypt; however, lack of proper stewardship will cause irreparable damage to them and ultimately cost the world more by their loss. Egypt has gone to great lengths to maintain and repair their national treasures, but more needs to be done to ensure their continued presence. During the course of my enlistment in the United States Army, along with a tour group of about fifty other soldiers I was afforded the opportunity to visit the Giza plateau.

So there I was, marooned in a dilapidated Egyptian military base, waiting for the tour bus. Another non-descript autumn morning in the desert: clear skies, a warm breeze, and the temperature climbing towards 100°F. The tour bus pulled up and there was a final headcount before boarding. While the bus itself looked modern, there were some cosmetic modifications: tassels and ropes adorned the interior edges of the windshield, curtains with elaborate floral designs hung in the windows, and large strips of red and white diagonal striped hazard tape covered the bumpers.

The bus ride into Cairo from our base in the northern desert was largely uneventful. Beige desert hardpan from horizon to horizon, ramshackle concrete buildings on the side of the roadway, scattered trees or shrubs, and the occasional vehicle dotted the landscape. A local radio station was leaking music out of small, tinny sounding speakers. The lyrics were all in Arabic, and completely unintelligible to me, but the rhythm and tone of the music were both intriguing and hypnotic. I dozed off once or twice along the way without realizing it. When the bus reached the freeway, familiar signs of civilization were everywhere: billboards, businesses, delivery trucks, commuter cars. While the freeways appeared to be recently paved,
the urban streets were overcrowded, poorly organized, and in many places badly in need of repair.

In my travels throughout the middle-east, I noted some recurring images in the scenery: inferior building materials, infrequent upkeep of paint or decorations, ineffective drainage and waste water systems, and haphazard orchestration of traffic. Building codes? Not in my city mister! City planning for roads and traffic management? Please, my city is older than the chariot. In spite of the ramshackle appearance, it seems familiar to me, almost comforting in the way that the last few blocks to your home feel.

The dramatic shift in environment from the desert to the Nile valley is literally a line. On one side of the city’s outer walls there is sand, on the other trees and vegetation. Much like entering a mountain range from a plain the actual scale of the pyramids is hard to judge, even when you’re standing at their base. Few things that I have experienced can compare to the awe-inspiring majesty of the Great Pyramids. The Miracle Mile in Chicago has taller structures, the Grand Canyon is thousands of times bigger, but in the contrast of a completely barren desert the Great Pyramids almost seem to defy measurement. The first and largest pyramid stands over 450 feet tall, and was the largest man-made structure on earth until the 1300’s AD. This pyramid is the tomb of the Pharaoh Khufu.

Khufu’s tomb is obviously massive, but it was not apparent just how big until I got close to it. From where the tour bus parked I could see groups of tourists walking to and from the base of the pyramid. The stones that make up the body of the structure appeared to be perhaps two or three feet high. Walking up to the base revealed that the small shapes moving around on the stones were in fact other visitors. The limestone blocks ranged in size from a large refrigerator for the bulk filler stones, to a full-sized passenger van for the load bearing arch stones above the entrance tunnel. Looking up towards the top caused me a mild case of vertigo, not unlike looking down into the Grand Canyon or up at the Sears Tower, and filled me with wonder.

I climbed a haphazard path up the first few flights of stones to a closed wrought iron gate entrance that led inside to the burial chamber and gazed north into Cairo’s haze. The city sprawled north and east to the horizon, a mixture of low-rise buildings and mosque towers. I made my way back down to the base duly noting the lack of a handrail and uneven step
height. Where the steps reached ground level, there was a small section of granite stones like the ones that originally encased these magnificent tombs. I imagined what it would look like: seeing the sun reflecting off their polished surface completely covering the immense structure, and was awestruck—a tomb for the Sun God indeed.

After viewing the pyramids, I moved down the plateau to the Sphinx. Our tour had already arranged for us to enter the temple grounds surrounding the Sphinx and view it from much closer than the access road. The square stone columns that made up the temple were easily five feet across and twenty feet high, worn smooth from countless sand storms, and patinated from hands of innumerable visitors. After a few minutes of wandering through the aisles between the massive columns I arrived at the viewing area just above and south of the courtyard of the Sphinx. Standing on an elevated stone wall that had originally been part of the causeway that led up to the second great pyramid, I marveled at the craftsmanship that must have gone into carving this immense statue. In its current state, the limestone body has eroded from wind, sand, and acid rain, and now has a layered-cake appearance owing to the difference in structure of the layers of bedrock. Portions of the Sphinx have been restored to their original smooth stonework, but the chin shows signs that there may have originally been a beard on its face, and most of the nose has been sheared off. The fact that the house-sized statue was carved in-place, like Mount Rushmore, is almost as impressive as the imposing visage of the half-lion/half-Pharaoh himself.

Not all of the impressions that I took away from the plateau were positive. Some of the more striking images that I recall include the very much modern graffiti carved into the stones at the base of Khufu's pyramid; a partially collapsed ventilation shaft that was lined with trash from fast food restaurants and plastic bags; a donkey tethered in a narrow, dilapidated breezeway between temples defecating where it stood; throngs of vendors and hawkers pressing their cheap wares—statuettes, trinkets, and carvings—on anyone not quick enough to stop them before they got within arm's reach. Would people be so cavalier about putting their initials on the Mona Lisa, throwing their empty cups in the Reflecting Pools, or leaving their pet's waste in Stonehenge? The most baffling image to me has to do with the dichotomy of ancient Egypt against modern Cairo: the Great
Sphinx spends his days looking east towards Cairo, less than a hundred yards from crowded streets and tourist shops—the saddest of which was the giant sign of a KFC/Pizza Hut directly in his line of sight.

That image stuck with me as I rode the tour bus back to our barracks that afternoon, and I still think about what I saw from time to time. In a way, it demonstrates the problem that Egypt faces with the Giza plateau monuments: how do you attract and cater to foreign tourists without compromising your national heritage, yet remain competitive enough to stay in business? Egypt is an Islamic nation, but many tourists are from western and eastern countries. Operating western chain restaurants can generate tourism revenue, but will also provide unhealthy foods to the local population, potentially leading to the long-term health consequences already apparent in the United States. Allowing tourists direct access to the Pyramids generates revenue, but the impact of tour busses and vandalism will permanently damage the monuments. Finding a balance between allowing tourists access and preserving the integrity of the site is critical to its continued viability as a revenue source.

There is no denying that the ancient Egyptian monuments and artifacts are major generators of tourism and income for Egypt. According to Euromonitor International, in 2008 there was a reported US $10.6 billion income from tourism receipts (“Egypt Statistics”). Egypt has taken great measures to protect and preserve these assets: only three hundred visitors are allowed on the plateau each day; a major eight lane highway was re-routed away from the pyramids to reduce damage from vibrations and vehicle exhaust; the Sphinx has had extensive structural bracing and reconstruction. Entrance fees for the complex and tombs are used for maintenance of the site, partially offsetting the impact of visitors, but how can Egypt protect the Giza plateau from threats not on the premises itself?

The direct impact that humans leave on the site are easy to spot but there are other effects not so easily seen. Tour buses make up the bulk of vehicle traffic on and around the plateau. The vibrations from their passing slowly causes the sand and rock to settle and shift. The single greatest threat to these monuments though is the air pollution from Cairo. Sulfur and nitrogen emissions from vehicles and industrial facilities can combine to form sulfurous or nitric acid in the atmosphere and create acid rain. If you’ve never seen what strong acids do to limestone, it’s a lot like putting
hydrogen peroxide on a cut, or vinegar on baking soda. Granted, the concentration of sulfuric or nitric acid in rainwater is substantially less powerful, but the long-term effects are the same. According to the 2007 World Development Indicators report by World Bank, in 2004 Cairo had the highest levels of particulate matter air pollution in the world, as well as a significant measure of sulfur dioxide (World Bank). I was fortunate on the day I visited: visibility was good enough to be able to see all of the pyramids and the Sphinx at once, something not all tourists have experienced.

While Egypt does require a strong industrial foundation to support its economic growth, it shouldn’t jeopardize the health of its citizens or the historical sites at the very core of its tourism industry. Where can Cairo turn to find a solution? In a recent article on the independent news site Bikya Masr, the current state of and future projects for renewable energy in Egypt are reviewed. Egypt currently generates 430 megawatts of electricity with wind turbines, and has a solar thermal facility south of Cairo that will come online in 2010. Given that only ten percent of Egypt’s land is inhabited, and that Egypt averages almost 300 days of sun a year, solar power is a very attractive solution. Egypt also aims to meet twenty percent of its energy needs with renewable sources by 2020 (“Solar Power”). Installing more solar and wind facilities could easily place Cairo at the forefront of renewable energy generation for the region, if not the world. Replacing just the commuter vehicles and coal or natural gas based power plants in Cairo with battery-powered vehicles and renewable energy power plants would dramatically reduce harmful emissions, improve air quality, and potentially even generate income by selling excess electricity to outlying areas or neighboring countries.

As for the Giza plateau itself, moving the parking area for buses and cars off the plateau proper and using electric trams to shuttle visitors to and from the site would all but eliminate the impact of direct vibration and exhaust deterioration. Increased vigilance by the Tourism Police—Egypt’s park rangers—would prevent further defacement by vandals.

When I see pictures of the pyramids or Sphinx, or a television show involving them, I can only think of how inadequate those images are at expressing their grandeur and magnitude. The only way to truly understand what the great pyramids and Sphinx represent is to visit—responsibly. Like any great endeavor, preserving the pyramids and Sphinx will be neither easy
nor inexpensive. Egypt has the potential to set a global example for both renewable energy generation and historic preservation in one sweep. With enough interest and dedication, these ancient monuments will be available not only to my grandchildren, but for hundreds of generations to come.

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Most of us know what Fall looks, feels, smells and tastes like, but do we recognize what it sounds like? Dried leaves rustling in the wind or gas-powered leaf blowers are likely to be your first answer, but there’s another familiar sound that accompanies the change in seasons: sneezing, coughing, sniffling and nose blowing. That’s right, in addition to going back to school and raking leaves, it’s flu season. If you haven’t already succumbed to at least one strain of a seasonal illness, odds are good that you will before the warm weather returns. There are many ways to combat these illnesses, ranging from folk remedies like chicken noodle soup to modern scientific techniques like strain-specific vaccinations and antiviral medicines. The medical practice of vaccination has proven to be very effective in preventing or eradicating certain diseases, but the current media blitz about the dangers of swine flu and the accompanying consumer response is needlessly endangering patients and hastening the virus towards antiviral immunity. This phenomenon prompts some interesting questions about the legitimacy and effectiveness of medicine targeted at influenza in general and its most recently famous cousin, swine flu.

The medical practice of vaccination has been the focus of public attention, both positive and negative, since its beginning. The reduction of smallpox-related deaths in the 1800s was regarded as miraculous. Conversely, editorial cartoons depicting people turning into fantastical cow-like creatures from contact with the vaccine were common images, reflecting the ignorance or unwillingness of the public to accept the medical technique.

In modern times, myths and misconceptions about vaccination are still present. Some of the more common myths about influenza vaccination include contracting the flu from a vaccination, building your immunity to influenza by not being vaccinated, or that one vaccination will protect you from all flu-like symptoms. Consumer Reports editor Ronni Sandroff addressed some of these issues in the January 2009 issue of Consumer Reports on Health.
The only way to contract influenza from a vaccination is if you were given a nasal spray type dose, which contains a weakened virus and developed mild symptoms as a result. Injection vaccines use dead viruses and as such pose no direct threat to a healthy immune system. There is also a possibility that the vaccine will not be effectively dealt with by your immune system, leaving you vulnerable to the strains contained in the vaccine.

Not getting vaccinated in order to “build up” one’s immune system against influenza is counterintuitive. If you get a flu shot, you are likely to have little or no symptoms from the three strains contained in the vaccine (Sandroff). If you pass on the shot, you will suffer the full wrath of the strains covered by the vaccination should you contract one of them. The catch is that most influenza strains change enough from year to year that even if you skip the vaccine, your immunity to this season’s strain will generally not protect you against future strains. Skipping the vaccine purely to avoid getting it next year doesn’t really work.

Some people also have the unrealistic expectation that one “flu shot” will protect them against any and all diseases that cause flu-like symptoms, which simply is not possible. The sheer number of diseases that cause flu-like symptoms makes it impractical or impossible to effectively create a single vaccine that will protect against all of them. Examining the history of vaccination will help explain why.

The practice of vaccination has existed in some form since the seventeenth century where it was used—but not understood—in Asia. In the late 1700s, Edward Jenner, a country doctor in England, made a connection between milk maids that had contracted cowpox and their resistance to smallpox infections that affected their communities. After almost three decades of research, Jenner concluded that the human immune system could be inoculated against smallpox by introducing fluid from a cowpox pustule on one infected person into the body of another person. While initially vaccination only referred to this procedure, it has since grown to include dozens of bacterial and viral diseases (Stern and Markel).

The science behind vaccination is a fairly straightforward application of knowledge about the human body’s reaction to infection: when your body finds a foreign substance or microorganism within itself, white blood cells capture and transport the invader to your lymph nodes. The lymphatic system then identifies the invader and prepares new white blood cells to
combat the infection. In most cases, there is a delay of several days from when the intruder is identified before your body can mount a counter-attack. By introducing a dead or disabled sample of a disease into your body, your immune system can prepare the necessary antibodies in advance of an actual infection. For non-lethal diseases, this results in a shortened duration of the illness. For lethal or crippling diseases, vaccination can allow your body to successfully combat the infection before severe damage or death occurs.

The results of effective vaccination and immunization can be clearly seen. According to their website, in 1967 the World Health Organization (WHO) initiated a global campaign to eradicate smallpox. The last naturally occurring case was in Somalia in 1977. Smallpox vaccination has proven to be so effective at controlling the disease that children are no longer immunized for it and in 1980 the disease was declared by the World Health Assembly as eradicated (“Smallpox”). In a similar effort, the virus that causes poliomyelitis (polio) has been targeted by the WHO since 1988, resulting in a global reduction of polio by 99%. So why is it that other viral and bacterial diseases can not be so easily controlled or prevented?

The primary characteristic of smallpox and polio that has allowed them to be contained is that they are not able to spread to other species. Smallpox and polio also have very low mutation rates, which allow a person’s immune system to recognize the disease even if it makes small changes to its attack mechanisms. These diseases are propagated almost entirely by direct transmission to a new host, normally a child without antibodies for the disease.

In the case of smallpox, the WHO reports mortality rates were as high as 30% (“Smallpox”). If the child survives the infection, they will have lifelong immunity to the disease, but may have lasting side effects such as blindness or scarring and pock marks where pustules had formed. In countries with access to medicine, infants are recommended to begin vaccination for polio at two months of age (Nazario). If the mother has been vaccinated and breast feeds the infant, her antibodies will be passed to the baby, providing protection before being vaccinated. By denying the disease a new and vulnerable host, the pathogen becomes extinct.
Influenza has a distinct advantage: unlike smallpox and polio, influenza can migrate to other species, has a very high mutation rate and can be spread through indirect contact. In an article posted at UCLA, this process is described in greater detail. The short explanation is that when an animal carrying one strain (let’s say a human) is exposed to a strain from another species (a pig), the strains can become mixed when the first strain replicates. The result: sometimes a new strain of the virus that has genetic components from the second strain, but is able to infect the first animal, is formed. The resulting virus may also be different enough from either of the source strains as to be unrecognizable by the host’s immune system (“Viruses”). The new strain may go unnoticed until it has spread to a significant population and perhaps even caused deaths in the frail or elderly. Preparing a vaccine for the new strain cannot even begin until it has been identified by medical diagnosis.

When a vaccine for influenza is prepared, current strains are analyzed by the WHO and Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the three most likely candidates are selected for production of the vaccine for the following fall. Vaccines take several months to be generated and must be evaluated by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) prior to disbursement in the United States. During the months that vaccine is being prepared, the most active strains may mutate, or other strains may become more predominant. When the vaccine is finally released, the three selected strains may no longer coincide with the primary strains affecting the population. In the November 2009 Atlantic Online health section, Shannon Brownlee and Jeanne Lenzer examined this effect, referred to as a “mismatch.” A mismatch results in a net non-immunization for the population that received the vaccine. Just such a mismatch occurred in the United States in 1968 and 1997. There were also reported shortages of influenza vaccines in 2004, causing a 40% reduction in immunization rates. While data about the efficacy of influenza vaccines suggests that there should have been a significant rise in mortality from influenza or influenza exacerbated conditions in these years, the associated death rates “did not budge” (Brownlee and Lenzer).

Compounding the confusion of these numbers is the fact that many diseases can cause flu-like symptoms, but are not affected by an influenza vaccine, owing to the fact that they are not actually influenza strains. Some
of the more than two hundred known viruses and pathogens that cause flu-like symptoms go by the names bocavirus, coronavirus, rhinovirus and respiratory syncytial virus. In addition, few if any deaths related to flu-like symptoms are actually tested for the presence of influenza, but are labeled as influenza-related for medical and statistical purposes (Brownlee and Lenzer). How can you begin to even estimate what the mortality rates for a disease are if the cause of death has not been accurately determined?

More doubt about the efficacy of influenza vaccines has been drawn by Lisa Jackson, a physician with the Center for Health Studies of the Group Health Cooperative in Seattle, WA. Jackson hypothesized that the level of mortality rates reported in studies of influenza vaccines are biased and could be attributed to the “healthy user effect”--the idea that persons who are in poor health to begin with are less likely to get vaccinated and as such incur a higher mortality rate from non-influenza conditions rather than influenza itself (Jackson 799-800). These findings by Jackson fly in the face of accepted medical practice and have earned her both praise and scorn from her colleagues and the medical industry respectively. This is not surprising considering that the companies involved in the production of these vaccines stand to lose a significant amount of their business should Jackson’s theories prove true.

Because it is not practical to create vaccines for every kind of influenza, treatment with medications for severe infections is occasionally needed. The CDC recommends the use of antiviral medications for patients that have confirmed cases of influenza or swine flu. The primary drugs in this category, oseltamivir and zanamivir, are marketed under the brand names of Tamiflu and Relenza respectively. While the CDC maintains on its web site that these medications should only be used for patients with confirmed influenza or swine flu infections, Dr. David Newman of New York City’s St. Luke’s Hospital stated that the New York City Health Department has “encourage[d] us to give a prescription [of antiviral medication] to just about every patient with the sniffles” (qtd in Brownlee and Lenzer).

The inherent risk involved in freely administering any antibiotic or antiviral medication is that any bacterial or viral strains present in the patient have the opportunity to develop into strains resistant to drugs. This concept has already been proven with traditional antibiotics like penicillin: over-use of the medication has led to strains of common bacteria that are
resistant to penicillin and require newer and more aggressive antibiotics. The same idea can be explained with common household disinfectants.

Have you ever wondered why the label says “Kills 99.9% of germs” instead of 100%? Some mutated strains of pathogens are immune to the sanitizing agents present in household cleaners. The reason that they don’t pose a serious threat in a mixed environment is that they have to compete with all of the benign microorganisms that they share resources with. If you wipe out 99.9% of the competition, that 0.01% now has free reign over the resources and can multiply without restriction. In most cases, these microbes will be benign, or your immune system will have little problem in dealing with them. But what happens when that 0.01% contains a malignant pathogen? Now you have a huge population of dangerous microbes that are not kept in check by competition and cannot be controlled with the same type of disinfectant.

If this is happening on your kitchen counter, there are barriers or strategies to keep these microbes out of your body: your skin, proper hygiene, sanitary food handling. If this happens inside of your body, your immune system may not be able to cope with the new strain and treating with a different antibiotic may not even appear to be necessary until it is too late. In addition, anyone you come into contact with while infectious will likely contract the infection as well, with the same drug resistance issues.

The other major consideration when taking any medication is the side effects. Both Tamiflu and Relenza have fairly harmless, if unpleasant, side effects, but some are cause for concern:

[Relenza] is inhaled and can cause side effects, especially in those with asthma or other chronic lung disease. Decreased respiratory function and bronchospasm have been reported with use of [Relenza]. [Relenza] is generally not recommended for use in persons with underlying lung disease such as asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. Other side effects reported by less than 5% of those who have used this drug are diarrhea, nausea, sinusitis, nasal infections, bronchitis, cough, headache, and dizziness. (“Antiviral Drugs”)

Tamiflu has similar gastrointestinal side effects, but more disturbing is the potential side effect to children:
[The] FDA approved a labeling supplement for . . . Tamiflu . . . to include a precaution about neuropsychiatric events. The revision is based on post marketing reports (mostly from Japan) of self-injury and delirium with the use of Tamiflu in patients with influenza. The reports were primarily among pediatric patients. The relative contribution of the drug to these events is not known. However, people with the flu, particularly children, may be at an increased risk of self-injury and confusion shortly after taking Tamiflu and should be closely monitored for signs of unusual behavior. ("Antiviral Drugs")

The only measurable benefit to taking these medications is a decrease of one to two days of illness and that is only if the strain of influenza is susceptible to these drugs. Would you put your child at risk for these side effects without a confirmed diagnosis of swine flu? While I agree that in specific cases these antivirals should be used to treat infected patients, handing out the medication like candy at Halloween to hypochondriacs or paranoid patients is reckless at best and dangerously negligent at worst.

Fortunately, swine flu has proven to be generally vulnerable to both Relenza and Tamiflu, but resistant strains have already emerged. While this effect is inevitable due to the high mutation rate of influenza viruses, prescription of the drugs to patients with otherwise healthy immune systems, or using them instead of a vaccine will speed up the process in the same way that the household cleaner example would.

As mentioned before, influenza related mortality is notoriously difficult to track. The CDC estimates that there are 36,000 annual influenza related deaths in the United States. This number is an estimate for several reasons: not all deaths caused by influenza, or diseases exacerbated by influenza are documented as such and those that are documented as influenza are often not confirmed by laboratory examination. Swine flu by its nature has garnered more media attention and as such is given more scrutiny in influenza-related deaths. Swine flu differs from a normal influenza strain in that it affects primarily persons under the age of 65, compared to common annual influenza affecting primarily persons over the age of 65. As of August 8, 2009, the CDC had reported only 114 confirmed deaths among children related to swine flu, most of which had “underlying conditions” ("Press Briefing"). While those deaths are tragic and devastating to the
families affected by them, they do not warrant the media blitz and over-hyped attention being given to the disease.

Physician Lisa Jackson’s theories could also apply to mortality rates reported with the current swine flu strain: there is no way to know how many lives have been saved, so there is no accurate way to measure the efficacy of its vaccine. To date, the majority of deaths related to swine flu have been in children with compromised immune systems, or other severe illnesses that prevented them from fighting off the infection; in other words, children that have a much higher chance of succumbing to an illness in the first place. These deaths are not representative of the effects of swine flu on the population at large and grouping them into sound-bite statistics is purely fear-mongering for the purpose of driving up sales of the vaccine or antivirals.

It is interesting to note that in light of all the confusion and skewed numbers relating to the effectiveness of influenza vaccinations and antiviral medications, people in positions of authority to influence policy decisions stand to profit from the widespread purchase and use of them. Before his tenure as Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld was “chairman . . . of Gilead Sciences, the company that holds the patent on Tamiflu, and he held millions of dollars’ worth of stock in the company.” Rumsfeld officially avoided any public or official actions that would have influenced the $1.8 billion purchase of Tamiflu for the military, but still profited immensely when the value of Gilead’s stock rose over 50% after the announcement of the government’s intention to purchase the drug (Brownlee and Lenzer).

While I agree with the practice of immunology for prevention of diseases, coercing people into believing that they need to be vaccinated with hastily formulated vaccines or that they should be given access to antiviral or antibiotic medication without verifying that they have a disease that can be controlled with that medication is dangerous, irresponsible and medically unsound. A media hype campaign that essentially only lines the pockets of shareholders of medical companies while providing little if any verifiable benefit to the public can only bring harm to the people it claims to protect.
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Social Networking Sites and Student Image Portrayal

The arrival of social networking sites such as MySpace, Twitter, and Facebook have propelled Internet communication into a whole new dimension. While some may find these sites to be extremely enjoyable and convenient, many college students are using the sites as marketing tools to promote themselves to their peers. In the article “Examining Students’ Intended Image on Facebook: ‘What Were They Thinking?!’”, authors Joy Peluchette and Katherine Karl discuss the idea of why adolescents post inappropriate content on their social networking profiles despite knowing that employers and family members are just as likely as peers to view an individual’s profile. In the study, 350 college students filled out surveys containing questions related to four subject areas: demographic information such as age and major, a measure of the inappropriate information posted, students opinions on which image they felt they portrayed, and lastly who the students believed should be viewing their profile. Based on the results of the survey the authors concluded that there are six main images portrayed by students, four that are appealing to ones peers while the other two would be impressive to employers. I agree that social networking sites are often used to help individuals represent themselves in a specific way; my experiences on Facebook relate to the topics researched by Peluchette and Karl, and allow me to give personal support for the results that they have found.

Facebook is currently ranked among the most visited sites on the Internet along with major search engines such as Google and Yahoo. Once a person joins the Facebook population they are instantly opened to a world of virtual communication and a level that may have previously not been thought possible. One of the first things a Facebook user does after creating their profile is to find other people that they know on Facebook and add them to a list of “friends”. Facebook has standard privacy settings that prevent anyone other than a persons friends from viewing their posted content and other profile activity. However, the settings can be altered to the user’s preference, keeping out unwanted visitors or allowing in all comers. Users can also tag themselves or others in photos, this activity significantly

Shayla wrote her portfolio in the class of Professor Julie White.
increases one's exposure on the Facebook website. Tagging someone in a photo means they are connected to that picture in some way, making it easier for other people to find pictures of a certain person. There are also many basic communication options such as instant messaging that make Facebook such a common cyber tool utilized by people from all walks of life.

Peluchette and Karl ask why students post inappropriate information despite its availability to unknown viewers. Throughout their piece, the authors generalize that students are aware of the potential viewers of their content, and that they simply do not care. Grand Valley State University’s Dean of Students, Bart Merkle says that he believes that students are simply naïve in regards to who can see their content, as well as the consequences that may come from certain parties viewing the content. When Facebook was first created, it was designed specifically for college students and it was not until September of 2006 that the site expanded its registration to anyone who wished to join (“Company”). Although it has been nearly three and a half years since the policy changed, allowing anyone to sign up for the site, it was not until June of 2009 that over half of all users were between the ages of 25 and 44. Prior to 2009 this age group had only made up about 32% of Facebook’s active users (O’Dell). Many students limit the content that may be viewed by the public by adjusting their privacy settings. However as older generations are getting Facebook profiles, this allows them to view the content that has otherwise been made private. My parents, aunts, uncles, managers, and some high school teachers have all been added as friends on my Facebook page, but only within the past year. Because the change is so recent many students are still adjusting to the reality that as their audience members are changing, they are now forced to censor much of the content that they are posting.

Peluchette and Karl found that the students who seemed to portray more obnoxious images were more likely to be okay with strangers viewing their profiles. In the study the authors state that “those who were OK with stranger seeing their profile, compared with those who are not, were significantly more likely to post inappropriate content and to portray an image that would be considered sexually appealing, wild, or offensive” (33). The majority of my Facebook friends are people who I have known through school since I was very young. Since most of my interactions with my
Facebook friends are in person rather than on the site, I can say that those who do post bold information have very outgoing personalities. As such, it is also known that acting out for attention is a universal concept. Such behavior is certainly not limited to college students with Facebook profiles. Such occurrences of outgoing people acting out and wanting to make new friends would support Peluchette and Karl’s ideas relating being okay with strangers viewing one’s profile and posting inappropriate content to attract new friends.

Although students do post inappropriate content on Facebook, they do not seem to be posting content of behaviors in which they did not actually partake. In other words, students are not lying about the activities they engage in during their college endeavors. In examining previous research done on this topic prior to conducting their study, Peluchette and Karl found that a very small percentage of students exaggerate their alcohol use on Facebook (31). Debra S. Dwyer of Stony Brook University’s School of Health, Technology & Management and Mir M. Ali of The University of Toledo’s Department of Economics have found evidence that reveals a strong correlation between peer activity and its influence on individuals (341). The evidence from both sources leads to the conclusion that while peers do seem to have a significant effect on an individual’s behavior, the majority of students do not seem to feel the need to present themselves falsely on Facebook in order to match peer behavior. Dwyer’s and Ali’s study also found that there are many factors outside of one’s peer group that made lead to alcohol use. These factors include age, race, and parent alcohol use (340). This evidence indicates that student’s risky behaviors both on and off the Internet are not influenced by other student’s behaviors that are observed via social networking sites.

Based on the results of their study, Peluchette and Karl suggest that “students make a conscious attempt to portray a particular image, and those who post problematic information do so to impress a particular audience, their peers” (35). Wanting to meet new friends is a general goal of most college students. In such a new, and often intimidating setting, it would be expected that students would be happy to utilize tools (such as social networking sites) that would allow them to depict themselves in a way that would attract others with interests similar to their own. Also found in the study was that “those who were OK with either their family or employers
seeing their profile, compared with those who are not, were significantly less likely to post inappropriate profile content and to portray an image that would be considered sexually appealing, wild, or offensive” (33). I have observed that students who have at least one parent as a friend on Facebook are much less likely to post material containing behaviors that their parents would disapprove of. In concurrence I have known of a significant amount of friends who have parents with Facebook pages but refuse to add them due to the fact that the parents would be upset by the material that the students have posted. It seems to me that students who refuse to add their parents do so because they would rather keep inappropriate material posted in order to impress their peers, correlating with what Peluchette and Karl have found.

In their discussion, Peluchette and Karl cover the importance of post-secondary institutions spreading the word about the risks associated with posting certain information on one’s social network profile. They state that “the consequences of posting problematic information be addressed early in a students’ college career” (35). At Grand Valley, students are not fully exposed to the dangers of posting problematic content. According to Dean of Students, Bart Merkle, the most warning students at the university get is through meetings with their advisors. Although all students are encouraged to have regular meetings with their advisors to discuss goals and make an academic plan, GVSU students are well aware that such meetings with advisors are not mandatory and are often put off until a specific concern arises. Whatever the norms may be for college student behavior they should know that any of the behavior they choose to plaster on the Internet has the potential to negatively affect them later as they pursue a career. Just as Peluchette and Karl encourage, I believe that colleges and universities should make an effort to promote the importance of Internet safety. While it may only take a few key strokes and pressed buttons to create an image for one’s friends, with over 400 million active users on Facebook alone (“Statistics”), such information may be just as easily found by an unfavorable party, causing poor consequences in the future. The students need to remember that content that is considered “impressive” or “funny” to one’s peers and friends may be considered exactly the opposite by a potential employer.
Overall, I believe that the answer to Peluchette and Karl’s question “What Were They Thinking When They Posted Inappropriate Information?” is simply that many college students are still adjusting to the changes that are occurring regarding people other than peers viewing their profiles. Students have become accustomed to the concept that only people who are “friends” on their Facebook pages will have access to that individual’s content and up until this time their “friends” have been their peers. While most students have harmless intentions with the image they portray to their fellow students, they must keep in mind that more and more employers are using search engines and social networking sites as screening tools for job candidates. As post-secondary institutions spread the word about who may realistically be viewing a profile, and parents as well as other older adults get Facebook profiles themselves, students are slowly beginning to realize that their social networking behavior can no longer continue uncensored. Regardless of their audience members or intentions, the most important thing that students need to remember is that nothing on the Internet is one hundred percent protected.

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“Pretty much all the honest truth-telling there is in the world is done by children” (“Quotations”). The echo of spoken numbers slowly fades in my ears as I sprint away from the boy standing and counting with his face buried in his hands. The warm grass cushions my feet and suddenly turns to a harsh crunch as I arrive on the road. A small dust cloud forms behind me, leaving one of the only hints as to my direction. I find an evergreen tree close by, extending my arm for the first branch I can reach. I swing my legs up one at a time until they are firmly planted on the branches, I then reach up again with my arms, the pattern continues until I am satisfied, even slightly impressed with the elevation I have achieved. At eight years old, hiding twelve feet up a tree is almost unbearably exhilarating. Holding myself steady, I crouch to fit between the branches as my heavy breathing finally begins to slow and my eyes rapidly scan the surrounding wilderness.

Just as my impatience is beginning to bubble, a small boy with bright blonde hair comes into view and I allow myself to practically fall to the ground to get away. I run for a short distance with the boy heavy on my trail, small twig-like branches whip my arms attempting to tell me to slow down, but I dare not listen to them. As I reach the road I feel a rush of adrenaline. Running straight is where the boys always seem to catch up with me so I know that this is where I need to prove myself. He remains in the dust trail behind me, but before long I feel that dreaded tap of his hand barely touching my shoulder blade.

The best players possess the ability to know the most precise moment to retreat and from their hiding spot in order to catch the seeker off guard and gain something of a head start, sprinting with all their might on a mentally pre-planned route to the next place of safety. Along with the ability to know when to move on, the best players will honestly accept defeat. Admitting to being caught is not a decision to be made but is simply a part of the routine. It is devastating yes because I would prefer to just keep running and hiding as I please, but if I get caught then it becomes my turn to seek and that is just the way of the game. We are oblivious to whatever world lies outside of our haven back in these woods, we are perfectly happy with
our repetitive routine. We run and chase and hide and run some more, over
and over again because it is the only way we have ever known.

Stopping momentarily to catch my breath I move forward, attempt-
ing to leave the defeat behind me in the dust cloud. As I begin to walk,
the street is still. Although I can feel my long dark hair beginning to burn
from the sun, I tilt my head back and accept the warmth of the beams on
my face. The wind blows causing the vibrant green sea atop the trees to
dance. Scarcely placed white clouds slowly pull across the sky. I am walking
by myself taking it all in and wanting so badly to scream for everyone else
to come out of hiding so we can jump in the pool. However I know that
they will have no such thing, as they love to make me chase them, usually
because they are boys and they always find ways to out-run me.

In my attempt to continue on with the game I begin to seek them
out. Keeping my eyes and ears open for any unusual movement I repeat-
edly come up short-handed. Where is everyone? After what seems like all
afternoon, I happen to spot one of the younger boys ducking behind a
large white propane tank as he heads for his house. My sprinting for him
is a dead giveaway that he has been spotted and he begins to run as well.
Catching up with him I grab his arm and he forcefully attempts to yank his
arm out of my grasp.

“Where is everyone else?” I ask him firmly.

“I don’t know.” He sarcastically taunts me.

“I’m going to take you hostage if you don’t tell me where they are!” He
looks at me for a moment and pouts before hesitantly raising his finger and
pointing at a grouping of pine trees behind us.

These trees are much larger than the ones I am used to hiding in. So
large and thick in fact, that I have to bend over and push my way through
the prickly needles and branches to get to the core of the tree. Once to the
core of the tree I can finally see what was previously hidden by the pine
needles. Looking up through the web of pipe like branches I see them.
There are three boys hiding up in the tree, my brother, another boy who
is my brother’s age, and the one furthest up the tree is the oldest of all us
kids. The smug look he gives me tells me that he is more than satisfied with
having tricked me for so long. I suddenly decide this is war. Grabbing onto
the first branch I begin to climb towards them. Although I know I will not
catch them in the tree I have to initiate some kind of offensive action to eventually force everyone else out from the tree.

My brother and the other boy drop down and begin to run but I am not concerned with them. Minutes pass as I maneuver the branches before the oldest boy is also forced to jump down. I have let go from the limbs of the tree before he completely lands making us almost dead even once on the ground. He gets a slight head start as we both dart into the open sun towards the big brick house nearby. During this time he has made a mistake; the line that he is running in is going to force him to have to go to the right of the big white propane tank. Noticing this I begin to head left because I know that by the time he rounds the tank and heads for the garage door I will be able to cut him off. It works beautifully, like a scene from a movie. Just as I had planned, I poke his bright red shirt just underneath his ribs after he rounds the propane tank.

I come to a halt, drenched in sweat and pride. I caught him! I think to myself. Finally I can catch my breath and just sit back and relax because I do not have to seek out the others for a change. Looking up however, the scene plays out differently. Why is he still running? He is just within reach of the door at this point.

“I got you!” I scream at him.

“No you didn’t, cheater!” he hollers back at me.

“You’re the cheater because I did so catch you!” Our bickering is cut off as he enters the house. I am in shock. Nobody has ever lied about being caught before. What are we going to do now? I certainly will not chase these boys around forever just because he does not want to admit that I caught him. Throwing a fit, I follow him into the house and demand him to tell the truth to the rest of the kids who are already inside waiting for lunch.

Our bickering continues back and forth over our bowls of macaroni and cheese. It feels like hours have passed, but finally we all finish eating. I have made no progress in trying to convince him, or any of the others of my story. I am shaking with anger, but I decide that it is only a minor setback and I accept the fact that I have no other choice but to continue on despite the wrong of the events that have taken place. Slowly, I drag my heavy feet
out into the middle of the grass underneath the beating sun. Closing my eyes, I begin to count...

“One Mississippi, two Mississippi, three Mississippi... READY OR NOT HERE I COME!!”

I open my eyes but the sudden brightness of the sun forces me to close them momentarily. So I try again, my squinting eyes are searching for some kind of clue as to where to look for the others. It comes quicker than I had expected, there is movement just ahead of me in a group of trees. I dart for it and one of the younger kids jumps out and runs away from me. Back into a familiar scene we are laughing and running. He is only a few steps ahead of me as the cloud of dust that is trailing us begins to grow. After a short distance, I catch him with minimal effort.

“Gotcha!” I jokingly laugh at him.

But he is still running. Sprinting as fast as he can for an opening in the trees that leads to a trail deep through to woods. NO, I think to myself. This is not happening again. I try with all my might to mentally stop him. I stand and watch as the sun reflects off of his bright blonde hair, wanting so badly for him to turn around and laugh and tell me that he is just kidding. However, my thoughts do not seem to be enough to stop his little legs. I momentarily rub the sweat out of my eyes to try and get a clearer view of where he is headed, but by the time I look up, he has already disappeared into the green and brown sea of trees. I grumpily plop myself down onto the soft grass and a new form of defeat comes over me. The desperation to succeed and the want to be on top have overtaken the laughs and simplicity we used to enjoy. We have learned how to lie, and sitting here soaking up the hot sun and seeing what that ability has done to one afternoon of play, I know that the game will never be played the same again.

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On a normal Christmas day in America the news is generally clogged with cliché faux Santa Claus sightings above New York, Detroit, L.A. etc. However this past Christmas was a different scene, thankfully one that did not end with a flying object lighting up the sky. On December 25, 2009 a 23 year-old Nigerian native by the name of Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab attempted to blow up Northwest Airlines flight 253 from Amsterdam to Detroit. The failed attempt sparked controversy and anger among Americans. Most prominently, everyone wanted to know how this could happen considering the heightened security set in place at airports since the September 11 attacks. The attempted bombing on Christmas shows that terrorists are adapting their methods to overcome the barriers that have already been set in an attempt to protect all people who choose to fly. In response to the evolving threat, the United States government is investing in a state-of-the art form of imaging technology called full-body scanners. Although there is much controversy surrounding the use of the scanners, it is important to make the public aware of the reality that while full-body scanners may cause some discomfort to certain people, they are a necessary security measure that will best protect all airline passengers and ensure the safety of our nation.

The main issue surrounding the use of full-body scanners is that they involve a very high degree of privacy invasion. There are two types of the scanners currently in use; backscatter and millimeter wave. According to the Transportation Security Administration (TSA), “Backscatter technology projects low level X-ray beams over the body to create a reflection of the body displayed on the monitor [. . .] Millimeter wave technology bounces harmless electromagnetic waves off the body to create a black and white three-dimensional image” (Transportation). Because the two machines work so similarly, they are both referred to as scanners, rather than being mentioned separately. These machines are so precise that the image produced essentially reveals the passenger being scanned as almost completely naked because the contours of the body beneath a person’s clothing are revealed. All traveling passengers have the option of receiving a personal pat
down by a security office in place of being scanned. Currently there are 40 millimeter-wave devices at 19 airports and four airports share six backscatter machines. If all goes as planned, by the end of 2010 there will be nearly 450 new scanning devices at airports nation wide (Transportation). As of April, the plan to install these new devices is well underway.

There are many valid arguments against the use of full-body scanners, with privacy being the main concern. While passengers who fly do want to know that they are being protected, many believe that the full-body scanners simply take airport security to an unnecessary level (“Security”). Yes the scanners may produce an image revealing passengers almost naked; however, in many ways they actually do a better job of protecting privacy than their human counter-parts of full-body pat downs performed by security officers. The TSA ensures utmost passenger privacy regarding the scanners. Firstly, the officers who view the images are in a closed-off windowless room and are forbidden from carrying cell-phones or cameras and the scanning devices have no way to save, store, or print the images viewed. And secondly, when a passenger is scanned their face is automatically blurred out on the image that is created (Transportation). The machines are not for entertainment or amusement purposes, as most critics seem to fear. A communications manager for Smiths Detection, Colin McSeveny states, “all they are looking for is something that shouldn’t be there” (qtd. in Max and Tessler). The high-tech evolution allows for minimal personal contact between the security officers and the passengers unless a threat is detected. I know that I would feel much more violated by a pat down as opposed to standing with my hands up as a machine scans me.

Many who rebuttal against the scanners because of privacy issues argue that there are alternatives that involve the same level of security without the high degree of invasion. In his article “Airport Security: Two Alternatives to Full-body Scanners” Mark Guarino discusses the two main machines suggested as substitutes for the scanners. First, a device nicknamed the “Puffer” blows puffs of chemically sensitive air around an individual to detect explosives that may be hidden beneath the person’s clothing. However Guarino also states that the Puffers are being phased out due to reoccurring maintenance issues. The “Guardian” is a machine that works very similar to the Puffer but it is more advanced, quick, and is better with more difficult areas such as the inside of shoes. Although the TSA contributed nearly
1.5 million dollars towards experiments of the Guardian the funding was discontinued for unknown reasons (Guarino). It can be assumed that with such a tight budget it would not have been plausible to continue to fund such a project when a similar machine such as the puffer had been experiencing so many technical problems. With the lingering terror threat it is crucial for authorities to be able to utilize a reliable technology, in this case, the full-body scanners.

As with most preventative measures taken in airports, many flyers are significantly bothered when people who are “obviously” not terrorists, such as senior citizens and small children, must go through the same brutal screening process as everyone else. In a 60 Minutes interview conducted by Lesley Stahl, former TSA administrator Kip Hawley responded very bluntly to such concerns stating, “You can’t say to Al Qaeda ‘if you give us someone who looks like they’re 90 years old or nine months old they’re going to get a free pass’ because I guarantee you, they are watching and they notice it and that’s where they’ll come” (“Screening”). The unfortunate truth is that Hawley is correct. Terrorists have, and will take advantage of any gap that they can find in our security systems. As also reported on 60 Minutes, when guns and knives were eliminated terrorists tried putting bombs in their shoes so scanning shoes in a separate X-ray became the new policy. In 2006, terrorists in Britain were caught attempting to use liquid explosives; this was followed by the elimination of liquids in travel. This did not stop terrorists either, as proven by the underwear bomber who hid explosives along the lining of his undergarments. However, with authorities being able to see clearly through clothing it is safe to say that places to hide weapons or explosives are quickly becoming almost non-existent and the terrorists are running out of options.

Besides the discomfort that passengers may feel while being scanned, there are an equal number of disputes that have nothing to do with the privacy issue. Bruce Schneier, a renowned expert on security technology, has made many cases against the use of full-body scanners claiming that “It’s magical thinking: If we defend against what the terrorists did last time, we’ll somehow defend against what they do one time. Of course this doesn’t work”. Schneier has coined the term “security theatre” to describe what he believes is the majority of the process that individuals experience when attempting to maneuver through airport security. The general
concept of security theatre is that the extensive measures really do very little for our security other than making us feel safer during air travel. For example, the complicated processes at airports make us think that we are being protected because such measures should catch anyone who may have slipped through the intelligence cracks, but in reality terrorists are still finding ways to get through the layers upon layers of security. Schneier believes that this cycle will not end even with the use of full-body scanners. He says that it would still be possible to hide explosives such as PETN (used by Abdulmutallab), terrorists could, “stuff it in a body cavity, spread it thin on a garment” so that it could not be detected by the scanners. Schneier believes that money and efforts should be put into intelligence and measures that would stop terrorists before they even get to the airports. Schneier’s ideas, although interesting, would do about as much to ensure our security as his concept of “security theatre”. Although it may seem naïve to simply make a new security measure for every threat we encounter, it is the only option that we have. Schneier also fails to mention that the added security is working. Following the changes to airport security, no attack tactics that have previously been attempted have been replicated and this is because there are preventative measures.

The Christmas day attack is proof that our intelligence system alone is not enough. There were some tips about Abdulmutallab prior to December 25, however, the information that was there was simply not enough to require a follow-up. Even Schneier, who is against increasing security, points out the following:

After the fact, it’s easy to point to the bits of evidence and claim that someone should have "connected the dots." But before the fact, when there are millions of dots -- some important but the vast majority unimportant -- uncovering plots is a lot harder.

It is easy enough to say that this or that could and should have been done to prevent the attack. It would be impossible to provide the manpower that would be required to do gather intelligence about all passengers who fly. Critics may argue that only certain passengers really need to be watched but the truth is that nobody can really pick out what a terrorist looks like. There is a general stereotype of terrorists, which is that they are Muslims of middle-eastern decent. This, as well as many other stereotypes can lead
to false accusations and investigations of the wrong people. The use of full-body scanners will help to eliminate this problem because they will treat everyone the same. All passengers step into the scanners and are screened in the same way, ethnicity and clothing are two things not detected, therefore preventing passengers from stereotyping by the security officers who interpret the images.

Despite the many arguments against full-body scanners, support for the measure is actually stronger. A *USA Today* poll conducted in mid-January found that 78 percent of participants approved of the use of the scanners (Frank). One respondent in favor of the scanners stated, “It would put me more at ease getting on a plane” (qtd. in Frank). The goal of the scanners is to help protect passengers that fly. And the truth is that they will make us safer. Former head of the Department of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff says that “no technology is perfect” but the scanners will find things that metal detectors miss (“Security”). This bonus is one that is impossible to ignore. Many critics imply that because of scarce objects that the technology would not detect, such as those in body cavities, the scanners should be disregarded and considered useless. However, this view of searching for a “perfect” screening mechanism is detrimental. The use of the scanners will eliminate every possible threat we have encountered thus far and that is a major step in the security evolution. How much of a dangerous substance or object can a person realistically fit into their body cavities and keep it hibernated for hours? Not a whole lot. With the use of the full-body scanners as a primary measure for all flyers, that “not a whole lot” window is key to limiting the options that the terrorists have.

The advanced imaging technology being utilized by the TSA is indeed very intimidating to many travelers. I believe that it is crucial for all citizens to understand the way in which the machines work and to also know that their cooperation is an equally crucial key to their effectiveness. The full-body scanners that are in place at many airports currently, will be installed in a total of 23 airports nation-wide are the latest security measure and are absolutely required to combat the continuing terror threat. The use of the scanners as a primary screening measure in airports will include maximum privacy protection of the passengers as well as ensuring their safety. The scanners will work to detect both metallic and non-metallic threats that may be hidden underneath clothing, a tool that would have been extremely
helpful in preventing the recent attempted Christmas Day attack. The swarm of full-body scanners that are currently making their way into public transportation are not in place to make us feel violated or uncomfortable but are and will be used only for our personal safety as well as to protect our nation.

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I will never forget that day, the day when I finally began to feel like an adult and experience that first taste of freedom, the day I turned sixteen. This would be the day I could finally go out and buy my own car and similar to any other teenager approaching this life-changing day all I could think about was what kind of car I would be driving. I could only imagine how fast it would be and how cool it would be, but I never could have expected to own what I drive today. Sadly, many other teenagers are also influenced by popular culture into believing that they will get exactly what they want out of their first car, but some are forced to realize that what they want out of a car is far different from what they need. Each person has a unique taste in vehicles that is influenced by culture, often varying from young men to women as well.

If you ask any teenage boy what kind of car they want when they start driving, almost all will name a fast or cool looking car. In fact, Sarah Redshaw, who was a member on the Australian Research Council and performed a Drivers Culture project which explored the “demands and requirements of driving as a cultural practice,” found this very relationship between gender, age and car preference present among teens in Australia. This cultural project not only researched trends, but also went in depth with many teenagers and interviewed them about their own experiences related to car culture. Redshaw found that “cars have always been associated with freedom, independence and convenience, as well as status and sex appeal. How these are experienced can vary according to the characteristics of the driver such as gender, location (whether country or city), and age” (78). This finding is consistent with different tastes in cars present among young men, women, and adults, and each person’s preference is a product of popular culture. For example, movies such as the *The Fast and the Furious* or *Gone in 60 Seconds* all feature big guys driving muscle and custom cars while getting all of the good looking girls. This image goes directly into a young man’s head, and makes him believe that he needs to have a fast custom car in order to be perceived as cool and have an impression on the opposite sex. Redshaw also confirmed that “young men it was clear,
were associated with and liked to associate themselves with, ‘hot’, flash and powerful cars that often involve ‘modifications’ to the original design, and were either big cars…or sporty cars with a lot of power. A young man from Wollongong stated: ‘Even if you can’t afford it, you’d still choose a nice car. Something sporty, because it says something’” (80). Male teenagers love to drive something cool and fast in order to impress their peers and fit in with popular culture.

On the other hand, culture has a very different affect on parent’s or older adults views of a good car. If you were to ask most parents which type of car their child will be driving they are more likely to name a big and “safe” car, and this is the influence of popular culture. Parents an entirely different idea of what their kid should be driving, they believe that in order to protect their kid they need to buy him the biggest SUV or car that they can afford. Thich is a product of the media and how in recent years it has become very concerned with teenage deaths due to car accidents and the relation between what a child drives and the frequency of deaths or accidents. Culture plays a significant role in the conflicting views of what parents and kids think teenagers should drive.

What a teenager wants out of a vehicle is often on the opposite spectrum of what they need, and parents can be the deciding factor when determining what a teenager will end up with. As explained above, a teenage boy will almost always want a new and fast car that will increase their social standing: a vehicle that has power to spare and is fun to drive. While on the other hand “young women were happier with smaller cars that used less fuel and did not see the need for fast cars” (Redshaw 81). Similarly, young women also prefer a certain type of vehicle, although this preference usually falls under a category that includes “cute” or new and nice looking cars rather than something that focuses on speed. Emerging adults fail to realize that this vision of the perfect car, the car of their dreams, will almost always fall short of what they will actually drive. Parents are always there to inform them that they do not need a fast, beautiful, or new car with all of the latest features even though it may seem like it to them.

On the contrary, many teenagers’ first car will often only possess the bare minimum and few features necessary for everyday life. For example, a vehicle’s first and foremost task is to provide a reliable means of transportation. It must always be dependable and able to get from point A to point B
and back without any major problems whenever necessary. Another quality which a car must possess is satisfactory safety equipment. If a car is not safe it is also not roadworthy, so it must have functioning airbags, brakes, and good tires. Car buyers often make the misconception that other features such as air condition, power windows, and a CD player need to be in a car, but this is not the case. A car can easily go without any of these things and still provide a teenager with means to escape from their home or go wherever they can imagine. All in all, transportation does not have to be fast or comfortable, just so long as it is safe and reliable for the driver and passengers; appearance or personal taste do not matter when only looking at what is needed out of a car.

Just like every other teenager, when I turned sixteen I wanted my own car, a car that I wouldn't have to be afraid to really drive and put to the test, a car that was mine to do whatever I wanted with, and the only thing that was stopping this dream from becoming a reality was my parents. They told me that I needed to get a job so I could buy my own car and pay for the insurance, ignoring my pleas of how I could not get a job until I had a car so they would need to buy me one anyway or how I could never wait that long to buy a car. Nevertheless, I listened to parents and found a job bussing tables and cleaning dishes at a local restaurant. After two months of saving the sixty dollars I made each week I could finally begin searching for that car of my dreams. Sadly, I soon realized that I would never be able to afford that beautiful 1968 Shelby Mustang; I was forced to go look at a '97 $700 Volkswagen Golf with a hatchback.

It was not exactly what I was looking for, but my dad talked me into at least taking a look at it because of the “awesome gas mileage” it would get and how it had almost no rust and even had a 5-speed, something I've always wanted in a car. So I went with him to the dealership where it was being kept and opened the driver’s door to take a look inside, tried to open the door, that is. It was ratchet-strapped shut from the inside and was also duct-taped to make sure it didn't open while driving. Good sign. So after my dad climbed over the passenger’s seat and in to the driver seat, and I got in behind him we decided to take it for a test drive. When he first fired it up I almost believed for a fleeting moment that maybe I did just step into a '68 mustang. The whole car seemed to come alive as the engine roared and then settled back down to a deep purr, but then my dad informed me that
the exhaust must be completely shot and full of holes and that the car really
did only have a 2.0 liter 4 banger. Another thing I noticed was the persis-
tent dinging that was a car alarm going off because the door could not be
shut all the way.

Slightly depressed, I still decided that I wanted to at least let my dad
drive it, because I couldn’t drive a clutch, around the block to see how it
ran and what else could possibly be wrong with it. So, he shifted into first,
and with a few jerks from a worn clutch we took off with a roar. As we kept
going I was surprised to find that the car was actually quite fast and was
pleased with it until we hit a bump, and then decided to turn. The whole
car seemed to groan in agony each time we went over a bump and took a
sharp corner, just begging to be put out of its misery. The back end would
repeatedly bounce up and down after hitting even the smallest dip or bump
in the road because of worn struts and sound as if gunfire was going off
every time we turned left, broken axle shaft. Surprisingly, that seemed to
be all that was wrong with the car, and after talking to my dad I decided
to buy it and fix it myself. This was going to be my first car, symphony of
groans dinging popping and all, not exactly what I had dreamed of. I was
forced to realize that although I wanted a muscle car and this VW was
nothing like that, it still had everything that I would need to get by.

Several months and seven hundred more dollars later, my dad and I
managed to repair nearly everything on the incredibly long list broken
parts. Of course, there are some nuances that I doubt will ever be figured
out, such as why my blinker does not work when I use the brake, or why it
never seems to run well after a heavy rain, but it has become a very reliable
car. Almost two years later, I am still driving my Volkswagen and loving
every minute of it. The gas-mileage is truly amazing; it doesn’t even look
half-bad, thanks to the tube of touch-up paint, and is able to get me to and
from school, work, and anywhere else I ever need to go. This has been one
of the best investments I ever made, especially since it is blue-booked at
about $2,500 which is a very rare return in the car world. Emerging adults
need to understand that although they may want to coolest car available,
settling for a less expensive car can also fit their needs.

All in all, cars are a very important part of life in America. Not only are
they are necessary forms of transportation, cars can be a way for a teenager
to escape from everyday life and have a new level of freedom. As Redshaw
clearly states, “for young people, having a license and access to a car is an enormous boost to their independence, mobility, and freedom. In this sense it symbolizes emerging adulthood, and in its particular forms, the car itself gives expression to identity” (86). The car is not just a machine; it can be an expression of who the driver is, like how my car shows that I am not overly concerned with appearance, but still love to have fun and rip through the gears every once and awhile. Each individual has his or her own dream car which can often be traced back to how popular culture has influenced their own life, but this dream car focuses too much on what a person wants and not what is needed.

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School, it is the tool which lays the foundation for a competitive marketplace in any country, a tool designed to mold the minds of young children and develop them into scholars and higher functioning human beings. Through implementation in countries across the world school has been proven to be a powerful phenomenon, but as with any good thing it must be taken in moderation. People have begun to question if children are devoting too much of their time to school, especially outside of the classroom, and these people have only grown more numerous and outspoken during years of an educational reform placing a heavier workload on younger students. Is there evidence supporting the push to abolish homework, or should the homework load be increased? There is evidence supporting both claims, but in order to create the most effective learning environment for children today we must find a middle ground that incorporates the benefits of both sides of the spectrum.

Many supporters of homework will say that it should not be abolished because homework helps America to compete internationally, but in reality, this statement lacks any scientific data for support and also brings into question the true purpose of homework. Compared to other countries, America has been falling in rank when looking at international test scores. This trend has been a very common argument among people that support homework because of the commonly believed idea that more homework will make the kids smarter. In spite of this, “although U.S. students spend just as much time on homework as do their peers in Japan, Japanese students perform better on international achievement tests, analysts note. No matter how much homework students do, analysts say, they still fail to perform on the same level as students in Japan. Clearly, critics of homework say, the solution to the educational failures of U.S public schools is not more homework” (“Homework” 4-5). This suggests that the supporters’ argument is in fact counterproductive; homework does not appear to be linked to higher international test scores. They even continue to say, in fact, that homework is not the solution to a declining competitiveness on a global scale.
This idea of increasing homework to compete internationally also brings up an interesting question, what is the true purpose of homework? This argument suggests that the reason behind homework is to improve test scores, but isn’t this supposed to be another form of learning with the main focus of benefiting the child and his or her development? People need to make sure they do not only analyze test scores but also how homework can help a person grow into a well rounded adult with the tools to succeed in life. The real reason homework is used internationally today is because of the belief that homework can help children learn material faster and with a deeper understanding of the curriculum.

Many say that homework should not be abolished because it is an effective tool used to develop children’s minds, but the research backing this claim is also up for debate. One side of this debate is that homework teaches children critical skills such as time management while also fostering their motivation. Every one of these skills is a necessity for one planning to move up in an increasingly competitive job market, especially amid an unemployment crisis, which is why proponents argue that homework must be kept in the schools in order to give each child the chance they deserve to become successful and live the American dream. One supporter of homework, Janine Bempechat, points out that “homework plays a critical, long-term role in the development of children’s achievement motivation and provides them with the time to develop study habits that are helpful for learning, including the value of effort and the ability to cope with mistakes and difficulty” (189-190). Bempechat reveals many benefits of homework which show how invaluable homework is in regards to the development of a child’s mind. Even if it cannot be proven that homework is the best learning device for every child, why abolish it if there is even the smallest possibility of having a negative effect on a child?

Proponents say it could not only affect their achievement in school, but also in any difficult situation they encounter in the future. For example, research performed by Diener and Sweck shows how instrumental homework can be in not only the development of a young person, but also how it can be used to train children to see themselves as someone able to achieve anything he or she sets their mind to. They found that “children who are more susceptible to learned helplessness—the tendency to fall apart in the face of difficulty or challenge—tend to believe that mistakes are a sign of
low ability, a stable quality of the self over which they have no control. Yet when trained to view mistakes as the result of a lack of effort, children adopt more positive ways of dealing with academic difficulty” (qtd. in Bempechat, 189). Their findings show that they believe homework is a powerful tool and is able to have an incredible effect on the mindset of a child for the rest of his life, and how a person looks at a problem or views themselves can change their level of success and even their personality; outgoing versus shy and bashful. Homework can change the lives of young Americans not only by incorporating problems that will teach them many new skills into school curriculum, but also by showing them that they are able to conquer any problem that they set their mind to.

In spite of this seemingly obvious relationship between homework and development, many opponents of homework reveal the significantly inconclusive results of studies and research that have attempted to prove this. They not only provide their own reasons to abolish homework, but they even challenge the very data which proponents rely upon to make their arguments. For example, “according to the Journal of Educational Psychology, ‘researchers have been far from unanimous in their assessments of the strengths and weaknesses of homework as an instructional technique. Their assessments ranged from homework having positive effects, no effects, or complex effects to the suggestion that the research was too sparse or poorly conducted’” (qtd. in Haddock). This shows that there is little scientific evidence pointing in either direction, homework being good or bad for a child during the learning process. Many may say that there are scientific cases or studies that prove each their way, but neither can fully prove their claim. For instance, Harris Cooper has reviewed over one hundred studies arguing for both sides of this debate and admits this problem, and even takes the step to “acknowledge that ‘the conclusions of past reviewers of homework research show extraordinary variability…the reviews often directly contradict one another’” (Kralovec et al). Cooper blatantly reveals how varied reviews can be, and opponents of homework use this discrepancy to make any argument for homework seem less valid. All in all, the results can neither prove nor disprove the effectiveness of homework.

At any rate, opponents argue that elementary age children gain very little, except for increased levels of stress, from doing class work outside of school. Nevertheless, elementary schools have shown the most growth
in homework amounts over the years. Experts and analysts, such as Etta Kralovec who holds a doctorate in education and is an associate professor at the University of Arizona, have made the consensus that this is the only age group which should see less homework. She has found that “asking children to perform tasks before they are developmentally ready proved counter-productive to development.” This is no longer a question of whether or not people support homework, but of what people value more, a possible and unlikely increase in test scores or the well being of a young child.

Even distinguished supporters of homework such as Harris Cooper, a professor of psychology at the University of Missouri, have stepped forward to argue against homework given to elementary age students not only from the basis of studies but also from a psychological standpoint. He says that “studies indicate that younger students have limited attention spans, or more specifically, limited abilities to tune out distractions. Also, younger students haven’t yet learned proper study skills. They don’t know how to apportion their time between easy or hard tasks or how to engage in effective self-testing.” Cooper makes it very clear that although he supports homework on a broader scale, he believes it should not be given out at the elementary level. So even if leading experts cannot fully agree on the outcome of each individual study regarding the relationship between homework and performance, opponents argue that it can be easily seen from any standpoint that there are many reasons to abolish it at the elementary level. They say a simple look at how a child is able to handle any homework load and their lack of necessary skills to complete an assignment also argue against homework for younger students.

So it is then that one must wonder why the homework load has increased in this age group even though data, even if it is overall inconclusive, suggests that homework can actually damage the developmental process for a young person when given in large volumes. There is no reason that this should be a trend because the possible gain is not worth the risks. Nevertheless, a report done by the NAEP reveals that “the percentage of nine year olds receiving homework assignments increased ten percentage points between 1984 and 1989” (qtd. in Marshall). After watching news reports and reading articles in the newspaper about schools, one can easily come to the conclusion that this trend has only continued over the years as education reform has become an increasingly popular issue and standards have
increased for this age group. The reasoning or argument behind this may be that education should begin at a younger level so that America does not fall behind other countries in the global competition for more competitive graduates, but it lacks any basis or foundation to support the argument.

In comparison, studies that have been done regarding schoolwork completed at home and its effect on grades for middle to high school level students have yielded more conclusive results. Critics still may argue that it has not been proven that homework does help middle school and high school age students, yet there is data to back up the claim. A *Long Term Trend* report released by the federally funded National Assessment of Educational Progress is what is known as a long-term assessment and asks questions to take all variables into consideration. This tests the performance of students in the elementary, middle, and high school levels and the data reinforces proponent’s arguments for homework. In the Reading Proficiency portion of the assessment “for thirteen year olds, the 2004 average reading scale score for those who did not have homework assigned the day before was about the same as for students who had homework but did not do it. For those who did homework, a clear relationship emerged between the time spent on homework and achievement: the more time students spent on homework the higher the average scale score.” (*Long Term Trend*). The same test given to the seventeen year olds yielded similar results, and the math portion for the older students had even more conclusive results than this reading proficiency assessment. This study, as well as others, shows a linear relationship between the amount of homework assigned and an improvement in grades for students above the elementary level, with clearer results as a student ages.

Yet again, schools have not been integrating these results into their curriculum by increasing the amount of homework for middle and high school age students. In fact, the amount of it handed out to older students has been steadily decreasing. In the 2000 Department of Education NAEP long term assessment it was found the “middle and high school students are getting less homework. From 1984 to 1999, the percentage of 13- and 17-year olds that received nightly homework assignments fell, and those who got homework spent less time on it” (qtd. in Marshall). Children are not receiving as much homework in the last leg of their mandatory school
careers. These findings show that they are spending too much time socializing and not enough time studying. Older students are no longer being challenged in school and are therefore missing out on an opportunity to flourish and gain all that they can from their education, and homework can help solve this problem.

These finding reveals a very poor move on behalf of schools nationwide they should be enforcing a curriculum that takes into account the results of large studies and the arguments of both sides of the homework debate. Schools need to put into practice a limit on the amount of homework given to students with regards to grade level and cognitive development of each child. For example, in a guide for parents, the National Parent Teacher Association and the National Education Association (2000) state, “most educators agree that for children in grades K-2, homework is most effective when it does not exceed 10-20 minutes each day; older children, in grades 3-6, can handle 30-60 minutes a day” (qtd. in Cooper). This is known as the ten minute rule, so basically there are ten minutes of homework according to the grade level. For instance, high school seniors would receive up to 120 minutes of homework per day. This amount is no more than a student can handle, and from what I have seen in high school, two hours of homework is both reasonable and beneficial for the student. Furthermore, by not completely eliminating homework for grades K-2 the younger children will still gain important life skills such as time management and problem solving without crossing the line. This approach works because it takes everything that was argued into consideration, especially the ability of a student according to grade level.

All in all, I believe that homework should not be abolished, but simply limited for elementary students and expanded for higher level students and held to some standards. Each side of the arguments presented show that there is a positive and negative side to the current homework policy, but each is looking at extreme situations. There is a middle ground, and it involves teachers spending more time with their students and creating interesting curriculum so that they can adjust the homework load each night with regards to each student’s needs. Furthermore, the amount of homework should also be regulated according to grade. Multiple studies have shown that overwhelming a young child with homework teach them poor motivational skills or study habits because he or she will be more
likely to give up or think that he or she is not smart enough to complete the assignments. The schools should adopt a system in which there is a minimal amount of homework assigned to elementary age students and the amount increases with grade. To synthesize the findings and arguments of both sides of this debate, homework is an effective learning tool when properly applied.

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Eric VanMiddendorp  
Writing 150

Fighting Foreclosure Fraud

The end of the first recession since World War II is finally beginning to draw near, although the dust created by the crash of the housing market has not yet begun to settle. The number of foreclosures continues to rise as more families sink deeper into debt with each passing day, despite desperate efforts to stay afloat. Often enough a family will seek out a business or counselor as a last resort to keep them in their homes but unknowingly become involved in a scam which can leave them in an even worse mess than in the one in which they started. At the very least money will be stolen, and possibly even the deed to the property will trade hands. These and other types of mortgage fraud have become far too common in recent years because of the high amounts of stress and emotion a homeowner is subject to when realizing the possibility of losing everything. However, there are intelligent moves that can be made to completely avoid this situation while still getting the help needed during a foreclosure.

The problem of mortgage fraud and foreclosure rescue scams is much larger than many may believe, and this problem takes many forms. According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation the estimated annual losses for mortgage fraud reach into the billions, up to six billion to be exact. This number is astounding, and clearly depicts the impact that this problem is having not only in communities across America but also on the national economy. The FBI also states the total number of “Mortgage Fraud Suspicious Activity Reports (SARS) in Fiscal Year 2008 was 63,173, with two thirds of that number reached in only the first five months of 2009” (Just The Facts). SARS are used by homeowners to request that the government looks into their situation and for them to seek retribution for their losses. This means that the reports are a strong indicator of a problem with foreclosure fraud that is reaching across the nation. The sheer amount of home foreclosures each year the reason why these scams have become such a large problem, it makes the crime easy to get away with using one of many simple scams. In fact, Powell did research on foreclosure fraud in New York City and concluded that “mortgage and deed fraud are among the most economically destructive crimes prosecuted by their offices. Bank robbers
average less than $2,000 and face a 75 percent chance of being caught; a mortgage fraud ring walks away with hundreds of thousands of dollars per house, prosecutors say, and runs little risk of arrest.” This suggests a big reason why foreclosure fraud has become so common, it is a crime that is difficult to be prosecuted and there is so much of it that the odds of being caught are very low. All cases of foreclosure fraud have used tactics to “help out” with a homeowner’s mortgage, which may seem innocent on the surface but are actually a trap.

One of the most common forms of mortgage fraud involves someone posing as a counselor or negotiator. They will come to a house and offer to make payments to the lender or negotiate with the lender on the behalf of the homeowner for a fee. In fact, the Federal Trade Commission warns that “sometimes the scam artist insists that you make all mortgage payments directly to him while he negotiates with the lender, but not to contact your lender, lawyer, or credit counselor and to let the scam artist handle all the details” (Foreclosure Rescue Scams 2). Asking a homeowner to make all of the payments to him, the scammer, can lead to the scammer receiving multiple payments before fleeing the scene. These people taking advantage of the homeowners may even take one final step to ruin their credit in a seemingly innocent way, filing a bankruptcy in the homeowner’s name. This provides very little benefit for the scammer other than making it seem as though he is trying to help by temporarily stopping the foreclosure, but can have a very serious effect on one’s life for many years to come. For instance, FTC explains that If a scam artist does file a bankruptcy in your name, “you could lose the money you paid to the scam artist as well as your home. Worse yet, a bankruptcy stays on your credit report for 10 years and can make it difficult to obtain credit, buy a home, get life insurance, or sometimes get a job” (Foreclosure Rescue Scams 3). In some situations, the effects can reach past the pain of losing a home and extend into other areas of a person’s life. This is a very simple scam that many people fall for each year, allowing the scam artist to slip away unscathed but leaving the deceived in more of a mess than before.

There are also fraudulent claims that can lead to far more devastation for one entering into foreclosure. As with any other mortgage scam claim the scammer will come with grand promises seeking to renew hope in hard times, but in these cases he walks away with the home. These are
what are known as the “Bait-and-Switch” and “Rent-to-Buy” schemes. The “Bait-and-Switch” scheme is a situation in which “you think you’re signing documents for a new loan to make your existing mortgage current. This is a trick: you’ve signed documents that surrender the title of your house to the scam artist in exchange for a ‘rescue’ loan” (Foreclosure Rescue Scams 2). In a very simple move a person offering a loan to help through the hard times and avoid foreclosure will have the family sign paperwork. This may seem like a harmless and necessary step to receiving a loan, but the family is not signing up for a loan at all, they are signing away the title of the home. A far more complicated approach talks homeowners into a deal in which “you’re told to surrender the title, which allows you to remain in your home as a renter and buy it back during the next few years” (Foreclosure Rescue Scams 2). Sadly, in all cases the family will never get their home back. In fact, the scammer will almost always walk away with nearly all of the home’s equity, leaving them with the mortgage.

On a much broader scale, however, counting the days until being evicted from your own home is terrible for anyone to experience and will leave anybody stressed and searching desperately for help. So even though there may be a way to stop the countdown and the eviction, good judgment takes a backseat to emotion and papers are signed as soon as possible. Rushing the process is the first mistake a person makes, and is exactly what a scammer is counting on to get a person to sign over his deed or begin sending payments to him or her as soon as possible. This hurriedness to seal the deal will be the cause of even more stress and pain if one does not take the time to look into a business offering help. No matter what the circumstance or how important speed may be during the process to receive aid in time, do not rush headfirst into a legally binding contract without first evaluating the business or organization offering help.

Many believe that they will not find themselves facing foreclosure and that even if they do the odds of being swindled are relatively small; they do not understand the importance of always being on the lookout for a scam. In fact, a bulletin recently written by Bradley, a Special Agent for the FBI, shows that the number of foreclosed homes in the United States is much larger than most people may think. He states that “in 2005, 846000 homes entered into foreclosure. The following year, the number increased 41 percent to over 1.2 million. In 2007, more than 2.2 million reportedly fore-
closed, a 75 percent rise over 2006 and a 149 percent increase over 2005.”

In America’s dismal economy, debt can creep up on even the most responsible homeowners. They must be aware of the scams and forms of fraud that have likely taken someone in their own neighborhood by surprise.

So if a family does have foreclosure knocking on their door, there are simple ways to avoid being taken advantage of during a housing crisis. One big rule is to never believe that companies advertised in the newspaper or on television are legitimate. It is actually quite common for a person to set up a phony business to make the deal look legitimate. An easy way to check this is to contact the Better Business Bureau, which has information regarding businesses and their track record. They often use slogans such as “stop foreclosure now!” or “we guarantee to stop you foreclosure” (Foreclosure Rescue Scams 2) to get a homeowner’s attention but this is only bait on the hook. In the latest edition of FDIC Consumer News the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation provides many tips to homeowners on the lookout for a scam. Two of their most helpful hints are to “try and deal only with lenders, businesses, and other organizations you already know or that have been recommended”, and to “make your mortgage payments directly to your lender or the mortgage service.” Each of these tips are key factors in an effort to avoid being caught up in a scam. By working with recommended services a homeowner’s safety and security can be almost guaranteed. Also, by making sure to always send payments directly to the lender a homeowner can cut out the middle man and prevent any scams in that area. However, the most important thing that a person can do to avoid losing their home is to carefully read over any documents before signing them. Reading the fine print can prevent the worst from happening, signing away the deed. One can never spend too much time when in a situation such as foreclosure, and should always spend as much time as necessary to prevent even more headaches.

Families nationwide are still struggling to make payments on their mortgages but are still sinking deeper and deeper into debt as each bill comes. Sadly, this has made foreclosure a far too common end to the financial battle and is ripping families from their homes nationwide. Amidst this terrible prospect, however, there still seems to be a glimmer of hope for families to keep their homes through the aid of businesses or banks offering to rescue them from foreclosure. These businesses, or often nonprofit
organizations, have prevented countless families from losing their homes through mentorship, loans, counseling, and other services. Nonetheless, there are still those who will take advantage of homeowners who are seeking desperately for help by seeming to offer them a way out of their crisis, only to leave them further in debt and unavoidably on a path to foreclosure. No matter how promising an offer may appear it could be a scam, but there are ways to reveal the frauds and avoid any scams that may be coming your way.

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Trashing Tranquility

The trees began to thin out and then altogether vanish as my brother and I emerged from the forest at last. Stepping out into the clearing at the base of the mountain, we both looked up to be met by the breathtaking view of Colorado’s Mount Yale. With its sheer cliff faces illuminated by the summer sunrise, this was the moment we had been looking forward to for months. The view was more perfect than any picture had portrayed it, a utopia of solitude and beauty. Until I looked back down to have the vista ruined by the remnants of a careless backpacker’s campsite. Candy bar wrappers were strewn across the trail, used toilet paper was draped by the wind, and someone’s empty fuel canister lay on the grass in front of us. And just like that, the quiet serenity of the once thrilling view had been destroyed by the waste of an offensive outdoorsman.

While trash piles like this are rare in the United States’ national parks, they are commonplace among the world’s tallest mountains. Due to the popularization of mountain climbing, there has been a steep increase in the tourism generated by mountainous regions. Expeditionary mountain climbing has become especially popular due to the extremeness of the mountains they attempt to conquer. This kind of climbing necessitates an astronomical amount of equipment, money, time and assistance for the sole purpose of placing a few people on the summit of one of the world’s tallest mountains. Then, because the conditions on such mountains are so difficult, most climbers ignore the environmental impact they have and focus solely on getting to the summit. Especially on Mount Everest, the world’s tallest mountain, this mindset has led to monumental build ups of oxygen bottles, fuel canisters, batteries and even dead bodies (Hytha A1). Sagarmatha National Park of Nepal, where Mount Everest is located, is constantly being subjected to damage by these mountain climbers who are ruining the wonderful escape that nature has provided us with. In order to protect Mount Everest from the litter, deforestation and exploitation of natives that are brought about by expeditionary mountaineering, the Nepal government needs to take drastic steps to protect this universal monument of natural beauty.

Kenneth wrote his portfolio in the class of Professor Arlene Hecksel.
The endeavor of mountain climbing has slowly become commercialized, warping it from a passionate pursuit of experiencing the outdoors to a luxury sport available to anyone with enough money. Many of the people who set out to conquer Everest today are not outdoor enthusiasts at all but are just wealthy people who want something to brag about. According to Elizabeth Rosen, a visiting Assistant Professor at Lafayette College, “…today, climbing the tallest mountain in the world…is considered a worthy vacation alternative” (Rosen 147). Due to this shift in the philosophy behind mountain climbing, the conditions on the world’s tallest mountain have been significantly damaged. Junko Tabei, the first woman to ever summit Everest, notes, "Everest has become too crowded. It needs a rest now" (qtd. in Keys A10). The overuse of Everest’s summit trails has compounded the environmental effect climbers have on the mountain. With more and more people visiting Everest, it is obvious that more and more refuse has accumulated as a result. This is incredibly enraging to the locals who view the mountain as being holy. The President of the Nepal Mountaineering Association, Ang Tshering Sherpa, told the press that, “Mount Everest is regarded as a Goddess Mother of the Earth to the Nepali people” (qtd. in Shrestha A15). This has created a sense of hostility between the locals, who are constantly subjected to witnessing their holy mountain being abused, and the foreigners, who pay no attention to the sacredness of Everest. Especially since most crews have a mindset of getting to the summit at any cost, they have been the cause of further destruction to what was once a pristine and holy mountain.

This additional influx of travelers to Nepal has also had a significant impact on the surrounding area of Sagarmatha National Park. Many tourists are now coming to simply witness Everest’s sheer cliffs and utter enormousness. This has caused the locals to start selling firewood to travelers and build inns to profit from the additional tourists. This additional demand for wood from tourists and trekkers has put further strain on the environment in Sagarmatha. Stan Stevens, an associate professor for the Department of Geosciences at the University of Massachusetts, says, “The tourism-driven firewood crisis is illustrated by the fact that this demand [from tourists] for firewood is estimated to increase local demand by roughly 85%…Much of this [wood] was formerly obtained by felling trees, and in some places trees continue to be felled even though this has been banned
by park authorities” (Stevens 261). In other words, the tourists and even locals are illegally using the wood inside of Sagarmatha National Parks for fires and other building projects. The problems of deforestation are inflated even further by meager monitoring and second-rate supervision strategies enacted by the Nepal government. Realistically, the only way to stop the illegal felling of the trees in Sagarmatha is to remove the demand for them. In other words, by reducing the number of expeditions they allow up Everest, the Nepal government could greatly decrease the widespread deforestation that is currently devastating the forests surrounding Mount Everest.

Many people oppose this plan to reduce the number of expeditions because they see the creation of jobs for local villagers as Sherpas, who help coordinate and lead climbs, as a positive thing. But these jobs often turn out to be more destructive to their culture than constructive to their incomes (Reid). The job as a Sherpa takes male family members away from their homes for months at a time while they work with climbing crews on their ascent up the mountain. This partnered with the high death rate among Sherpas puts additional strain on the women of the families. Despite their expertise at living at high altitudes, Sherpas are just as likely to die on Everest as any other climber. Approximately one third of the 175 deaths on Everest have been Sherpas (Reid). This loss of patriarchal figures forces families to change from their traditional farming practices focused on self subsistence in favor of more surefire means of survival (Nepal 667-668). The Sherpas have lived in this rugged region of Sagarmatha for a long time and have survived without any aid from travelers, so clearly the elimination of the Sherpa job will not ruin their livelihoods.

Furthermore, the Sherpas jobs are incredibly risky, but due to the pay off, many people become blind to the danger in hopes of a big payday. The per capita income for the majority of Nepali citizens is about $1,400 a year, but Sherpas can easily make five times as much as that during a single climbing season (Reid). This draw to make quick money has even affected monasteries that call Mount Everest home. According to Sanjay Nepal, an Associate Professor in the Department of Recreation, Park, and Tourism Sciences at the University of Texas A & M, “As tourism has become a highly profitable enterprise, even Lamas (monks) are now attracted to tourism. For example, the Rinpoche in Thame Monastery had made arrangements for the monks to take leave during peak tourism seasons to seek
employment” (qtd. in Nepal 668). The increased usage of Mount Everest has disrupted the culture of inhabitants of the local region. Currently, reports indicate that the Sherpa culture has not been damaged by outside influences, but realistically there is no way to speak for the future. With monasteries changing their schedules to accompany hikers and Sherpas being constantly exposed to drugs and other aspects of Western culture by climbers, there is no way that the presence of climbers will not eventually have a negative effect on the locals (Nepal 668).

Furthermore, without all of these locals organizing and leading the treks, none of the summit bids would have been possible and Nepal would not be making the outrageous amount of money from climbing permits that it currently does. So, it seems only rational that Nepal should reinvest some of the tourism revenue back into the rehabilitation of the mountain, so that it may remain open forever. For, if the condition of Everest becomes inhospitable to climbers, then Nepal will lose all of their climbing tourism forever. Their current approach is foolhardy because they could very easily just close the summit for a couple of years to allow for the necessary environmental recovery and litter clean up that will allow it to remain open for years to come.

However, the climbing of Everest has become very profitable for the Nepal government so many officials refute the idea of closing the mountain solely due to financial reasons. A climbing permit for a team to summit the world’s tallest mountain costs approximately $70,000, not to mention the additional costs that most expeditions spend on hiring local Sherpas and porters who help organize the climb and haul gear up to the base camps (Keys A10). With a trip up Everest easily earning over $100,000, it is easy to see why the government has been slow to make any kind of changes that might harm this source of revenue. According to Sanjay Nepal, the tourism in Nepal alone earned the government $117 million in 1996 (Nepal 664). By no means is this a small amount of money, but after a closer inspection, only a fraction of this actually comes from the climbing of Mount Everest itself. In actuality, most of Nepal’s tourism is not related at all to expeditionary climbing, meaning that Nepal will only lose a small fraction of their income if they do close the summit trails. Tourism accounts for only roughly 3.8% of Nepal’s gross domestic product. But with over 350,000 tourists visiting Nepal in the year 2000 alone, and only 24
percent of them coming to trek or mountaineer, there is still a vast amount of interest in the other attractions Nepal has to offer (Bhattarai 63-65). So, if Nepal gets the courage to implement the closure of Everest’s summit trails, they will still profit handsomely from their other tourist destinations.

Closing all of the summit trails for a full four years will be a sufficient amount of time for Everest to get back what it loses during climbing seasons. This four year break will mimic a study that was done by Pieter Roovers, a doctoral researcher for the Department of Land Management at the Catholic University of Leuven, which showed that after a six year closure of trails similar to those at the base of Everest, they were completely recovered. Not only that, but also there were no significant differences between the recovered and the untouched vegetation that came from unscathed grass samples from the same location. Furthermore, in the study it also stated that an “acceptable recovery could already occur in a shorter period of 6 years or less” (Roovers 278). Even though the Nepal government will never consider a six year break, a four year break instead is a reasonable compromise that should allow the trails and forest to recover enough that they will be able to handle the next round of climbers that come once the closure is over. This solution will completely remove the high demand for wood that is at the heart of the deforestation problem in Sagarmatha while also allowing the locals to get back to their normal ways of life. Giving Everest time to recover from the overuse and overcrowding will allow nature to catch back up with the misuse it has been exposed to. And while the litter will not disappear during the closure, climbing crews whose mission is to clean up mountains like Everest will now be free to do so unobstructed by climbers gunning for the summit. Then with the majority of cleanup crews embracing a “leave no trace” policy, it is guaranteed that they will only have a positive effect on the mountain.

In addition, once the four years are up, I believe the only way to control the current situation is to only allow one team on each of the twelve summit routes, per year. This will solve the dangerous overcrowding problem as well as cut down on the amount of refuse left behind on the mountain. These solutions will cause the Nepalese to lose a small amount of their tourism revenue along with their seasonal jobs as Sherpas, but much more importantly, it will slow down the widespread deforestation while stopping the misuse of the resources that the locals depend on daily. In addition, it
will ensure that Mount Everest is as astonishing in a hundred years as it is today.

Mountain climbing once was a sport embraced by outdoor enthusiasts looking to explore the natural landscape and to enjoy it to the fullest. Recently however, it has been converted into an expeditionary task requiring tons of resources that is resulting in the exponential increase of the destruction of our national parks. Due to the negative effects of climbing, extended closures of Everest have become necessary in order to solve the many problems it is currently suffering from. But if we fail to act at this crucial crossroads for the future of Everest, it is likely that the next generation of climbers will have more trouble traversing the onslaught of garbage than actually climbing the icy slopes of Mount Everest. Without taking the proper steps towards the preservation of Sagarmatha National Park, we may very well destroy one of the most beautiful places on Earth.

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Convalescing in Colorado

It was 2:30 a.m. when my watch alarm tore through the silence of the early morning, waking me and my brother from our slumber. We awoke to the crisp cool Colorado air and the damp feeling of dew on our sleeping bags. I cast an unsure look at my brother, questioning whether or not our strategy to peak the mountain at sunrise was really worth the misery I was enduring at that moment. But, with the thought of sitting on top of Mt. Yale as the sun erupts over the eastern horizon and illuminates the Colorado backcountry I couldn’t hold back my excitement as a grin spread across my face. My brother saw my eagerness and matched it as his eyes lit up, proclaiming, “I can’t believe we’re about to climb Mt. Yale, I’ve been looking forward to this for months!” With our gogginess behind us and our adrenaline pumping, we got the courage to brave the cold and hopped out of our sleeping bags. But as we went to unzip the tent, neither of us could have guessed what we were about to face.

Ever since my brother Dave and I had gone on separate backpacking trips two summers ago, we had both eagerly discussed going on a similar trip, but just with the two of us. My first trip was with a Young Life camp while his was with the National Guard, so needless to say neither of us had much experience with the coordination of our trips. We were mainly just along for the ride. But this trip we were planning would be different. We were piecing together every single aspect of it and had worked hard all summer to buy every piece of gear we needed for the excursion to be a success. With everything in our hands, we weren’t going to let anything stop us from enjoying our adventure. As the summer of the trip approached, we agreed on the location for our voyage: the Colorado wilderness. More specifically, we had two fourteeners in mind. Both Mt. Yale and Mt. Elbert have elevations above 14,000 feet, earning them the “fourteener” title and a decent amount of respect from casual climbers. Our game plan was to start at Mt. Yale, a fairly easy class 3 climb, which normally equates to a pretty difficult hike. And after that, we would go to Mt. Elbert, and conquer our second fourteener of the week. This, at least, was our goal.
After the grueling 20 hour drive from Michigan to Colorado, my brother began to get on my nerves as we pulled up to the parking lot of Mount Yale’s summit trail. But with the arrival at our destination I easily shrugged off the tension as the excitement of beginning our hike took over. We then changed into our hiking garb, threw our gear into our packs and were off before we knew it. That night, we stopped about 4 miles into the trail and called it a day, estimating that there was about 4 hours of hiking until we’d reach the top, which we were hoping to get to just as the sun rose. Besides the added scenery of a sunrise summit, we also wanted to peak in the early morning to avoid Colorado’s notorious afternoon lightning storms. Neither of us were Boy Scouts, but we easily foresaw the danger of being on a mountaintop while lightning was present. So I set my watch alarm for extra early the next morning, as we cooked up some dinner before hitting the hay.

But as we rose before daybreak, we were met with our first surprise of the day: a solid two inches of snow had fallen over night. We hadn’t anticipated snow mainly because it was the summer and we figured this would be the one time of the year that there would not be snow in the northern hemisphere. But, seeing as we were left with no other choice, we simply shook off our tent along with the fear of more snow higher up as we packed up camp and got ready for the hike.

After a solid hour of hiking, we were quite a ways above the tree line when we saw the lingering clouds that engulfed the top of the mountain. With hopes that they would clear at dawn, we both trudged on, steadily gaining altitude. But inevitably we crossed into the clouds as we got higher. They started out being fairly thin and easy to see through, but quickly got thicker and harder to see through as we rose. Not only that, but what was supposed to be the trail was now covered in a solid four inches of snow, enough to make finding the trail mighty difficult. So we cast unsure glances to each other as we both searched fervently for the trail, while we kept on going the one direction we knew would get us to the summit: up.

The haze continued to thicken and became an all out blizzard as I thought we neared the top. Also, what was supposed to be a semi-difficult hike had turned into a climb as the steepness of the trail increased and the snow became a sheet of ice at least a foot and a half thick. With each step, we kicked foot holds into the ice and grasped at shards of rocks protruding
from the snow, just to try and keep our balance to avoid a deadly slip. Because, as we peered down from where we had came, it was easy to see that a single misplaced step would easily have sent either of us tumbling three hundred feet down a deadly gauntlet of ice and rocks.

With the stakes of the climb nearing life or death, we reached the crest of the ridge as wind continued to slash and claw at our numb faces. We stood atop the ridge, knowing the summit was close, but unable to see for more than four feet in front of us due to the thick clouds. Reluctantly, we came to the conclusion that not only would trying to summit in these kind of conditions be pointless, because the view would be the same, if not worse, but the winds would only become more severe, creating an even riskier situation. With the realization that we would not be summiting today, or possibly all week due to the nasty weather, we both swallowed our pride and began the steep descent from which we had came, frustrated and discouraged.

This was the frustrating moment that I flashed back to while I was on the phone with my brother last week. Dave had just proposed to his girlfriend and gotten engaged moments earlier, a mere nine months after our escapade up Mount Yale. While we gave up climbing Mt. Elbert after that ascent up Yale, due to exhaustion on both of our parts and the foul weather, the trip really just began after that failure. The rest of the week we slowly trekked around the Colorado wilderness, from trail to trail just to see where they went. Hanging out with my brother during this time was one of the most memorable weeks of my life. He is four years older than me, which meant we didn’t really hang out that much once he hit high school. He always seemed to be doing his own thing, and then once I entered high school, he had already left for college so I saw him even less. We went on this trip the summer before I headed off to college, and this was the first time I can remember spending quality time with my otherwise seemingly absent brother.

Everything about that trip I now look back on favorably. The failure of our summit attempt was now more of an extreme feat in which we conquered the elements rather than a disappointment. And all of the roaming and backpacking that we did no longer seems like a waste of time compared to climbing a fourteener, but now it was meaningful time spent getting to know Dave. Even the 20 hour drive that tested both of our
tempers seems now just to show how much my brother did want to spend time with me.

I think I flashed back to that moment of the trip when I thought we had failed and wasted a trip to Colorado when I got Dave’s call because everything was put into perspective at that moment. The trip was transformed from a sort of failure to a renewal of our friendship. But for some reason I still felt like what we had in our backpacking trip would soon be lost once he got married. I mean, if he hardly had time to come back and visit when he was in college, this will be just another reason to not travel to visit us. Even worse, we probably would not get to go on any more trips because he will want to bring his wife backpacking with him pretty soon.

But it was right as this cascade of disappointment swept over me that my brother asked me where I thought we should go for our next trip. Despite the closeness of his wedding date to the planned week of our next trip, Dave was still willing to go backpacking with just me. In the end, I think that in our relationships it is not really the amount of time you spend with the people you care about, but the quality of the time. While my time with my brother has been limited, thanks to his willingness to drive across the country and show how much he cares for me in big ways, our friendship has been richer than I could have imagined. So, while I would have loved to have spent more time with my brother while I was growing up, I would not trade our Colorado adventure for anything in the world.
After scrounging through my mother’s pantry, I surface empty-handed and frustrated at the lack of food. To me, one of the worst feelings in the world is the gnawing, aching, throbbing pain of being hungry. There is the constant rumbling of my stomach partnered by the lingering thoughts of how much I would like to eat. The very idea of going without food for a day is incredibly daunting to me, so I was extremely humbled, to say the least, as I read later that 975 million people are hungry in the world today. I have always known that there is a constant fight against starvation among every nation’s poorest inhabitants. But what really blew me away was learning that the cause of millions of people’s pain and misery could actually have been caused by the lifestyle I was living a thousand miles away. Many things, such as what I eat on a daily basis, are sending shockwaves halfway across the world. But how is this possible? How could my steak have harmed someone? Maybe not directly, but our everyday decisions have a much larger impact on the survival struggle of millions than many of us have ever fathomed.

We are in the midst of a global famine that has been defined by the sudden increases in the prices of agricultural goods across the worldwide markets (Schutter 38). It encompasses the entire world and affects every human who walks the Earth. Just in the last year alone it has pushed 100 million people below the poverty line worldwide, causing 975 million people to be hungry in the world today (Singh 23). These dramatic and horrific consequences in third world countries are present because food has become unaffordable for the 975 million people fighting starvation. Only those who can pay more for food will be the ones who get it, while those who do not have the extra money are forced to make cuts on expenses elsewhere in order to be able to survive. This is the grim truth, so any actions that could be taken to reduce the price of grain will provide a great amount of relief to those forced to face starvation as a result of the high prices.

These high prices of agriculture are the result of one main event: the decrease in grain yields, which is due to recent environmental changes, mainly seen in the increase in temperatures, and water shortages (Brown
19). These two causes result in the shortage of grain and thus cause the steep increase of the price, making it unaffordable in other countries. In order to alleviate this famine, we must strike at these two causes. If we can slow the environmental damage our society is causing as well as conserve the limited amount of water we have, then we very well could put an end to the food crisis that is currently devastating the impoverished everywhere.

To start, many things can and should be done by governmental authorities to alleviate this situation and empower the most vulnerable populations: the small scale farmers, the landless agricultural workers and the urban poor (Schutter 40). While the list of things the government should be doing to help these people runs on for miles, there is no way for any of us to directly pass any kind of legislation, however, this really should not discourage any of us from taking an active role. There are countless other things that we can do to help raise awareness and reduce our effect on the crisis just through our everyday actions.

One way in which we all have affected the food crisis is through our greenhouse gas emissions. Greenhouse gases are defined as any gases that once are released and trapped in the atmosphere, trap heat in the Earth, causing the phenomenon known as global warming: the gradual increasing of the Earth’s temperature (“Climate”). These gases are let off in the exhaust of the cars we drive, our biological waste, and anything else that uses a fossil fuel, like most electricity (“Climate”). The effects of the increased temperatures from greenhouse gases have direct negative effects on grain prices, and therefore the food crisis as well. A study conducted by crop ecologists from the International Rice Research Institute and the United States Department of Agriculture “…jointly concluded that each 1° Celsius rise in temperature during the growing season cuts 10% off the yields of wheat, rice, and corn” (Brown 21). And with a speculation of the Earth’s average temperature rising 1.4 – 5.8° Celsius during this century alone, we are going to see the consequences of our actions very soon (21). This drop in the yields of grain crops around the world will have a devastating effect on the struggling population. If a jump in grain prices in 2008 caused 100 million people to be pushed below the poverty line worldwide, just imagine the number of people who will be pushed into poverty if grain crops yield 10% less, causing grain prices to skyrocket (Singh 23). It is imperative that we all take an initiative to discover what practices we can take to cut
down on our greenhouse gas emissions in order to avoid these catastrophic consequences.

One way in which we have inadvertently released a large quantity of greenhouse gases is through our consumption of meat. Animal Feeding Operations, also known as factory farms, are huge complexes designed for the mass production of livestock, and they are one of the largest emitters of greenhouse gases on Earth. According to Anthony McMichael, the President of the International Society for Environmental Epidemiology, “Worldwide, agricultural activity, especially livestock production, accounts for about a fifth of total greenhouse-gas emissions, thus contributing to climate change and its adverse health consequences, including the threat to food yields in many regions” (McMichael 1253). Just by causing a demand for meat products, we have directly caused substantial damage to the environment and to food yields, directly increasing the price of grain and fueling the global food crisis. So as the greatest damagers of the environment, it will be up to us to change the status quo (McMichael 1258).

Currently, there is a large emerging middle class in developing regions of Asia and the Middle East where millions of people are finally able to buy things that they have been unable to afford for a long time (Brown 21). It is for this reason that Lester Brown, the Chairman and Founder of Worldwatch Institute, a research institute focused on 21st-century challenges including population growth, notes “Every society I’ve looked at, when incomes go up, one of the first things people do is add protein to their diets (qtd. in Motavalli 36-37). And because it is unjust and hypocritical to deprive the newly emerged middle classes around the world of the luxury of eating meat, it is upon the wealthier nations to set the example for eating environmentally consciously. This is why “…the prime objective must be to reduce consumption of animal products in high-income countries, and thus lower the ceiling consumption level to which low-income and middle-income countries would then converge” (McMichael 1253). Through a reduction of our consumption of meat products, we can vastly reduce the greenhouse-gas emissions resulting from the Animal Feeding Operations, which will in turn lessen the increase in temperature, slowing the threat to grain and other agricultural yields.

Furthermore, the adjustment of our diets to include less meat will also waste less grain to begin with. We, as Americans, primarily eat foods that
are known as resource intensive foods. They are known as this because they use masses of resources to produce a very small amount of final product. Meat fits into this category for it requires lots of grain for the feed necessary to raise the animals before they are actually turned into the final product. Not to mention all the water it requires to grow the grain and provide for the livestock. To put this into perspective, on average, growing 1 kilogram of potatoes takes 100 liters of water, while it takes 13,000 liters of water to produce 1 kilogram of beef (Home). The production of meat unreasonably uses up a lot of resources which could have been used more efficiently as food or towards the production of other foods. By maintaining a high demand for resource intensive foods, we are pulling those resources away from other places where they could be used more wisely, causing a higher price on all of the resources involved, from grain to meat. In essence, by consuming less resource intense foods, we will reduce the demand for them, reducing the amount produced, allowing less grain to be used, resulting in the price of grain to drop, and bringing much needed relief to the impoverished.

Similarly, the lack of water is also a hefty contributor to the food crisis. This lack of water, or water deficit, has come from us using water faster than the natural rainfall refills the aquifers, wells or springs, which we rely on for water (Brown 20). If there is not enough water because of this deficit, the price of grain will consequentially rise because less will be able to be produced. With water tables falling in the three countries that are also the three largest grain producers in the world, the U.S., China, and India, the water deficit is a very real threat that we need to take into account as we fight the food crisis (20). As stated earlier, meat is wasteful in its intensive use of water, so a reduction of meat consumption will help to conserve the water we do have. The strategy to cut back on grain intensive foods, also brought up earlier, will similarly have a positive impact on the water deficit. Then, we can help on the local level by simply conserving water as much as possible, which will help to save the water we currently do have.

Beyond just saving water and eating less meat, almost every decision we make has an effect on this conflict. Cutting meat out of our diets is probably the most effective way to help the crisis, but it is by no means the only way (Motavalli 37). Anything that is seen as environmentally conscious will positively affect the crisis, while anything that is wasteful of the Earth’s
limited resources, like water, grain, or fossil fuels, will have a negative effect on grain prices. Whether through carpooling or choosing a salad over a burger, hopefully it is now clear that every aspect of our lives affects others significantly.

However, we live in a society that is generally slow to make any kind of changes that will affect our own lives or comfort. We are taught that the ends justify the means and in order to succeed you will have to use others to push yourself to greatness. This idea is a fundamental flaw in the American mindset that has made us selfish and narrow minded. We are so consumed with our own affairs that it seems we often lose sight of any kind of bigger picture in the world. How did I not know that we were in the middle of the largest food shortage in the history of the world until just a month ago? Well, honestly, my typical thoughts do not go beyond my own immediate agenda very frequently, and I’m sure thousands of people will agree with me there. But, in order to halt this crisis we need to break this trend of unawareness and take an active role in the world to work towards something greater than ourselves. Only with cooperation and selflessness will we be able to conquer this crisis.

We have all damaged the future food production of the world. We have all contributed to the food crisis through many actions we never realized were harmful. But it is our responsibility to take ownership of our actions and work towards a solution for the problem we helped create. It will take great self-sacrifice in order to change the status quo, but it can and must be done before the food crisis pushes the world into global instability. With food riots already present in Latin America, Africa and Asia, the reality of a global food war is very much a threat if we do not get this problem under control (Singh 24). We must be aware of the consequences of our practices and get them in line with the environment before it is too late.

Works Cited


I grabbed my stopwatch, roster, and clipboard from the kitchen counter and tossed them into my duffle bag. I hurriedly pulled on my sweatshirt—the one my team had given me last year with the word “Coach” emblazoned in large, white letters across the back—while my son shuffled into the room looking groggy and disheveled having apparently fallen asleep after school while watching television. He opened the door to the refrigerator and leaned in looking for a snack. “Don’t forget that my team has a track meet tonight, so I may be late for your jazz concert,” I reminded him. He grunted in response, his head still in the fridge.

“Do you have everything you need for your concert tonight?”

“I guess so,” was my son’s reply, as he shrugged his shoulders and bit into a piece of leftover pizza.

“How about your cummerbund and extra reeds?” I asked as I quickly emptied the dishwasher and packed a snack for myself. “And have you done your homework yet?” I queried as he began eating a second piece of pizza.

“Mom, I’m not twelve. I have everything I need, and I’ll do my homework before I leave.” He sighed and went back to the fridge as I shot him a slightly reproachful glance and hurried out the door.

While I was driving to school, I contemplated the irony that although I’ve successfully coached and mentored hundreds of athletes—who actually seek out my guidance and counsel—the one child I love the most would rather open a vein in shark-infested waters than take advice from either of his parents. Perhaps some day he will understand that our rules, restrictions, and, yes, I admit it, occasional nagging, are done with love, because of our desire to protect, guide, and help him, not, as I’m sure he often assumes, because we want to annoy, upset, or irritate him. “Oh well,” I thought. “It’s time to take off my mom hat and get into coaching mode. We’ve got a meet to win.”

Deborah wrote her portfolio in the class of Sister Lucia Treanor, F.S.E.
By the time the meet was over, I had long forgotten my earlier exchange with my son. While parents began arriving to pick up the athletes, I made several trips to my car and loaded our track gear into my trunk. As I walked across the parking lot for the last time and headed back toward the school, I noticed that our new team manager was still waiting for her ride, and I observed her as I approached. Her skin was the color of Hershey kisses, and her clothing, including her backpack, were the same dark chocolaty brown. It was as though she wanted to be invisible, or perhaps, to blend into her belongings so that no one would notice she was there. She was short—five feet tall with shoes on—and she would later fit easily under my arm as I wrapped it around her. She stood by herself, away from the other track team managers, and her downcast eyes and hunched shoulders made her look like a shy and frightened fawn. Without saying a word to her, a group of light-haired, sun-cured athletes rushed by as they ran to catch their rides home. She heard me approaching, and she raised her eyes to look at me from under her long lashes. She smiled a sweet but shy smile, and her face had a gentle kindness that invited me in. If any of her teammates had been listening, they would have learned that her voice was soft, just above a whisper, but that it was friendly and warm.

I had been coaching at the high school for a few years, and since I was the head coach of two sports (cross-country and track-and-field), I already knew many of the students. Shawna’s was a face I had not seen until she joined our team, so I had made a mental note to seek her out after the meet and make her feel welcome. Her parents were late, which gave me a perfect opportunity to get to know her better. As I approached her, I said something funny and we—mostly me—began talking and laughing.

“I’m sorry my parents are so late,” she repeated as she again glanced at her watch. “I know you can’t go home until we’ve all been picked up,” she said apologetically.

“It’s no problem at all,” I assured her. “Since I don’t have any daughters, it’s actually a treat when I get to spend extra time with the girls on my team.” I continued to make small talk to put her at ease, and I thanked her for volunteering to be our manager. I shared stories with her about some of the funny things that had happened in seasons past, and was able to make her laugh, albeit softly. As we talked, I noticed a physical change in her. Like a wadded up piece of paper that gradually regains its form as it
relaxes, expanding from the tight ball originally tossed into the wastebasket, she loosened her shoulders and her voice grew a bit stronger. Some of the sadness slowly left her face.

Shawna began to share a bit of herself with me, at first slowly and quietly, and then with a bit more zeal. “I’m sixteen, and I’m a junior,” she informed me.

“How is it that I’ve only just met you?” I asked.

“My family just moved here, and that placed us in a new district, so I had to switch schools. I’ve only been here for a few weeks,” she responded.

“It must have been extremely difficult to begin at a new school as a junior. It’s unfortunate that your family had to move before you graduated from your previous school, but their loss is our gain! We’re really happy you’re here!”

Without warning, tears formed, her shoulders began to shake, and in a rush of words, she began to share her pain. Her voice trembling, she said, “Coach it is so difficult! Everyone has already made friends with people they’ve known since first grade. They have already formed groups. None of them have the need or the time for new friends.” She stopped to catch her breath and pulled a Kleenex out of her backpack. Without looking up, she continued, “I miss my old friends and my old school. I fit in there. They look like me. I’m so lonely, and almost no one seems to notice or care.” As her tears gave way to quiet weeping, I put my arm around her, and that show of affection allowed her soft crying to give way to real sobs. She began digging in her backpack for another tissue. That slight change in focus caused her crying to subside, and after she looked around to be certain no students were near, she began talking again.

“Every afternoon when I get home from school, I go to my room and cry. At night when I go to bed, I pray to God that the next day will be better, but every day remains almost the same. My grandma keeps telling me that things will improve, and I want to believe her, but…” Her voice trailed off, and she began to weep again. It broke my heart to see her in such distress. She continued softly, “During these past few weeks, there was one person who was nice to me. He’s a tall, freckle-faced, white guy. He invited me to join his table in the cafeteria, said ‘hi’ to me when we passed each other in the halls, and always said things that make me laugh. He’s a senior, and he’s really popular, so I’m surprised that he even noticed
me.” She paused and softly added, “He’s the reason I haven’t given up. I’m hoping that since he was nice to me, someone else will be, too.” As she talked about this boy, I noticed that it seemed to calm her, and her crying subsided a bit.

I tightened my grip on her shoulders, and said, “Now that you’re a member of our team, I promise that things are going to change for you. I will see to it that you make new friends, and you’ve already made one in me. I’m very happy that you’re one of our managers. I’m also extremely grateful that someone reached out to you and made you feel welcome before we were lucky enough to adopt you into our team. Tell me more about this ‘great guy.’ Perhaps I’ve coached him. What’s his name?”

“I don’t even know his last name, because everyone just calls him by his nickname.”

“What is that?” I asked.

She responded, “His nickname is Stevo.”

My eyes opened wide and a feeling of shocked surprise surged through my body. I paused, and as I tried to maintain my composure, I asked her, “Do you know who that is?”

She looked confused and repeated, “I don’t know his full name. Everyone just calls him Stevo.”

It was now my turn to hold back tears as I slowly and softly said, “His name is Steve. He is my son.”

When I finally got home that evening, I knocked on my son’s bedroom door.

“Come in!” He yelled over the sound of the music blaring from his headphones.

As I entered, I saw him lying on his bed with homework spread all around him. He had a book in one hand, and he ran the other hand through his hair after having removed his headphones.

“I just heard a very moving story that I want to share with you,” I told him. He looked nonchalantly intrigued. As I began telling the story, a feeling of tightness took hold in my throat, and I paused twice to swallow in an attempt to avoid crying. When I was done, Steve unexpectedly asked, “What’s the girl’s name, and what does she look like?”
I was astonished to discover that he seemed to know Shawna only vaguely. (How could he have made such an impact on someone he barely knew?) “Her name is Shawna,” I said as I then described her.

After some thought, he responded, “Oh, yeah. I think I know who you’re talking about. She’s really nice.”

“Based on the impact you’ve had on Shawna, I’m so surprised that you don’t know her better,” I said.

Steve simply responded, “I assumed she was new at school, but I try to be nice to everyone.”

I was still so filled with emotion as a result of Shawna’s story that I had to continue fighting back tears of pride as I looked my son in the eyes and said, “Steve, I am so proud of you! You were the only person who reached out to Shawna, and you made a real difference.” I paused to get my emotions in check, but as tears filled my eyes, I said, “There have been many moments when I have felt pleased to be your mom, but this outshines them all.”

When Shawna was sharing her pain with me, and I ultimately discovered that the kindness directed toward her had come from my son, I realized that he was no longer a child. He was a young man—a good man—and I realized that I could begin to back off as his parent, because he clearly had been listening to me, and he obviously had learned the life lessons I had tried to impart. I had always done my best to raise a son who is, among other things, inclusive, empathetic, and kind, but as parents, we don’t always know whether our kids are listening or our lessons have sunk in. Sometimes, in an effort to teach and train our children, we are too hard on them. We want to be certain that they get the message, so we drill it into them until the mere sound of our voice causes their eyes to roll back in their heads like spinning lemons in a slot machine. In the moment I heard that “Stevo” was the hero who had provided kindness and hope in this young girl’s story, I knew that my son had earned the right to have me back off as a parent and trust that he not only knew what the right thing to do was, but that he would actually do it.

When I was talking with Steve later that evening, I discovered that, although he barely knew Shawna, he had still gone out of his way to be nice to her, and his kindness had made a difference. I realized that we often take for granted what a profound difference we make in the lives
of the people around us, despite the fact that our contact with them may appear to be brief and insignificant. Leo Buscaglia said it beautifully, “Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have the potential to turn a life around.” Until hearing it from me, Steve did not know that Shawna was hurting, or sad, or even that he had made a difference. He was simply being nice, and in doing so, gave a distressed, young girl a reason to believe that tomorrow might be better.

As that day unfolded, I began to comprehend fully what a difference kindness makes, even when it’s given to a stranger. I also recognized that I could learn life lessons from people half my age. But most importantly, I finally realized that the way I parented my son could irrevocably change from that day forward. I now saw Steve as the young man he had grown into, rather than the child at whom I needed to hurl commands like artillery fire.

At the end of our conversation that evening, Steve glanced at his clock, jumped up from his bed, and quickly gathered his concert gear. As he picked up his saxophone case he said, “I have to go now, or I’ll be late for my concert. I think I have everything packed, but go ahead mom,” He said with a smile, “Do you have any last minute reminders?”

“No,” I replied, “Go, and have a good time. I know that you have everything you need.”
In the early 1950’s, there were many educators (and parents) who were concerned that the leisure reading of comic books would signal the end of “real reading.” Now, decades later, e-books have been introduced, and bibliophiles around the world are expressing concern over their impact, not just on reading, but also on the actual demise of printed books. Based on its portability, distinctive attributes and potential for textbooks and handouts, the e-book is here to stay, and it may actually increase the amount of casual and educational reading.

The current darlings in the e-book world are Amazon’s Kindle and Barnes and Noble’s Nook, but waiting in the wings is Apple’s iPad. John Makinson, Chairman and CEO of the Penguin Group, contends that “Amazon has already shown the way. The success of its Kindle e-book reader, now available around the world, has demonstrated the size of the public appetite for books on screens” (A21). Despite concerns on behalf of many authors and publishers, best-selling novelist, James Patterson, agrees that the Kindle will succeed. Patterson reasons that “The baby boomers have a love affair with paper…but the next-gen people, in their 20s and below, do everything on a screen” (qtd. in Levy). Some middle-aged reading purists (myself included) have been clutching tightly to their printed books, turning their noses up at technology, and commenting on how ludicrous it is that reading a book now requires a battery. Meanwhile, readers who grew up reading on screens understand that the move from the printed page to print media does not signal the end of reading; instead it offers them new ways to read.

A favorite feature of the e-book for travelers is its portability. Like many readers who travel, I puzzle over which books to bring on a trip. It’s difficult to determine, in advance, what I’ll be in the mood for while I’m gone. I typically avoid bringing hardcover books, because they are too bulky and heavy for traveling. I don’t want to bring too many books, because that would result in extra fees for my heavy luggage, as well as a sore back from lugging a heavy suitcase. On the other hand, I’m also concerned that I won’t pack enough books, and that by the time I’ve finished reading at the
airport and on the long flight, I’ll have nothing left to read when I’m finally lounging by the pool. These issues are resolved by e-books. Steven Levy, former chief technology writer and senior editor for *Newsweek* and current senior writer for *Wired*, states that the Kindle, for example, can house 200 books, and hundreds more with the purchase of a memory card. An employee at Barnes and Noble informed me that the Nook holds 1,500 books. This is, of course, in addition to the endless supply of books available to readers from the virtual bookshelves at Amazon and Barnes and Noble. If I had finished reading all of the stored books on my e-book, or I wasn’t in the mood for those that I previously downloaded, no errand to the bookstore would be necessary; I could simply peruse the selections in my virtual library, select a title, place an order, and a new book would be in my hand in seconds. Tom Peters, the founder of Tap Information Service, sums it up when he writes:

> [P]ortable electronic reading appliances…may result in an innovative, long-term growth in reading. Never before has so much reading material been so easily and quickly available to so many people. If reading founders, it will not be because of a dearth of things to read.

Packing for my next trip may be quite a bit easier in the future. And since e-books automatically mark the last page read, I don’t even have to worry about losing my place when I nod off during the plane ride or while relaxing by the pool. E-books are the ideal solution for busy travelers, like myself, who find it difficult to keep pace with their backlog of reading and want to catch up while they are on the road.

E-books also provide traveling readers with the option of subscribing to newspapers and magazines, allowing them to take along those subscriptions wherever they go. When the issues of those publications go to press, they are automatically sent to the subscriber’s e-book. This means that readers can stay on top of local or world news while they are traveling, and in doing so, they will also be making a positive environmental choice, as well as avoiding the ink-stained hands and fluttering pages that result when reading newspapers pool side. Another travel advantage of the e-book is that it allows people to read privately in public (in the airport, on the beach, or at an outdoor café) without the cover of their book announcing to passersby what they’re reading. E-books give readers the option of downloading and
reading books that they might be too embarrassed to purchase at Barnes and Noble or read in public (self-help books, romance novels, or books beneath their reading level). When people are more comfortable reading in open view, they are going to read more often.

In addition to the convenience offered by e-books to casual readers, the portability features would also positively affect the academic lives of students. My backpack would certainly be much lighter if all of my textbooks were available on e-book. I would also find relief from the dilemma of having to decide which books I could carry to school on a given day. This would allow me to read the text for one class while I was waiting for another to begin. I could also download PDF’s, which would allow me to keep my research handy. Rebecca S. Anderson and Ernest Balajthy, professors at the University of Memphis and State University of New York at Geneseo, respectively, confirm the observation that “this generation of students is more inclined to read online” (540). They also referred to an online journal article, which “showed that even professional reading teachers tended to treat technology as having almost magical effects on children” (541). Because e-books are portable and are also fun to use, it is likely that they will positively influence the amount of reading done by students.

Michael A. Looney, Senior Director of Adobe Network Marketing, and Mark Sheehan, Chief Information Officer of Montana State University-Bozeman, affirm that another portability benefit of e-books is that they allow students studying abroad to have access to the same content as students on campus. Thus, students can keep current on their studies without missing out on relevant text that is being read by their classmates thousands of miles away. Levy adds that some e-books also provide wireless connectivity that allows them to work anywhere, not just in certain Wi-Fi hotspots around campus. Therefore, students are less limited in terms of where they can actually do their assigned reading. This would certainly lower my frustration and save me time, because I wouldn’t have to repeatedly pack up my work and move to different locations on campus in search of a wireless signal.

In addition to the portability pluses, e-books have many distinctive attributes that make them a great choice for most readers. Looney and Sheehan point out that some e-book devices include “dictionaries, backlit screens, and friendly user interfaces that make for a near-paper reading experience.”
They add that the “text-to-speech and other audio options can be highly valuable for vision-impaired students or for international students with difficulties reading English.” A feature that middle-aged readers will enjoy is the ability to adjust the font size and type. Another advantage of the e-book is the amount of shelf space it will save readers in their dorm rooms, offices, and homes.

A Kindle attribute that readers might also appreciate is the feature that allows them to search within a book for a phrase or name. According to Levy:

In addition, the Kindle can venture out on the Web itself—to look up things in Wikipedia, search via Google or follow links from blogs and other Web pages. You can jot down a gloss on the page of a book you’re reading, or capture passages with an electronic version of a highlight pen. And if you or a friend sends a word document or PDF file to your private Kindle email address, it appears in your Kindle library, just as a book does.

While I’m excited about the possibility of reading one thing while instantly searching another, I’m even more eager to use the feature that allows readers to look up words while reading complicated text. Professors, writers, journalists, and my fellow students may be the readers who will most appreciate these useful features.

Enjoying a good book has always been a multi-sensory pleasure, and that experience does not have to end, thanks to the attributes of e-books. Reading purists would agree with Peters that the attributes of a “real” book, “the look, feel, smell, and heft of a printed book all contribute to the overall experience of reading.” Printz Award winner, John Green, asks, “Will the fabled smell of books become as antiquated as the taste of a postage stamp?” (26). The sensory experience for readers may change, but it will not disappear altogether. Braille books already provide tactile experiences for some readers, and auditory reading is currently available via audio books. Current attributes of e-books include their sleek high-tech appearance, smooth surface, and nominal weight that make them nice looking, silky to the touch, and easy to hold. Future e-books may also include features such as scent and sound to accompany the text that the reader has downloaded. Looney and Sheehan admit, “We’re a long way from replacing
the aesthetic feel of a printed book. However, for readers who read for information and who are mobile, the benefits so outweigh the disadvantages as to ensure that the era of the eBook has begun.” E-books are not what bibliophiles are used to, but as music lovers survived the “upgrade” from vinyl to digital, so too book lovers will survive the evolution from print to digital media.

Future e-books may also include attributes that allow the reader to connect with writing groups, “speak” to authors, and generate sounds and three-dimensional images in ways that books in print cannot. According to Peters, “The future of reading may involve empowering readers to add characters and story lines to evolving communal works.” This would give students and future writers another way in which to hone their writing skills. This would also provide book club members with the ability to “discuss” featured books on “non-book club nights” without ever leaving their homes.

Although e-books are fairly new additions to the world of technology, research has already been done regarding the effect of e-book’s attributes on the act of reading. Ziming Liu’s research, supported by a 2003 Summer Research Grant from the School of Library and Information Science at San Jose State University, asserts that:

Digital media contribute to a transformative shift in reading. They also introduce a number of powerful advantages that are traditionally absent in the printed environment, such as interactivity, non-linearity, immediacy of accessing information, and the convergence of text and images, audio and video (Landow, 1992; Lanham, 1993; Murray, 1997; Ross, 2003). (701)

Clearly e-book’s distinctive attributes provide many advantages that print media cannot, and these advantages may actually reinvigorate an interest in reading for those who never take the time to curl up with a good book.

Serving as a replacement for textbooks and class handouts, e-books can add tremendous value to educational reading. Looney and Sheehan suggest that the three-dimensional capabilities available in e-books are:

[I]nvaluable tools for conveying dynamic, abstract concepts such as molecular bonding or the subtleties of tone and shading in a work
of art. This is particularly appealing for upper-division courses, in which textbooks are used less frequently... In addition, textbooks in eBook format can be made modular, [sic] This will allow the faculty member to review a 15-chapter textbook and simply select the three or four chapters that are relevant to a course. This modular selection can be offered electronically and as a POD book in the bookstore, with either option costing considerably less than the price of the complete printed textbook.

Clearly, the academic lives of students would be improved through the massive amounts of information available to them on e-books. In addition, via e-books, text can be added to non-textbook classes including text written by the professor. Students can also easily review downloaded homework and practice quizzes, as well as access key terms, because these useful study aids will be just a simple click away.

Some textbooks become obsolete before they even reach the consumer. With the use of e-books, texts could be updated on a regular basis and outdated textbooks would then be eliminated. This would mean that the materials the students are reading would be the most up-to-date possible. This would also benefit the professors because they would no longer have to add supplemental updates to the coursework themselves. An example of this presented itself in my World Regional Geography class last week. The students were tasked with memorizing, among other things, all of the capitals in several countries around the world. I noticed that one of the capitals shown in the book had changed since the text’s publication. If I had not mentioned that in class, all of the students would have memorized the outdated information. If instead, that textbook had been available via e-book, the publisher could have downloaded the correct information before my class even read that chapter.

Traditional printed textbooks often become filled with handwritten notes, yellow highlights, and multiple Post-it notes. Therefore, when students buy these used books, they are inheriting the previous owner’s note-taking ability, or lack thereof, which can be very distracting. One of the reasons I spend extra money on new textbooks is that I want to steer clear of that distraction. E-books would allow me to sidestep the extra expense, as well as avoid stressing over whether the highlighted section in
a textbook is my reminder that the information will be on an upcoming test, or simply the bored doodle of the textbook’s previous owner. E-books would also permit me to underline, take notes, and annotate while I read without defacing any pages, and since the notes written alongside text in an e-book would be my notes, they would be written in my style and would, therefore, be less distracting. All students would benefit if they were reading and studying from pristine textbooks, rather than from the confusing and messy pages found in used books.

Although used textbooks are less expensive than new, e-books are the most economical choice. Looney and Sheehan’s research indicates that the average price of textbooks increased nearly 500 percent from 1965 to 1998, and it is expected that the cost will continue to rise. Downloading textbooks to a student’s e-book would be considerably less expensive. An analysis of the statistics provided by authors, Thorin McGee and Brian Oleyn, reveal that e-textbooks could save students approximately 40 percent off the cost of a printed version (15). Giving students the potential to download textbooks is an e-book benefit that will save students time and money as well as help them avoid sore back muscles (from carrying overflowing backpacks).

Despite the fact that some reading purists believe that e-books will mean the end of “real” reading, I disagree. The portability that e-books offer will mean that more travelers, students, business people, and moms-on-the-go will turn to e-books as their reading “device” of choice, and they will also read more often, because the portability of e-books will provide them with more opportunities to read. The distinctive attributes of current e-books will continue to improve and expand making them a “must-have gadget” for students, businessmen and women, bibliophiles, and technophiles. If textbooks and class handouts are also added to e-books, students and professors could be the biggest winners in e-book’s evolution, and the amount of educational reading that students do will increase. As for me, I’ve finally unpacked my Christmas gift, and I am currently charging the battery in my new e-book. I admit that I’m not used to waiting for a book to “warm up” before I read it, but I’m really looking forward to playing with my new “toy” and reading the Pulitzer Prize winning book that’s been on my list for months.
Works Cited


Should We Erase Cursive Writing From Our Future?

Like many students, I learned cursive writing in the third grade. Each day after recess, the other students and I would reach into our desks, remove our blue-lined paper and eraser-less pencils, and begin laboriously to practice the swirls, curlicues, and dips that made us feel like the big shot fourth graders who had already cracked the code of this secret communication used by our parents and other adults. Sister Mary Catherine would walk up and down the rows of desks carefully monitoring our progress. She would remind us to sit erect and hold our pencils correctly while we regularly glanced at the banner of perfectly formed letters that ran the length of the blackboard just beyond her tidy desk. Sister’s goal, of course, was to have each of us produce precisely spaced, perfectly formed, and pleasingly legible letters. Our goal was to earn the gold star that she would put on the top of our paper if we somehow got it all right.

Various forms of cursive writing—the style of writing in which all of the letters in a word are connected through one stroke—have been around for centuries. However, due to technological advancements in the last few decades (specifically the introduction of computers and cell phones), students today would rather e-mail, text, and instant message than handwrite personal notes, school papers, or to-do lists. Consequently, cursive writing, as well as penmanship in general, appears to be on the decline, and there is great debate as to whether or not cursive writing is a skill that is still worth teaching. Despite my emotional attachment to, and reverence for, cursive writing, I see an end to this type of script. Printing already exists, and it is an effective form of written communication. In addition, technological changes, and a dearth of training and time in a teacher’s busy day, have prompted the elimination of cursive writing.

The Value of Cursive Writing

Samuel L. Blumenfeld, author of *Homeschooling: A Parents [sic] Guide to Teaching Children*, attempts to give a compelling argument in favor of cursive writing. Blumenfeld points out that “educators now tell us that children no longer need to be taught handwriting because they now have typewriters, computers, word processors, and laptops to do the
writing for them” (25). He points out, however, that handwriting is a skill that is needed throughout life, and that “you can’t carry a laptop or a word processor everywhere you go” (25). Blumenfeld is adamant that children should be taught “standard cursive writing from the very beginning” (25). He adds that many of the letters printed in the “ball and stick” (manuscript/block/printed) method look alike and because children learning to write are confused by those similarities, they make mistakes. With cursive writing, he argues:

…children do not confuse b’s and d’s because the movements of the hand—the muscular reflexes—make it impossible to confuse the two letters. And this knowledge is transferred to the reading process. Thus, by teaching children the distinctive differences between letters, learning to write cursive helps learning to read print. (28)

Blumenfeld contends that another advantage of cursive writing is that the repetitive motion helps students spell better because the hand movements compliment the spelling patterns and work together much like the muscle memory enjoyed by pianists and typists (28). Blumenfeld further maintains that good handwriting will enhance a student’s academic self-esteem. He claims that “it helps reading, it helps spelling, and because writing is made easy, accurate, and esthetically pleasant, it helps thinking” (30). Blumenfeld encourages parents who homeschool, as well as teachers in school systems, to continue the instruction of cursive writing.

We Still Know How to Print

Contrary to Blumenfeld’s arguments, there are many reasons why cursive is no longer essential today, and printed script can instead meet all business, social and academic needs. It is my contention that if students are taught to print, expected to practice routinely, and allowed to avoid the interruption of cursive training, they will improve their printing skills and ultimately avoid “letter confusion” that results in difficulties with reading. They will also benefit from the repetitive hand movements that will help their spelling, and they will learn to print more legibly, which will increase their academic self-esteem. Students (and adults) must obviously possess the ability to communicate in writing, and their penmanship needs to be legible, but this social intercourse can satisfactorily be accomplished
through printing rather than by means of cursive writing. The choice to remove cursive from academic curricula is also supported by many experts who agree that it is a mistake to introduce cursive once students have already begun to master printing. When elementary students are taught cursive, Dr. Vi Supon, Professor at Bloomburg University, explains:

Letter configurations change dramatically. For example, the letter “S” in (manuscript) block print is one style; in cursive it is another style. Students have to learn a new set of alphabet letters (both upper and lower case), connect those letters to make words, write sentences, develop paragraphs and execute essays. (357)

With the elimination of cursive, confusion and frustration are avoided, and more time can be spent on perfecting printing and incorporating technology into the classrooms. As Blumenfeld himself admits, “Children will only make the effort to learn one primary way of writing which they will use for the rest of their lives. They don’t need to be taught three ways, two of which will be discarded” (30). Caitlin Carpenter’s Saturday Evening Post article echoes this sentiment:

Kate Gladstone is a “handwriting repair expert” in New York. She is not surprised to see cursive going the way of the dinosaur, with only 15 percent of adults using cursive after high school. She’s not disappointed. She disagrees with the idea that students should first learn to print and then to write in cursive. “You don’t teach some English by first teaching Chinese,” Ms. Gladstone says, “We need to decide what the best way to handwrite is and just teach that.” (35)

Educators need to make a choice, and manuscript writing is the method they should choose.

Despite the advent of laptops, iPhones, and other technological means of communication, the need to write by hand will always be a part of our lives. People will continue to write messages in birthday cards, scribble grocery lists, and jot down impromptu notes during unscheduled meetings. The ability to write will continue to be imperative, but the method we use will be printing rather than cursive, and it seems this has already come to pass. Most students, and many adults, choose to print rather than use cursive for the bulk of their writing. Jessica Bennett, senior writer for
Newsweek, reports that “just 15 percent of SAT takers used cursive on the written test.” That information precipitated a study of my own. I asked 60 Grand Valley State University students whether they used printing or cursive writing to take notes in their classes. Every student said they print their notes. (A few of the students answered that they use technology—laptops, recorders, electronic tablets—to take their notes, but when pressed, they agreed that when they do not have their computers, they print their notes.) The most common reason given for printing notes rather than writing them in cursive was that their cursive is “sloppy,” but their printing is “neater and easier to read.” My assumption was that I, on the other hand, wrote my notes in cursive or used a hybrid of cursive and printing. However, when I reviewed all of my class notes, I discovered that they were printed rather than written in cursive. This was surprising to me. Unlike many of my fellow students, I actually like cursive writing, and I would have guessed that when the need to take notes quickly was required, I would have responded in cursive. Clearly, current students of all ages view printing as the efficient and legible script of choice—even those who spent years perfecting the art of cursive.

In a more scientific study, Harry Houston, author of multiple books and articles regarding writing, shares an experiment conducted in two first-grade classes at a Connecticut elementary school. For this trial, one school used manuscript writing and the other used cursive. The outcome indicates that manuscript writing provides an advantage when it comes to initiating writing. Houston further reveals, “The results show distinctly that during the first three months pupils can master manuscript more readily than they can learn cursive writing” (117). At odds with Blumenfeld’s statement above, Houston adds, “The reading-test results show that there is some advantage in exposing beginners to print exclusively as against using both cursive and print writing” (118). Houston also notes that the teachers involved in this experiment were enthusiastic about continuing to use manuscript writing, and in the five other schools where manuscript writing had been used, the teachers reported that it aided “reading, spelling, and the expression of ideas,” and that no “teacher has asked to return to cursive writing” (118). It’s obvious that many educators are in agreement with today’s students that print is the script of choice.
Many adults admit that they rarely have the opportunity to use cursive. They use computers all day at work, they email co-workers who are sitting in the next cubicle, and they text, rather than call, to keep tabs on their children. As Bennett puts it, “The only time I pen a handwritten letter is when I write to my grandmother. So when I hear people say that penmanship is dead, my response: it’s about time.” Tom Breen, author and Associated Press reporter, quotes Steve Graham, professor at Vanderbilt University, who quips, “It isn’t as if all those adults who learned cursive years ago are doing their writing with the fluent grace of John Hancock.” According to Kathleen Wright, the national product manager for handwriting at Zaner-Bloser, “It’s common for adults to write in a cursive-print hybrid” (qtd. in Breen). Apparently, the surveyed students at GVSU are not the only ones who have discarded cursive. Even adults who did not grow up using computers, but instead were taught the importance of cursive writing, are no longer using that style of script when they communicate. Therefore, although I agree with Kitty Burns Florey, author of *Script and Scribble: The Rise and Fall of Handwriting*, that “there’s simply too much to be lost by allowing the written word to fade into irrelevance” (qtd. in Bennett), the written word can, and should be, legibly printed rather than carefully rendered in cursive.

### Keyboards versus Cursive

For several years, educators have been involved in passionate discourse about introducing students directly to keyboarding once they have learned how to print, completely bypassing time-consuming and tedious cursive drills. Many curricula have already been adjusted to include an emphasis on keyboarding instruction rather than cursive writing. Breen opines, “Students accustomed to using computers to write at home have a hard time seeing the relevance of hours of practicing cursive handwriting.” Katie Van Sluys, professor at DePaul University and president of the Whole Language Umbrella, a conference of the National Council of Teachers of English, adds, “They’re writing, they’re composing with these tools at home, and to have school look so different from that set of experiences is not the best idea” (qtd. in Breen). As long as students can print and use a keyboard they will have the skills they need to communicate effectively through written words despite the absence of cursive.
Although not everyone has fully embraced the computer age, computers are the tools of choice for most students and professionals when writing for school or for work. And while we have not yet reached the point where there is a computer in every household, they are easily accessible at work, in school, and at the public library. As Dennis Baron, author of *A Better Pencil: Readers, Writers, and the Digital Revolution*, points out, “Children are taking control of the design of their school writing even as they learn to write, and handwriting, which often posed an insurmountable aesthetic stumbling block for some young writers, has been replaced in many curricula by keyboarding” (229). Cheryl Jeffers, a professor at Marshall University’s College of Education and Human Services, agrees, adding, “I am not sure students have a sense of any reason why they should vest their time and effort in writing a message out manually when it can be sent electronically in seconds” (qtd. in Breen). Writing on a computer is faster and neater than cursive writing, and it’s also easier to locate and correct mistakes. Therefore, students, as well as other writers, can focus on the content of their writing rather than the curve or slant of their script.

Jack McGarvey, a middle school teacher in Connecticut, quoted by Tamara Plakins Thornton in *Handwriting in America: A Cultural History*, recommends, “the booting out of cursive and the booting up of computers” (177). It’s time to retire the Palmer Method cursive workbooks and instead plug in the laptops.

**Lack of Time and Training**

Keyboarding instruction has now taken the place of lessons in cursive because overstressed teachers say they no longer have the time or the training to effectively teach these protracted and tedious loops and swirls. Rosemary Sassoon, author of *Handwriting of the Twentieth Century*, empathizes, “Teachers themselves cannot and should not be blamed for what happened” (141). She goes on to quote Wallis Myers who explains, “With so many language needs to be met, there was little time to correct letter formation or spacing” (141). The increased amount of time spent preparing for standardized testing, the need to incorporate technology, and the additional demands placed on teachers today simply do not allow enough time in the school day to continue teaching the antiquated art of cursive. A 2007 study confirms that although penmanship used to be taught for
an hour each day, students now receive less than 15 minutes of instruction only a few times per week (Bennett). Carpenter adds:

The Palmer and Zaner-Bloser penmanship methods ruled the day for decades. Students spent 45 minutes every day on handwriting. Penmanship was a separate grade on report cards. Today, handwriting instruction might get 10 or 15 minutes a few times a week. (81)

Many educators and administrators agree that cursive is not given the emphasis it was years ago, primarily because of the technological skills that now need to be taught. The decline of cursive is occurring as students are doing most of their work on computers, including writing. In fact, the 2011 National Assessment of Educational Progress writing test will require 8th and 11th graders to compose on computers, with 4th graders following in 2019 (Breen). Van Sluys reasons, “We need to make sure they’ll be ready for what’s going to happen in 2020 or 2030” (qtd. in Breen). Since technology has continued to infiltrate our lives, I suspect that cursive is receiving even less classroom attention than recorded in the 2007 study. Even Blumenfeld admits that third grade teachers:

Do not have the time to supervise the development of good cursive penmanship and the students, already doing a lot of writing in class, are often unwilling to take the time and do the practice required to develop a good cursive script. (26)

Therefore, since teachers cannot give cursive its due, and students have something else that can fill the void (printing), we should allow teachers to remove cursive from their already burdened curricula.

In addition to diminished class time, educators are also challenged by the lack of training they receive in the fading art of cursive writing. Thorn- ton indicates that even as far back as the Great Depression:

…teachers’ colleges ceased training future teachers in the techniques of penmanship. When the novice teachers did enter the classroom, they taught their students how to print, and the transition to cursive was never accomplished satisfactorily. (185)

Likewise, Carpenter reveals that a “recent study Graham conducted on handwriting instruction found that only 12 percent of teachers had taken a
course in how to teach handwriting” (81). Even more alarming is the fact that Gladstone asserts that fewer teachers today even know how to write cursive, let alone teach it. She divulges that she has seen teachers simply give students a workbook and tell them to follow what’s inside. When students then ask for help, the teachers respond that they will attempt to help, but they may not be of much assistance, because they are not very good at cursive (qtd. in Carpenter). Gladstone incredulously adds, “If people who can’t count were found to be teaching math, there’d be a report on 60 Minutes, it would be on the cover of Time, and there would be several congressional investigations” (qtd. in Florey 173). While it is essential that the ball and stick method be taught effectively and practiced diligently, there is no longer any direction or standardization when it comes to cursive, so educators should finally be allowed to erase cursive from their curricula.

Even Blumenfeld agrees that “it takes time and supervision to help a child develop a good cursive script…That’s why it seems like such a waste of time to have the child develop competency in ball-and-stick when all of that is going to be replaced by cursive” (29). Gladstone expounds, “We’d call it ridiculous to try to teach math entirely in Roman numerals up to second or third grade, then suddenly drop it all and start over again with modern Arabic numerals” (qtd. in Florey 173). Many teachers agree. There are too many pressing tasks that educators need to spend time on in the classroom, and when the insufficient amount of class time is coupled with teachers’ minimal training in cursive, it makes sense finally to remove this type of script from the curriculum and instead place an emphasis on practical, legible, and useful penmanship that is printed in manuscript form.

Conclusion

The importance of cursive has greatly diminished in recent years, and it is finally time to say goodbye to this outdated form of written communication. Technological advances have caused students and others to use computers instead of cursive because keyboarding is quicker, neater, and now more universally accepted. (Students wouldn’t dream of turning in a term paper that wasn’t typed, nor would an employee submit a handwritten proposal to his or her boss.) In addition, cursive instruction for teachers is minimal, or nonexistent, leaving educators ill equipped to teach this dying
art. Cursive instruction is also quite time-consuming, and often impractical, especially when dealing with students who can already print but still need to be taught how to type. Core classes, preparation for state assessments tests, keyboarding instruction, and other variables dominate class time leaving teachers with no time left for the instruction of a skill that is obsolete. Since teachers have neither the time nor the training to teach both cursive and printing, cursive should be dropped, and an emphasis should be placed instead on legibility with regard to the manuscript style of writing.

Two forms of script are not needed. Young students are already being taught how to print, and those lessons should not be interrupted with cursive. Manuscript writing is easier for beginners to learn, typically more legible, and it looks like the print students see on computers and in textbooks. In addition, printed script is what is requested of adults when filling out tax forms, job applications, medical forms, etc. Even the post office is requesting that envelope labels be typed or printed rather than written in cursive. It should also be noted that communication is more important than form. Students who have trouble with cursive might also shy away from actual writing (transferring ideas onto paper), and cursive lessons, therefore, should be eliminated so as not to impede that process, especially since students already have the written communication skills they need through the use of print.

It’s time to discard cursive, continue teaching manuscript, focus on legibility, and look forward to the days when the physician of the future will write his or her “script” in a print that can actually be read!

Works Cited


The main purpose of the first-year writing requirement is to prepare students for the academic and professional writing they will do after their freshman year. In this section, we highlight some quality writing completed in classes beyond WRT 150. By examining some of the other pieces that were written outside of WRT 150, you will observe a wider variety of topics, styles, and forms.

The following section contains pieces written by students in GVSU courses, some of which required WRT 150 as a prerequisite. Lauren Janicki wrote “Linguistics and the Aryan Supremacy” in Professor Dan Balfour’s course, “The Holocaust” (HNR 231). Dawn Heerspink composed “The Fullness of Being: The Female Conflict of Individual Identity and Community in Maxine Hong Kingston’s The Woman Warrior” in “Literature of American Minorities” (ENG 335) under the guidance of her professor, Margery Guest. Benjamin Winegard wrote “I’d Rather Watch Gymnastics: Evidence for a Feminine-Phenotype?” in Professor Robert Deaner’s course, “Research Methods in Psychology” (PSY 300).

As you read, think about the form and content of each piece. How do the writers organize, develop, and support their essays? How have these writers learned to manipulate purpose and focus to convey information in an informative and meaningful way to their academic audience?
Lauren Janicki  
HNR 231  

Linguistics and the Aryan Supremacy

Introduction
In the Holocaust, it is easy to recognize the tyranny of the Nazis over the Jewish people: the systematic attempt to eliminate them completely. The ideal blond-haired, blue-eyed Aryan whom the Nazis sought to preserve through their work is also well known. Less familiar, however, are the foundations upon which the Aryan was first conceived and the studies which collaborated to justify his presumed superiority. Although the study of language is rarely noted as a major component of the Holocaust, historical linguistics actually worked to create the myth behind the Aryan ideal. Working in conjunction with the greater body of anthropological studies and the sciences, it provided a framework of proof and justification for Aryan supremacy. Sociolinguistics further served to alienate and demean the Jews, emphasizing the foreignness of their speech. Today, linguists must recognize the way in which the study has promoted and can promote racism and prejudice when biases are allowed to influence research. Linguists must seek to eliminate bias and prejudice from their own work in order to use the study to benefit rather than to destroy.

“Discovering” the Aryan Race
From early on, German speakers felt an identity through their language and saw in it a superiority. Martin Luther, who served to unify the German language, explained its genealogy in terms of the Genesis story. He credited Ashkenaz as the source of German and promoted it to the status of a holy language, equal to Hebrew and superior to all others (Poliakov 84). German speakers saw their language as an identifier, an important part of their origin, and a source of pride. Languages were not equal for them and fit into a hierarchy—at the top of which was German.

Shortly after Martin Luther, Goropius Becanus also sought to elevate the German language through Biblical means. Analyzing German and Hebrew, he asserted a connection between the two languages based on a monosyllabic nature of words. He claimed that German was not a derivative of Hebrew, but in fact that Hebrew derived from German (Poliakov 90). This placed German at the very top of the linguistic hierarchy, excellent in its
status as forefather and in its purity. Although historical linguistics had not truly emerged as a discipline at this time, Goropius began using comparisons among languages as a means of understanding them. In doing so, he followed the example of Martin Luther and attributed unequal values to languages. He also assigned the greatest value to his own language by virtue of its being the progenitor of Hebrew and maintaining its purity through the ages.

In 1786, Sir William Jones explained similarities among Sanskrit, Greek, Latin, German, and Celtic by suggesting a common parentage for them (Taylor 2). This discovery provided a foundation for the discipline of comparative and historical linguistics. These new studies, then, suggested a single, common language from which the many descendant languages had arisen. This was the language Max Müller entitled “Aryan.” Furthermore, Müller asserted an original Aryan race, born from the clan who spoke this early Aryan language (Müller 211). Based on grammatical and lexical similarities, he claims that:

Before the ancestors of the Indians and Persians started for the south, and the leaders of the Greek, Roman, Celtic, Teutonic, and Slavonic colonies marched towards the shores of Europe, there was a small clan of Aryans, settled probably on the highest elevation of Central Asia, speaking a language, not yet Sanskrit or Greek or German, but containing the dialectical germs of all (Müller 212).

In this way, Müller effectively introduces the thought that language and race are connected, and that along with an original language must come the clan of people who first spoke that language. These people, according to Müller, were independent, self-reliant, strong, and lived close to the soil (Mosse 42). While Müller’s ideas would not all remain intact through later scholarship, his characterization of the strong, hearty Aryan would have great significance.

Taylor is quick to correct Müller’s logical fallacy in his connection of language and race, responding that common ancestry is not necessary among those who speak the descendant languages – for it is possible to speak a language as a result of language transfer rather than because of birth. Thus it is possible for someone of Celtic origin to speak the same language as someone of Teutonic origin, for example, and yet hold no blood relation (Taylor 5). In asserting this, however, Taylor did not refute
the idea of an original Aryan race – simply the idea that all the people who speak later Aryan languages must descend from the first Aryan race.

The Aryan Homeland

The question which became important following these studies is that of the origin of the very first Aryans. For many years, scholars sought a homeland in Asia based on a combination of geographical, textual, and philological data. The assumption of the Genesis story also had strong power in holding the origin of Aryans in Asia.

New discoveries in many disciplines, however, allowed scholars to move the early Aryans from the East to the West. Discoveries of archaeological material pre-dating the age of man according to Biblical tradition had extensive implications. According to Taylor:

> The assumption that man was a comparatively recent denizen of the earth, the traditional belief that Asia was the cradle of the human race, and the identification of the Aryans with the descendants of Japhet, had to be reconsidered when it was recognised that man had been an inhabitant of Western Europe at a time anterior to the oldest traditions (Taylor 17).

Old views were called into question and all disciplines of the science and anthropology of the time were rallied to place the Aryan homeland in Europe rather than Asia, from geology to archaeology. Beyond simply moving the homeland to Europe, Germans fought to distinguish Germany as the cradle of Aryan civilization and lay claim to the prestigious position as the developers of the languages that would later cover much of Europe and Asia. The study of linguistics collaborated with other areas of science in many ways to achieve this goal.

First, linguistic methods proved useful to scholars in pinpointing the Aryan homeland within Europe. In 1868, Fick published a work which utilized a new science – Linguistic Palaeontology – to suggest a homeland (Taylor 24). According to J.P. Mallory, this is the practice of comparing a reconstructed vocabulary with the archaeological and environmental record to identify a plausible homeland (158). By identifying characteristics such as animals, plants, weather and geographical terms from the earliest Aryan texts, one might identify the homeland of the first Aryans. While Mallory agrees that there is merit in this type of study due to its logical methodol-
ogy, the scholars of the late 19th century abused this method in such a way as to derive conclusions tailored by their own racist views. They further used these conclusions to support their belief in German supremacy, ignoring conclusions which contradicted their sense of nationalist pride.

This is most notable in the creation of the ideal Aryan whom Hitler so valued: the blond-haired, blue-eyed, tall, strong figure. According to Mallory, Theodor Poesche surveyed historical references to the Aryan peoples. He used this collection to demonstrate that the Aryan is often described as light-skinned, fair-haired, and blue-eyed in early texts (268). He also utilized the scientific work in the study of craniology to identify the Aryan as dolichocephalic, or long-headed. Using Linguistic Paleontology in the same way to match humans with geographical regions as others had for plants and animals, Poesche now searched Europe for regions inhabited by the highest concentration of blue-eyed, blond-haired people. This search resulted in his placement of the Aryan homeland in the marshes in Eastern Europe.

Taylor’s reaction to Poesche’s hypothesis demonstrates the obvious bias which influenced and directed the general trends in research. He exclaims:

The obvious objections to this theory are that the Rokitno swamp is not sufficiently extensive for the cradle of such a numerous people, and that the Aryans, an athletic and energetic race, exceeded in vital force by no other people, could hardly have originated in an unhealthy region, where the conditions of existence are depressing, while the sickly, tow-haired albinism which prevails in Rokitno swamp is quite different from the tawny hair and the ruddy, healthy, lily and carnation tint of his typical Aryans (Taylor 43).

Here, the sense of Aryan pride shows through clearly. Taylor’s reaction makes numerous assumptions here about the Aryan race. Taking Müller’s reconstructed ideal Aryan as undoubted truth, he rhetorically belittles the possibility that the Aryans could have arisen from a swamp. Although logically unsound, his argument was one which fit well into the nationalist ideals and would have been well received by many who also wished to see themselves as the true bearers of Aryan blood.

New Theories and the Use of Racial Bias
If pure Linguistic Paleontology was not able to prove the German Aryan origins, however, other resources were necessary to do so. Scholars therefore
turned to the greater discipline of anthropology for assistance, and to other methods of linguistic study and various sciences.

First, Schmidt developed the wave theory to describe the apparent differences among Aryan languages and hypothesized a new way of understanding their development. Rather than interpreting the languages as a genealogical tree, he viewed them as interconnected links (Taylor 270). Through comparisons of vocabulary and grammar, he demonstrated many links among the various languages. Two languages were more likely to share common characteristics if they developed in close geographical proximity (272). When language change occurs, he reasoned, it happens as ripples in water, affecting the source with the strongest force and dissipating as it moves away. Based on similarities in languages and their geographical proximities, Schmidt determined that the changes in languages must have occurred once the Aryan speaking peoples were already in relatively similar geographical areas to their current positions (273). The first Aryan speakers must have utilized a common, homogeneous language before languages began to develop in separate directions.

It would be impossible, using this theory, to claim that the Aryans originated in Asia. Schmidt’s research was significant in that it eliminated more thoroughly the idea of an Asian homeland beyond the sometimes-doubtful evidence of Linguistic Paleontology and furthered the goal of scholars to place the homeland in Europe, where a strong nationalist drive would lead them to establish the Aryan homeland in Germany through biased scholarship. The conclusions gained by this scholarship would then be used in turn to justify the bias toward Aryan supremacy.

Although Schmidt’s studies successfully placed the early Aryan civilization in Europe, they failed to account for the reasons behind dialectical differences (Taylor 273). Here, the broader discipline of anthropology built upon the foundation of Schmidt’s work to understand differences among Aryan speakers. Penka returned to the problem noted in Max Müller’s hypothesis—that speaking a common language is not sufficient evidence for sharing a common race. Contrary to Müller, he distinguished numerous races, all of which spoke Aryan languages, but only one of which could be Aryan by both language and blood (274). Using the more recent example of the Neo-Latin languages, Penka suggested that differences in French and Spanish were due to the acquisition of Latin by two different races: the Celts and the Iberians (37). Although the people in those areas were still
members of the separate races which had inhabited those parts of Europe from early on – as evidenced by the study of craniology (18) – they each assimilated the Latin language, changing it in their own way because of the difficulty of acquiring a foreign tongue. Similarly, he proposed that differences among Aryan dialects may be the result of Aryan incorporation of non-Aryan races (37).

So once again, it was necessary to question who the original Aryans truly were, and to follow the precedent of understanding language in terms of race, with one race as the superior progenitor. According to Penka, the purest Aryans were established in Scandinavia and in Northern Germany, where the people are of such a hearty physical type that they could have conquered and imposed their language on the rest of the Aryan-speaking language (46). Just as before, it is clear that scholars chose to understand the history of the Aryans in terms of physical biases, which they mistakenly took as scientific fact.

**Linguistics and Anti-Semitism**

This brief survey of the origins of Aryans demonstrates the clear role the study of linguistics held in contributing to the ideal German whom Hitler so revered. The Aryan race itself is a concept which cannot be understood on any terms except that of language, for its origin is in the similarities noted by comparative linguists, and its ideal physical characterization is created through the language in the mythology of the Aryan languages. Scholars in the late 19th and early 20th centuries exploited the study of linguistics in order to feed the nationalist drive of the time and find justification for their claims to supremacy.

Linguistics was used as more than just a uniting force for the Aryans, however. The study was also used as a tool for the alienation of the Jews. First, Semitic languages were recognized as having a completely different origin from Aryan languages, being dissimilar in vocabulary and language. Taylor notes an “impassable abyss between the Semitic and Aryan languages” in terms of structure (283). Although this observation in itself is harmless, it came to be used as evidence against the Jews, as a mark of their otherness.

On a sociolinguistic level, Jews were viewed as intrinsically tied to their language. Society often used language to show non-native speakers that they were not capable of managing the superior German language (Gilm­man 144). Anti-Semitic works regularly pinned Jews with a poor German speech mixed with Yiddish, presuming their inability to speak proper
German. Indeed, Renan saw Hebrew as a reflex of the Jews which was completed by Christianity. It was only through entrance into the Christian discourse that Jews might be accepted into society. As a result of this attitude toward the Jews and their language, some Jews themselves saw their language as a barrier between them and German society. Anton Ree, a Jew, believed that Jews were literally “sick” as long as they spoke differently from Germans (Gilman 141). He saw Jewish pronunciation as a sign of a problem with the speech organs due to the isolation of the Jews – a problem which could only be fixed through complete Jewish integration into German society (142).

In this way, the difference between the Aryan and the Semitic languages was carefully observed and utilized by the Aryan community to alienate the Jews. Because of the view that languages fell in a hierarchy, the classification of the Jews’ language as non-Aryan proved highly detrimental to them on a societal level. It would be impossible for them to reach beyond the restrictions of their heritage, for no matter how well they learned German, their Jewishness tied them to an inferior language.

In many ways, then, the study of linguistics, whether intentionally or not, contributed to and created attitudes which contributed to nationalism and placed the so-called Aryans in a superior position and the Jews in a subordinate position. Research methods were abused and biases and prejudices taken as fact and acceptable premises for arguments. Although some, like Müller, later regretted the nationalism and bias their studies had been used to create (Poliakov 214), others intentionally used languages and their study as a means of justification for the Aryan ideology. This ideology created a societal environment in which the Holocaust could occur, with many convinced that it was necessary to ruthlessly and inhumanely slaughter the Jews in order to protect a hypothetical superior race.

**Applications and Conclusions**

Because it has been demonstrated that linguistic study can have results reaching much beyond the grammar book, it is important that linguists recognize the possible pitfalls and dangers of unscientific and prejudiced research, realizing as Thucydides did that what happened in the past is likely to occur again in the future. A repetition of the events of the Holocaust can only be avoided if each person will undertake to learn the causes and seek
to analyze their own motives and behaviors so that they do not partake, purposefully or not, in the recreation of such an event.

The Linguistics Society of America (LSA) has recognized the need for careful considerations of its actions, and has therefore recently created an ethics committee to ensure its own responsible actions. For the present, the LSA has posted a statement of language rights detailing its position on multilingualism and the Native American languages which are indigenous to the United States. This document acknowledges many of the same issues surrounding the Aryan languages and their relationship to the Jewish language, and is a useful tool for considering how to move forward from the events which have occurred in the past toward a society more understanding of different languages and the people who speak them.

First and foremost, the statement asserts that it is possible for people who speak different languages to coexist peacefully. Multilingualism, it claims, is not generally the source itself of conflict, but previous instances of linguistic discord have been the result of attempts to disadvantage minorities or racial or religious conflicts (LSA 1). It is clear that the linguistic tension in the Holocaust can be understood in this light, as part of the racial tyranny enacted by the Germans. The statement also acknowledges that biases and uninformed views led to the decline of languages and loss of much culture for Native Americans (3). Similarly, prejudices against the Jewish language participated in creating an attempt to obliterate Jewish culture, and in encouraging Jews to abandon their language as a shameful thing in order to fit into the Aryan culture.

In light of past events, the statement of Language Rights looks forward and suggests a path of future action which will seek to include native languages rather than exclude them, claiming that helping people maintain their indigenous language and culture is an obligation of the people (LSA 4). It promotes bilingualism as a positive rather than negative, and grants certain linguistic rights for all people in the United States. Including the rights to express oneself in a language of choice in public and private, to receive education which considers both a child’s native language and the necessity to learn English, and to conduct business in whichever language one chooses (10). While English education is stressed as a means for participation in American society, the LSA insists that the promotion of English should never violate the rights of linguistic minorities.

In this statement, the LSA successfully identifies and acknowledges many of the past problems created through the use of linguistic differences
as a vehicle for racism and political gain. It also seeks means for reparation of previous linguistic tyranny and promotes equality and rights for speakers of all languages in the future. While the LSA specifically discusses the issue of indigenous Native American languages and cultures, the same concepts apply to the events of the Holocaust and to the linguistic rights which the Jews were denied as part of the attempt to eliminate them from the Aryan race.

Early historical and comparative linguistics sought to promote the Aryan ideal and assert supremacy over the Jews. This was possible due to the racism, bias, and faulty research methods utilized by scholars of the time. Understanding the aftermath of the Holocaust, it is important that today’s linguists strive to conduct their research through proper scientific methods and carefully search for and dispose of any dangerous biases and assumptions they might bring to their studies. In doing so, linguists assert their moral duty to work in their own capacity to prevent a resurgence of ideals similar to those used in the Nazi era to justify the ruthless murder of millions of people.

Works Cited


The Fullness of Being: The Female Conflict of Individual Identity and Community in Maxine Hong Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior*

In her 1845 essay “Woman in the Nineteenth Century,” Margaret Fuller writes, “I would have her free from compromise, from complaisance, from helplessness, because I would have her good enough and strong enough to love one and all beings, from the fullness, not the poverty of being” (Hollinger 394). The issue of a woman’s role in society has been a topic of contention over centuries, with many different voices offering various perspectives. In her memoir *The Woman Warrior*, Maxine Hong Kingston offers a picture of this struggle through a Chinese lens, demonstrating the patriarchal society that dominated Chinese life. Kingston, however, goes further in her narrative, as she not only confronts the Chinese hierarchal society that favors men but also weaves within this commentary the conflict the women in her memoir have in reconciling individual identity and the search for place with tradition, family, and communal ties.

Kingston’s memoir centers around three women: herself, her mother, and her nameless aunt. These women all experience in their own way the struggle between their individuality and the communal structure of traditional Chinese life that accords men a more influential role. Kingston introduces this theme in the opening pages, where she recounts the punishment of her aunt for becoming pregnant with another man’s child. The aunt’s story not only illustrates the patriarchal society, as Kingston remarks, “Women in old China did not choose” (Kingston 6), but also the theme of the conflict between individual identity and autonomy and community and tradition. In relating the aunt’s story, Kingston not only suggests that her aunt had been compelled to lie with the man by the very nature of the Chinese hierarchal society that stressed male dominance, but also hints that her aunt had passionate feelings and an individuality that, as a woman, had no place in traditional Chinese society. This second point is emphasized by Kingston’s explanation of the villagers’ actions in ransacking her aunt’s parents’ home: “The villagers punished her for acting as if she could have a private life, secret and apart from them” (Kingston 13). Consequently,
through the aunt’s story, Kingston presents the constraints and injustices placed upon women in a patriarchal society as well as how community, family, and tradition can conflict with a person’s need for individuality, independence, and self-governance.

Kingston, however, does not just portray her aunt’s, one woman’s, story; she builds upon the theme of individuality versus community by threading through her narrative not only her own struggle as a Chinese-American woman, but also her mother’s, Brave Orchid’s, story. Although there is evidence of constant tension between the narrator and her mother, they are similar in their desires as intelligent and strong women who want to claim and define a place for themselves. In the section entitled “Shaman,” Kingston recounts how her mother sailed to Canton by herself to earn a medical degree, as well as her mother’s strength in confronting the “ghosts” and working late hours to excel in her classes (Kingston 57-75). Although Kingston often portrays herself at odds with her mother as she chafes against the structure of Chinese society and tradition, there is a note of pride in her description of the mother who tried to make a place for herself by being a doctor in China. Through this section, and indeed throughout the whole novel, Kingston explores the need for women to have a purpose beyond just being a wife and a mother and to cultivate strength in themselves. This point is emphasized through Kingston’s words as she tells of her mother’s living space at the medical school in Canton: “The Revolution put an end to prostitution by giving women what they wanted: a job and a room of their own” (Kingston 62). This is an integral part of Kingston’s critique of Chinese patriarchal society that often disregards the abilities of women. Kingston suggests that women deserve to have place to call their own, a place in which they can exercise and be recognized for their full range of faculties. It is a critique that has been repeated throughout history from Sarah Grimké’s passionate declaration in 1838: “Whatsoever it is morally right for a man to do, it is right for a woman to do” (Hollinger 283) to Virginia Woolf’s A Room of One’s Own.

Women’s struggle to gain a place for themselves outside of tradition and the expectations of their communities and their desire to cultivate their own individual abilities is played out in Brave Orchid’s story. She tried to create a place of her own through her abilities but is portrayed as being constrained by Chinese tradition, which causes her to convey mixed signals
to her daughter. Kingston says that her mother “. . . said I would grow up a wife and a slave, but she taught me the song of the warrior woman, Fa Mu Lan. I would have to grow up a warrior woman” (Kingston 20). This tension between the desire to be the “woman warrior,” the strong, independent, and self-developed woman, with traditional expectations of motherhood and being a good and dutiful wife, a woman’s expected place in the community, is again demonstrated in the scene in which Brave Orchid sends for her sister Moon Orchid from China and tries to get her to confront her husband, who has been in America for many years without sending for her. Brave Orchid urges Moon Orchid to reclaim her position and assert her power as first wife: “Claim your rights” (Kingston 125). Brave Orchid recognizes that Chinese, even Chinese-American, women’s power still lies with their status as wives and mothers, and consequently she refuses to allow her sister to be submissive and docile in the one area where she is allowed a position. Thus, Brave Orchid demonstrates strength and intelligence along with an indomitable will to carve out a place for herself in the community and tradition she has been born into.

It is a will that she passes on to her daughter who, while often at odds with her mother, demonstrates the same strength and intelligence. When Kingston visits her home as an adult and inevitably clashes with Brave Orchid, she nevertheless still identifies with her mother: “I am really a Dragon, as she is a Dragon, both of us born in dragon years” (Kingston 109). Despite her disagreements with Brave Orchid and her chafing against Chinese tradition, Kingston recognizes that she and her mother are both fighters, both trying to be a “woman warrior” in a constraining society that often does not value them. Kingston’s struggle for individuality and recognition of her value as a person instead of being defined by her gender echoes the struggle of her mother as both have to fight for their position and place, while trying to reconcile their individuality with the bonds of community and family.

While Kingston desires the strength and independence of the woman warrior, she also demonstrates this innate need for community and family. This is first demonstrated in the section “White Tigers” in which Kingston presents a mythical world in which she is the woman warrior who avenges herself on her and her people’s enemies. While Kingston pictures herself as strong and independent, she also envisions someone who loves her and weds her: “I would have for a new husband my own playmate, dear since childhood, who loved me so much he was to become a spirit bridegroom
for my sake. We will be happy. . .” (Kingston 31). In this, Kingston does not disregard the traditional roles of wife and mother; rather, she presents a view in keeping with many feminists, one in which women should be allowed to develop their full potential in order that they may be fully human and able to engage in not only domesticity but also in larger society with their unique abilities. Kingston’s “woman warrior,” however, does undergo sacrifice in her pursuit of strength and independence as she gives up her son and husband (Kingston 41), not returning to them until many years later (Kingston 45). In this, Kingston presents a dilemma that still faces all women: how to reconcile individual development with family and community. This idea is reiterated in her words later in the novel:

Nobody supports me at the expense of his own adventure. Then I get bitter: no one supports me; I am not loved enough to be supported. That I am not a burden has to compensate for the sad envy when I look at women loved enough to be supported. Even now China wraps double binds around my feet. (Kingston 48)

This is an apt description of the two forces of individuality and community that may seem to pull in opposite directions. While Kingston longs for independence and strength as her own person, the modern day “woman warrior,” she still retains the need for family and community. She attributes this need to China’s hold upon her, but it is an innate longing in all humanity. Thus, in confronting the Chinese patriarchal society and questioning a woman’s role, Kingston also displays a very universal concern of women as one set of desires, independence, self-sufficiency, and individuality, wars with other needs, that of love, family, and community.

These needs are multifaceted, as Kingston demonstrates through the presentation of her aunt’s, her mother’s, and her own story. Community, tradition, and family can constrict us and stifle our individuality and self-sufficiency, but they also are integral aspects of our lives. Conversely, the need for independence and individual development can cause us to make sacrifices in the area of human connections.

The closing story of Kingston’s memoir reiterates this theme of a woman’s conflict in reconciling individual identity and autonomy with the desire for community and family. Even as she opened her memoir with her aunt’s story, Kingston closes with a story whose beginning is her mother’s
and the ending hers (Kingston 206), highlighting the three women and their struggles to find a place in a world. The story tells of another brave and strong woman who is taken away from her family by a barbarian king and who sings a song about China and her family while in captivity (Kingston 207-09). It is a fitting ending for Kingston’s memoir which, while asserting the rights of women to be strong and independent, also emphasizes the longing for family and community. Thus, Kingston does not discount tradition and communal ties; rather, she desires to point out the flaws in a system that does not allow women to fully participate or be valued as individuals. In this, she would perhaps agree with Margaret Fuller’s statement: Women must be allowed to be “free from compromise, from complaisance, from helplessness” in order that they may love “from the fullness, not the poverty of being” (Hollinger 394).

Works Cited


I’d Rather Watch Gymnastics: Evidence for a Feminine-Phenotype?

Abstract
Evolutionary psychologists have demonstrated that physical attractiveness is correlated with sexual dimorphism. In a separate literature, studies find that sports are reliably perceived along a continuum of masculinity/femininity. Here we combined these findings and predicted that women gymnasts (feminine sport) would be rated as more attractive than women in more masculine sports, whereas women basketball players (masculine sport) would be rated as less attractive than women in more feminine sports. We investigated this hypothesis using online pictures of women collegiate athletes in gymnastics, golf, cross country, and basketball. The data confirmed that gymnasts were most attractive and basketball players least. Our results suggest that there may be a general feminine-phenotype that exerts a strong effect on sporting performance.

Dante asserted that “heat cannot be separated from fire, or beauty from The Eternal.” Poetic sentiments aside, human beauty has generated serious psychological study for many years (Adams, 1977; Clifford & Walster, 1973; Walster, Aronson, Abrahams, & Rottman, 1966). More recently, researchers from the emerging paradigm of evolutionary psychology are examining beauty from an adaptationist perspective (Barber, 1995; Gangestad & Scheyd, 2005; Rhodes, 2006). This research has uncovered many of the mysteries of human attractiveness.

Evolutionary psychology views complex phenotypic traits as the end products of a long history of natural selection and/or sexual selection. These traits helped humans survive and reproduce in their environment of evolutionary adaptation (EEA) (Buss, 2008; Gaulin & McBurney, 2004). From this perspective, men and women are expected to find opposite sex individuals who possess specific phenotypic traits attractive. Importantly, these traits, or signals, are hypothesized to differ according to sex (Buss, 2003). This is so because men and women had to solve different adaptive problems throughout their evolutionary history (Geary, 1998). For ex-
ample, one adaptive problem men had to solve was finding young, fertile women who were healthy enough to bear and raise offspring. Consequently, men universally prefer women who are between 16-35 years of age, which corresponds with a woman’s peak years of fertility (Kenrick & Keefe, 1992; Kenrick & Keefe, 1996). Further, studies have demonstrated that sexually dimorphic traits are often considered attractive. For example, Little, Burt, Penton-Voak, and Perrett (2001) found that faces with high levels of symmetry and dimorphism are rated more attractive than sexually neutral or asymmetric faces, while Cornwell et al. (2004) found that women with more sexually dimorphic faces smelled more attractive. Women with extremely feminine and symmetrical features are hypothesized to be attractive because these features serve as indicators of health (Grammer, Fink, Moller, Manning 2005; Rhodes, Chan, Zebrowitz, & Simmons, 2003) and fertility (Jasienska et al., 2004; Jasienska et al., 2006).

Despite the plethora of studies on human attractiveness and the interest that the subject has generated throughout history, surprisingly little is known about the relationship between athletic ability and attractiveness. This is unfortunate as sports provide fertile ground for testing the real world effects of physical attractiveness. This for two main reasons: one, sports are consistently rated as lying on a continuum of masculinity/femininity (Alley, & Hicks, 2005; Shakib, 2003). Sports such as figure skating and gymnastics are considered extremely feminine, while swimming is considered neutral, and wrestling is considered extremely masculine. Two, sports differ in the traits they require for success. For example, height and strength are important in basketball, but not in baseball; flexibility and grace are important in women’s gymnastics, but not in women’s softball.

In this article, we explore the evolutionary psychology of beauty as applied to women’s sports. Specifically, we hypothesize that women who excel in collegiate gymnastics will be rated as more attractive than women who excel in collegiate cross country, golf, or basketball. We further predict that women who excel in collegiate basketball will be rated as less attractive than women who excel in collegiate gymnastics, cross country, or golf. These predictions follow from the demonstrated link between sexual dimorphism and physical attractiveness (Jasienska et al., 2004; Jasienska et al., 2006; Little, Burt, Penton-Voak, & Perrett, 2001). Women who are particularly feminine, and therefore relatively attractive, should be drawn toward and
excel at gymnastics, whereas women who are particularly masculine, and therefore relatively unattractive, should be drawn toward and excel at basketball (for supporting evidence, see Giuliano, Popp, & Knight, 2000; Paul et al., 2006). We call our evolutionary-based hypothesis for differential aptitude in sports the feminine-phenotype hypothesis to distinguish it from socialization theories which state that sports aptitude has nothing to do with a particular phenotype per se, but, rather, results from social-role expectancy. These findings would demonstrate that beauty is not only in the eye of the beholder, but is also in the athletic ability of the possessor. To test our hypotheses, we used pictures of women’s faces taken from collegiate athletic websites which were then rated on attractiveness.

**Methods**

**Sample Selection**

We used the following website as a link to division I (DI) and division III (DIII) colleges: http://www.ncaa.org/wps/portal/?ut/p/kxml/04_Sj9SPykssy0xPLMnMz0vM0Y_QjzKLN4j3CQHJgFjGpvqRqCKO-cAFvfVP_NxU_QD9gtzQihJHRUAbGvNAw!!/delta/base64xml/L3dJdyEvUUd3QndNQSEvNEIVRS82XzBfTFU!?CONTENT_URL=http://www.ncaa.org/conferences/links.html. For DI, we selected the first ten women’s teams in four targeted sports (basketball, cross country, golf, and gymnastics). We used the same procedure for D3 women’s teams; however, we could only locate five gymnastics teams that included player pictures. We then copied and pasted the entire roster of each team into an excel spreadsheet for coding. The names were randomized upon transfer to excel so that almost every coder would rate athletes from every school and every sport. Importantly, each roster entered into excel contained a hyperlink to the team’s homepage so that coders could use the excel sheet to navigate to the athlete’s photographs. Informed consent was not sought because the pictures were available to public viewing, none of the participants names were used, and the chance of risk to coded athletes was non-existent.

**Coding the Pictures**

We recruited students from three undergraduate psychology courses at a small Midwestern university to code the pictures as part of a wider research project on collegiate athletes and physical traits (e.g. sports and smiling,
masculinity, femininity). The students received partial credit for their participation. Coders were first split by sex and then randomly divided into seven groups and assigned to code roughly 100 opposite-sex athletes (total sample = 713, each individual coded roughly 1/7th of the athletes). The coders were instructed to honestly rate each athlete’s attractiveness on a 7 point Likert scale (1 = extremely unattractive, 4 = average, 7 = extremely attractive). Coders completed the procedure by opening the excel page and entering the hyperlinked team roster into a search engine. They then found the individual player’s picture, rated it, and entered the data into the excel spreadsheet. For each athlete there were two coders. To obtain our attractiveness rating, we simply averaged the two coder ratings. The inter-observer reliability was fairly low (r = .399). Participants had no knowledge of the authors’ specific hypotheses, although they were aware of some of the projects larger goals.

Criteria of Inclusion
We removed a picture from consideration if one of the coders marked it the wrong sex (i.e. if a female face was marked “male” by one or more of the coders). We also removed duplicate pictures. Not all of the initial athletes’ pictures were available online. Further, for some of the athletes, only one coder was able to locate the picture. When this occurred, we kept the picture and used the single coder’s rating as our composite attractiveness rating. After applying these criteria, our sample consisted of 679 coded female athletes (gymnastics, n = 173; basketball, n = 225; cross country, n = 142; golf, n = 139).

Results
We used a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) to analyze the relationship between women’s collegiate sport and mean attractiveness. The expected difference in women’s mean attractiveness by sport was significant, F (3, 675) = 13.151, p < .001.

We conducted a post-hoc Bonferroni test to determine which mean attractiveness level(s) differed. The results of this test as well as the means and standard deviations are reported in table 1. As predicted, women gymnasts were significantly more attractive than women basketball players, cross country runners, or golfers. Also as predicted, women basketball players
were significantly less attractive than women gymnasts or cross country runners. However, there was no significant difference between women basketball players and golfers. 

Although these differences in attractiveness support the feminine-phenotype hypothesis, an alternative explanation is that women who are more attractive are encouraged to pursue gymnastics due to its association with femininity, whereas women who are less attractive face less pressure to participate in stereotypically feminine sports (Eccles & Harold, 1991). If this hypothesis is correct, then either there should be no difference in the respective attractiveness of DI and DIII women athletes within a specific sport (e.g. gymnastics), or the difference in attractiveness between DI and DIII athletes should be consistent between sports. That is, if DI women gymnasts are, on average, more attractive than DIII gymnasts, this relationship should generalize to women basketball players, women golfers, and women cross country runners. The feminine-phenotype hypothesis, however, predicts that women with particularly feminine traits are better able to compete at the highest level in gymnastics, and women with particularly masculine traits are better able to compete at the highest level in basketball. Since DI schools have more money, the level of competition and talent is much higher in DI than DIII (National Collegiate Athletic Association [NCAA], 2007). Due to this competitive difference, we predict that DI women gymnasts will be more attractive than DIII women gymnasts, whereas DI women basketball players will be less attractive than DIII women basketball players.

We tested these respective predictions using independent t-tests. As predicted by the feminine-phenotype hypothesis, we found that DI gymnasts were more attractive ($M = 4.48$, $SD = .96$) than DIII gymnasts ($M = 3.82$, $SD = .97$). These results were statistically significant, $t \ (171) = 4.326, p < .001$. As concomitantly predicted by the feminine-phenotype hypothesis, we found that DI basketball players were less attractive ($M = 3.35$, $SD = 1.06$) than DIII basketball players ($M = 3.76$, $SD = 1.16$). These results were statistically significant, $t \ (223) = -2.699, p = .007$. Finally, we tested whether DIII gymnasts ($M = 3.82$, $SD = .97$) were more attractive than DIII basketball players ($M = 3.76$, $SD = 1.16$). These results were not significant, $t \ (195) = .356, p = .722$. 
Discussion
Our results lend support the feminine-phenotype hypothesis. Women gymnasts were more attractive than women basketball players, cross country runners, or golfers while women basketball players were less attractive than women gymnasts or cross country runners. Furthermore, DI women gymnasts were more attractive than DIII women gymnasts, while DI women basketball players were less attractive than DIII women basketball players.

These results are consistent with Thornhill and Grammer’s (1999) finding that there is a feminine phenotypic package that may signal genetic quality. They are also consistent with previous research on sexual selection, which argues that an organism’s phenotype functions as a signal of underlying genotypic quality (Andersson & Iwasa, 1996; Prokosch, Yeo, & Miller, 2005). Our study is the first, at least of which we are aware, to demonstrate that female attractiveness is related to disparate phenotypic qualities that have an important impact on sports aptitude and performance. In other words, the importance of attractiveness is not limited to the domain of mating. Instead, attractiveness is related to many domains of life such as health (Henderson & Anglin, 2003; Shakelford & Larson, 1999), intelligence, (Kanazawa & Kovar, 2004; Luxen & Buunk, 2006) pay level (Biddle and Hamermesh, 1998), likelihood of being elected to office (Rosar, Klein, & Beckers, 2007), and, as the current study demonstrated, sports performance.

Although it is possible to explain our results by utilizing social-role theory (e.g. Eagly & Wood, 2003), we suggest that the evidence favors our evolutionary hypothesis. Social-role theory has no problem explaining the difference in attractiveness between women gymnasts and women basketball players. However, social-role theory would have a great deal of difficulty predicting the specific patterns of attractiveness by sport and division that we predicted and confirmed. It could be argued, post hoc, that gender-role socialization is more extreme in DI than DIII schools. However, this seems incredibly implausible: When the level of competition increases, social pressures will matter less and innate aptitude more. With training, almost anyone can become a proficient basketball player. However, it takes an innate genetic gift to play DI basketball. If attractiveness differences in women’s collegiate athletics were simply the result of social pressures, we would expect a large difference between DIII women gymnasts and DIII
women basketball players, since the lessoned competition of DIII athletics allows more room for extraneous social pressure to influence a woman’s decision to participate in particular sports. However, our results demonstrate that there is no significant difference in attractiveness between DIII women gymnasts and DIII women basketball players!

Our study has important limitations, which should be noted. First, our inter-observer reliability for attractiveness was low (r = .399). Second, we were limited to two coders for each athlete’s picture. And third, the pictures in our study were not standardized. These limitations may have diminished the accuracy of our attractiveness ratings. Furthermore, it is possible that different sports systematically favor different types of pictures to display on the internet. For example, gymnastics teams may emphasize beauty in their pictures, while basketball teams may emphasize toughness and intimidation. Future studies should address these limitations by using more coders and standardizing the athlete’s pictures. Studies should also hormonally assess the fertility (probability of conception) of women collegiate gymnasts, basketball players, cross country runners, and golfers. We predict that relatively masculinized women, who excel in basketball, possess low relative fertility compared to gymnasts.

In conclusion, this study is the first that we are aware of to demonstrate a direct link between attractiveness and differential sports aptitude in women collegiate athletes. Future studies should address vocations outside of sports to see if the feminine-phenotype effect is robust. Perhaps beauty influences the world more than previously believed.

References


Table 1

<table>
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<tr>
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Note: NS = nonsignificant differences between pairs of means, while one asterisk (*) = significance at the .10 level, two asterisks (**) = significance at the .05 level, and three asterisks (***) = significance at the .01 level. All significance levels were assessed using a post-hoc Bonferroni test.

Figure Caption

Figure 1. Attractiveness of women collegiate athletes as a function of sport.
The Department of Writing offers instruction in academic, creative, and professional writing. Academic writing courses, which are designed for all students in the university community, include first-year composition and junior-level writing. For students who choose to major in writing, the department offers emphasis areas in creative and professional writing. The department also offers a minor in writing for students wishing to enhance their writing abilities for personal or professional reasons.

Academic writing, creative writing, and professional writing all belong to the liberal arts. As disciplines, they seek to sensitize student writers to the values and practices of particular genres of writing. The overall goal is to develop in students the ability to write well in a variety of contexts. Students develop this ability by reading and analyzing models and by drafting and revising original work in a workshop setting. Academic writing explores the art of writing well in specific disciplinary contexts. Creative writing explores the art of writing literary fiction, poetry, drama, and non-fiction. Professional writing explores the art of writing nonfiction and workplace writing.

The department has 48 faculty and approximately 210 majors. Altogether we offer about 250 sections a year in academic, creative, and professional writing.

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