

# RhetTech

Undergraduate Journal in Writing, Rhetoric and Technical Communication



# Editors

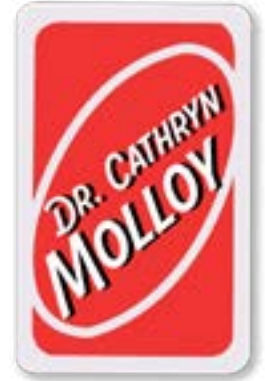
Managing Co-Editors



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Editors



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# Letter From the Editors

Welcome to the fourth volume of RhetTech,

RhetTech is a practicum course in the Writing Rhetoric and Technical Communication (WRTC) department at James Madison University which spans both the Fall and Spring semesters. Over the Fall 2021 and the Spring 2022 semesters, our journal was incredibly lucky to have a talented group of 14 undergraduate students join the staff, many of whom were a part of the staff for the entire academic year. Although our journal is housed in the Writing, Rhetoric and Technical Communication department at James Madison, many of our staff members have majors outside of WRTC. For these staff members, reviewing submissions allowed them to gain experience in the field of WRTC and the academic opportunity to deepen their perspectives in ways they may not have had without RhetTech. The insight of staff members from other academic majors gave RhetTech perspectives that were vital to the 21-22 volume as they gave consideration to an audience broader than ourselves.

During the Fall semester, we received over thirty quality submissions from talented and dedicated undergraduate students from over a dozen universities, making it our most difficult year yet for the selection of pieces to include in this volume. The submission review process created an enlightening and thought-provoking dialogue on often difficult topics between staff from different academic programs with diverse experiences.

In the Spring semester, RhetTech students experienced an unexpected break from the traditional course structure. For the first time in the journal's history, RhetTech received numerous submissions during the spring term. Due to the versatility, adaptability, and dedication of our staff members, these submissions were able to be reviewed and have decisions rendered in the spring semester. In addition to this submission review, our staff worked to curate, edit, and design this volume of RhetTech. During the spring our staff was challenged to put their own writing and editing skills into practice. Thanks to the tireless work of the entire RhetTech staff, the standards and quality of the RhetTech journal reached new heights which are reflected cohesively across the volume.

Intentionally reviewing submissions gave our staff the opportunity to be further educated on important topics such as mental illness and societal experiences often considered taboo. Reading these submissions broadened our own perspectives, allowing us to feel and understand experiences that we did not personally have ourselves. Not only do we hope that these pieces are as enlightening for our readers as they were for us as a staff, but they are also as educational as they were for the editors. Our authors were vulnerable in their pieces and we encourage our audience to become vulnerable in their own experiences after reading the pieces in this journal. We want this volume to be equally informative and reflective, as there is always more to learn from others' experiences.

Being a part of the 2021-2022 RhetTech staff has been an insightful and meaningful experience for all undergraduate students involved. We used the talents of this year's group of editors to have our second volume with a special section, this one focused on mental health. This special section focuses on opening up the conversation of mental health by bringing stories of vulnerability, perseverance, and strength to light. Our goal is to start a deeper conversation that broadens the knowledge about mental health. Through personal stories/narratives, we hope to open our audiences' minds to different perspectives and experiences of others. Due to the creative vision and talent of our staff members, we were able for the first time in the journal's history to create an overall design theme for the journal. This incredible design, and a huge step for the Journal, was all thanks to the talent and hard work of staff member Vanessa Phillips. In addition to the strides made in this volume of the journal, the staff was also able to better the RhetTech experience for future staff members. This year our students created a social media content strategy and a RhetTech style guide.

## Thank You to our Authors

We would like to take this opportunity to look back on the past year and thank all who submitted to our journal. In total, we received 34 submissions from university students all over the country. The success of our publication would not be possible without the continued support of our authors. In this volume, we feature authors from nine universities and seven states.

We appreciate the sharing of experiences and vulnerability that this year's authors demonstrated within their pieces. We would like to thank those who took the time to remain in touch with us and stay flexible during our revision process. We truly believe this year's volume may be one of our strongest journals yet, and this could not be done without the true talent of the authors within this journal. We wish you the best of luck in your future endeavors and we hope that you continue to create work that fills your passion. We encourage the authors to participate in future journal submissions, as we would love to publish future pieces from those who made this year's volume possible.

## Summary of Volume

RhetTech has published a variety of pieces throughout the duration of the semester that align with our special section on mental health and, thus, covering various mental health topics such as mindfulness, eating disorders, depression, schizophrenia, the traumatization of child pornography victims, and more. Additionally, our journal has taken on other timely and relevant topics such as zines, medical advancements, language, and global citizenship.

In "Cortical Changes While Learning BCIs: Masters of the Force," Elizabeth Fulton of Carnegie Mellon University competently explores Brain Computer Interface (BCI) and discusses themes of disability, medical interventions in disability, and personal struggle. Readers will also note the many author-created graphics that explain these dense concepts that the author brings to our attention.

Readers will also find JMU WRTC student Katherine Peppiatt's "The Internet: Pornography's Ally, People's Nightmare," which addresses the issue of child pornography from the angle of a survivor while discussing how the internet helps to perpetuate the cycle of abuse for victims.

Next, we are very pleased to include Arizona State student Meggie Tran's "Mindfulness is a Lifestyle, Not a Relaxation Hack." In this piece, the author discusses how the practice of mindfulness should play a meaningful role as a lifestyle choice rather than a quick hack and easy marketing fad.

In Satoshi Nishizaka's "One Puzzle 'Peace' Of My Life," the author, an international student at Soka University, shares the process of learning English while connecting the ideas of global citizenship and literacy by intertwining his home language of Japanese into the piece while balancing a discussion of American and Japanese culture.

We don't often accept straight academic arguments such as film analyses, yet we were quite taken with Vivian Norris's "To the Bone: Starving for Accuracy," in which the University of San Francisco student critiques popular perceptions and portrayals of eating disorders based on the 2017 movie; her focus on anorexia is compellingly influenced by the author's own experiences.

We, likewise, are pleased to include JMU student Aren Tift's "Call it What you Want," which compellingly describes how film and certain events in the author's life, including becoming a marine, shaped his perceptions of war and violence.

We also highly enjoyed Stony Brook University student Matthew Hono's "Zines as Rebellion Against the Cultural Dominance of Digital Self-Publishing" is a piece that covers a sort of "lost" form of media called a zine—a DIY-like magazine publication that is currently overcoming the barrier of moving from paper to online publishing.

In "Tell Me About Gaslighting," readers will meet a person we are sure is a future podcast star—Transylvania University's Lindsey Steffen shares her three-episode podcast to help readers to explore the concept of gaslighting in a college context, including a baseline description of the concept, insights into how it plays out in intimate partnerships, and impressive coverage of how gaslighting shows up in particular for marginalized persons.

We are very excited, also to share Princess Jackson's "oK? Magazine" in which the North Carolina Central University student astutely examines various mental health issues such as depression, schizophrenia, and eating disorders through the artistic take of a magazine. The magazine touches on these topics in a manner that is fully candid and that frankness is comforting in a way as mental health and the talk about one's own experi-

ences with mental health is often stigmatized.

We loved Meggie Tran's work so much that we accepted a second brilliant piece from her: "To my Fellow Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders: Stop Denying Mental Health Services." Tran utilizes an engaging medium to encourage important conversation regarding mental health and current events with writing rooted in personal experience, knowledge, and awareness.

Finally, Pace University student Hayden Miller's "The Value of Invisible Aid Past and Present" is a captivating narrative that begins with a familiar part of history before the author transitions to recounting her family's similar struggles, later tying them to her experiences today. The pictures and artifacts used in this piece transport the reader into a chilling time in history.

We are all so very proud to present you with this volume of RhetTech,  
The RhetTech Undergraduate Staff

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# ONE PUZZLE "PEACE" OF MY LIFE

BY SATOSHI NISHIZAKA

I often struggle expressing my thoughts as words on paper, but I love interacting with my friends. Those similar to me are likely to be shy, especially when speaking in a different language from their mother tongue.

There are many obstacles to communicating with international students. My literacy skills have been developing over the past 20 years thanks to those who taught me both Japanese and English. I believe that my experience studying language and the concept of global citizenship connect. Let me share my history. 準備はいいですか?(Are you ready?)

During my childhood, I was curious and challenged everything. There was no YouTube, no smartphones, and no games when I was a child, so I liked reading picture books. For example, the Bam and Kero series, drawn and written by Yuka Shimada, were some of my favorite books when I was four.

Usually, my mother read books aloud to me, but after finishing each page, we discussed the pictures. For instance, if dogs were pictured running straight forward, my mother and I shared each idea about their destinations and why these puppies needed to hurry. I believe that this ritual helped me to create new thoughts. In addition, I asked my parents many questions about what each word meant; thus, I gradually understood and mem-

orized Japanese vocabulary. Picture books were the "textbooks" of my childhood; they contributed to improving my reading skills and developing my creativity.

As I read picture books, I also loved to imitate anything I observed. In Japan, comedians often perform a song called Ippatsu Gyagu—a very short comedic gag to make their audiences laugh, and these were appealing to me. I tried to copy an Ippatsu Gyagu and to change some parts to make it my own. The following is the arranged lyrics: "俺は西坂聡、おもちゃが欲しいって、いうじゃない? でも、おもちゃ持っていますから、残念!" ("I am Satoshi Nishizaka, and I hope that I can get some toys. However, I've already had another toy! Oh my god!") Because I was a little boy when I enjoyed creating this short comedy, its meaning is not straightforward; it's not funny if you only read the translation. However, I learned that I could make it funny by emphasizing each important word through changing my intonations, speed, and volume. In this case, my intonation was upside down when I sang "俺は西坂聡," and I humorously changed my voice in part "いうじゃない?" Finally, I made my voice sudden-

ly loud to finish, and this is called オチ (Ochi). By imitating such funny activities, I learned how I could make someone smile in daily life. I learned that my compositions could have an impact on an audience.

When I was five, I attended a calligraphy class with my older sister every week to improve my writing. Traditionally, the Japanese tend to focus on the beauty of characters, including Hiragana, Katakana, and Chinese characters. Producing beautiful characters is considered crucial to showing honesty to an audience. I took a beginner course that taught me handwriting with pencils. My writing was becoming beautiful as I continued attending classes. In addition, I had many opportunities to have more practical training. One of them was writing letters to my family. On my family members' birthdays, I wrote them letters in appreciation of their support.

Figure 1 shows three Japanese vocabulary words that I wrote: father [otosan; お父さん], mother [okaasan; お母さん], and older sister [oneechan; お姉ちゃん]. Japanese writers often start their letters with, for example, "To my father [otosan-e; お父さんへ]".

At first, I could write down only a short sentence, but I became confident in giving family members my letters thanks to the handwriting class.

When my birthday came, I received many thoughtful letters from my family members. Because they are older than me, I learned a lot of vocabulary and sentence structures by reading them, which also improved my writing skills. Writing letters became our important tradition to celebrate birthdays

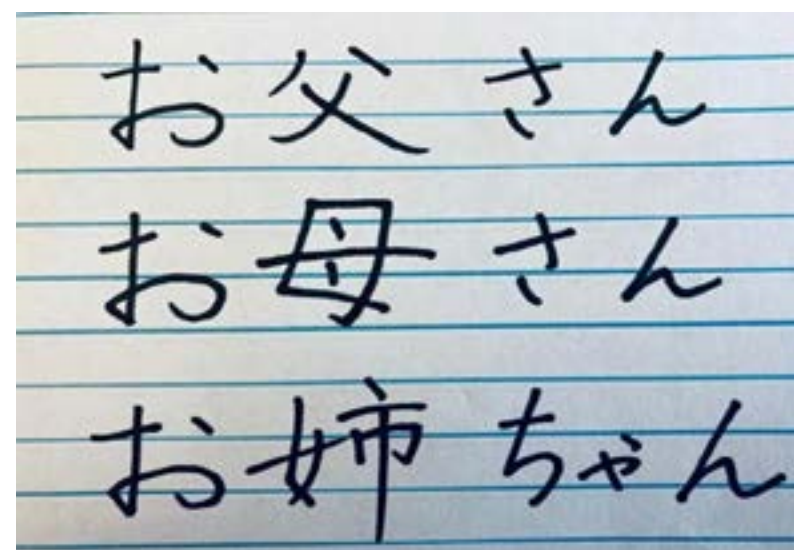


Fig. 1. Father, mother, and older sister (Nishizaka)

and a way to train my writing and reading skills.

Before my seventh birthday, I was learning both academic knowledge and kanji, Chinese characters. But the kanji got increasingly complicated as I moved into the upper grades. For example, beginners are likely to start studying the characters from 一, which means “one.” It seems to be easy; however, when I became a high school student, teachers gave me many exams of Chinese characters, including 怪兽 which means “monster.” Furthermore, I needed to memorize the form of each character correctly to get a perfect score. Sometimes, I could not remember the correct kanji while I was taking the exam. Because of my kanji teacher’s strict grading policy for the exams, my accuracy improved.

In addition to learning kanji, I learned how to perform comical skits with my friends. I originally disliked acting because I was too shy to stand and speak any words in front of many audiences. However, when I joined the executive committee for my class’s graduation, I had to prepare a skit and act before my classmates. When I practiced speaking short words, I did not notice that my voice was neutral until my friends informed me that it was coming across that way. After this shameful experience, I read my scripts more carefully and tried to interpret how the characters think and act with my delivery. In those skits, I eventually began to express my roles with my whole body and emotions. I exaggerated every reaction, allowing me to express the character’s personality and avoid giving a neutral or flat performance. After a signifi-

Fig. 2. Soka University of America, Founders Hall (Wikimedia)



cant amount of practice, my voice gradually made various intonations and tones. As a result, I found that these skills helped me to communicate my thoughts during my daily conversations.

My Japanese journey was joyful; however, my journey with English was like a rollercoaster. I have been struggling with studying English since high school, even though I enjoyed it when I was younger. Through it all, the experiences of learning Japanese helped immensely in improving my English skills.

At the start of kindergarten, I had already begun studying English in my own way: using Koko-pad and playing BE-GO. These educational games were released by one of the famous correspondence education companies. I played many educational games with game cards. Koko-pad and BE-GO were both advantageous for me to study English. For example, when I pushed a beetle in a picture on Koko-pad with the equipped pen, it pronounced the word “beetle” clearly. According to my mother’s story, I went to school with her to see my sister and said “beetle” to her homeroom teacher.

He was surprised and praised my pronunciation. As I grew older, I started playing BE-GO by imitating my sister, because she always looked joyful when she played with it to study English. In this PC learning, my pronunciation was recorded and evaluated by the computer. Although there was no typing activity, playing games helped me learn how to use a laptop by including dragging, recording, and clicking activities.

After graduating from elementary and junior high school, I aimed to go to Soka University of America (SUA, see Figure 2) because I dreamed of becoming an interpreter. My high school teacher recommended I study abroad for four years to prepare for my dream. This recommendation inspired me to study English more rigorously. At that time, I focused on reading to get higher scores on the official English exams. I chose to read the Harry Potter series in English, which has seven volumes. At first, it was difficult to understand its contents, so I was often distracted while reading the first volume. Consequently, it took me approximately three months to finish reading it; however, I dramatically improved my reading speed because I did not give up. In addition, I found some thoughtful words while I was reading the second volume, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*. For example, Albus Dumbledore, the principal of Harry’s school, explains that what differentiates Harry from the enemy are his choices. He then says to Harry that those choices “show what we truly are, far more than our abilities” (Rowling 333). This quote reminds me that I chose to go to SUA by myself even though my native lan-

guage is Japanese, not English. By reading such notable books, I became accustomed to reading English literature and adopted this quote that supported my journey to SUA.

As a result of my application to SUA, I became a student of the Extended Bridge Program. Last year, my classmates and I took online learning for one year due to COVID-19. I had never experienced an extended period of online classes, so it was a challenge for me. I took 5 to 6 classes each semester, and professors assigned large amounts of homework, including reading and writing assignments. For example, we received reading assignments from literature class and academic writing class. The structures of the academic assignments were completely different from the literature assignments. Moreover, it took a significant amount of time to complete reading the articles without understanding some of the contents, so I was always worried about improving my English skills. In addition to the language barrier, online tutoring frustrated me because I needed to use my laptop every day. For example, when I unintentionally changed the setting of Microsoft Word, I would get annoyed need to spend a good amount of time fixing the issue. To solve this technological problem, I utilized Google to find the solutions. Through this experience, I became familiar with technology. These stressors affected my mental condition, and I fell into a great depression. At that time, I just wanted to leave the Bridge Program, and it was the first time I did not want to speak English during the Program.

I cried for a long time. But after sharing my mental condition with my friends and family in Japanese, I began to recover. I wrote down my feelings in my diary so I could read about my feelings in the future to encourage myself. People tend to be silent, especially when they are going through difficulties; however, thanks to my courage to be open about my struggles, I believed that this experience would encourage my future self.

Now I have been in the United States as an SUA student for half a year. At first, I was overwhelmed with America's atmosphere. For instance, non-Japanese students can be extremely extroverted. I became exhausted from talking with them because I was a shy person and liked to be alone. Despite these challenges, I highly appreciated all obstacles because they helped me develop my conversational skills. Thanks to the Bridge Program, I am now more interactive and do not hesitate to talk with strangers in the US. I continuously challenge myself to communicate with them. Also, I now can help other Japanese students struggling with becoming accustomed to living here by sharing my experiences in learning Japanese. Such experiences encourage me whenever I become anxious. My literacy narrative is not only for promoting my future self, but also for inspiring others.

I have not given up while facing difficulties because of the principle of global citizenship. The founder of SUA, Daisaku Ikeda, taught me this principle. In his lecture at Columbia University in 1996, he stated three characteristics of a global citizen: to

be wise, courageous, and compassionate. As I became more literate, I better understood compassion. Dr. Ikeda explains that compassion is "to maintain an imaginative empathy that reaches beyond one's immediate surroundings and extends to those suffering in distant places" (41). When I was challenged with comical skits in high school, acting helped me foster an imaginative empathy for others. I tried to understand the characters' minds and how they were changing in the story. After the show, I realized that I was thinking about others carefully because I had been thinking about the characters I was representing. I can become more empathetic as I continue to have experiences of thinking of another's perspective. Hence, I believe that compassionate language is important for communicating with anyone and understanding others' minds. Dr. Ikeda also stated that "global citizenship is not determined merely by the number of languages one speaks or the number of countries to which one has traveled" (41). Although I agree with Dr. Ikeda, I still wonder: what is literacy for? If I can speak five languages, I can share how people living in these five nations are suffering from difficulties on their behalf. I think that this is the most significant mission in my life as a bilingual speaker. Throughout my entire life, I thought that literacy is not a requirement for global citizenship, but strong recommendation. If I smile at someone, they acknowledge that I am feeling happy, which means I can share emotions with facial expressions alone. However, this is not enough to understand their inner mind. I believe that wisdom, courage,

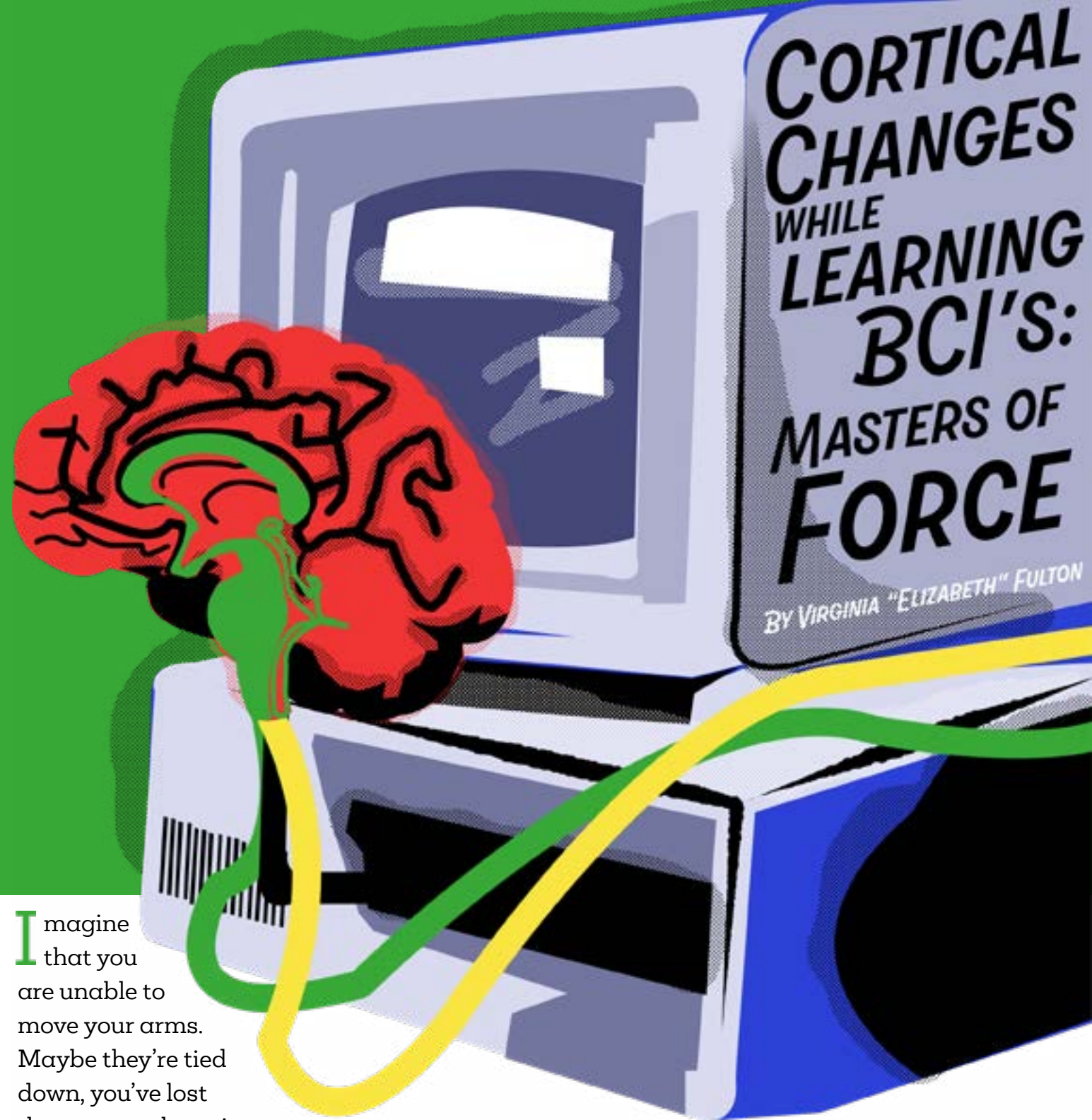
and compassion are necessary to listen to others, and literacy may be just one puzzle "peace" to empathize with them.

I might face more obstacles than I ever expected during college life, but as Dr. Ikeda states, " 'Goodness' can be defined as that which moves us in the direction of harmonious coexistence, empathy, and solidarity with others" (42). My current goal is to create value during my university days through dialogue with my friends. In SUA, I can converse with my friends not only from Japan, but also from other countries, giving me wonderful opportunities to share the value of my life with them. This experience taught me the significance of understanding different perspectives. Although learning a language seems like a recommendation, I want to study it more because I know that it provides many chances to share my values with others. Completing this global citizenship puzzle may take a lifetime. The pursuit is endless, but I will never give up. I will study more languages to communicate with more people, allowing me to attain more than one puzzle "peace" and to cherish my friends with empathy to grab the final "peace."

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Imagine that you are unable to move your arms. Maybe they're tied down, you've lost them, or you have intractable epilepsy like the seven patients that J. D. Wander and colleagues worked with. Wander et al. worked with these seven patients as they studied adaptations across multiple cortices (areas in the outer layer of the brain), while the patients learned how to perform a task in a brain-computer interface (BCI). Imagine

that through this BCI, you are suddenly able to move a cursor across a screen with just your mind—a bit challenging at first, of course. To do this, you have to imagine moving the cursor as if you were moving it with your hand (Ming, Dong, et al.). You might feel like a magician or a Jedi. You move the cursor, manipulating your physical environment, without actually

moving your body. Normally, when you manipulate your physical environment, you do so by sending a signal from your brain to your body. For example, this signal tells your arm to reach out for a doorknob. While you move and after you successfully reach the doorknob, your brain is receiving sensory feedback from your arm about where your arm is relative to your body, if it successfully reaches the doorknob, if it's on the correct trajectory, and so on (Tsay, et al., 1037-1049). This feedback is very important for learning a motor skill, as it gives you detailed information on how to correct the motion or do it better.

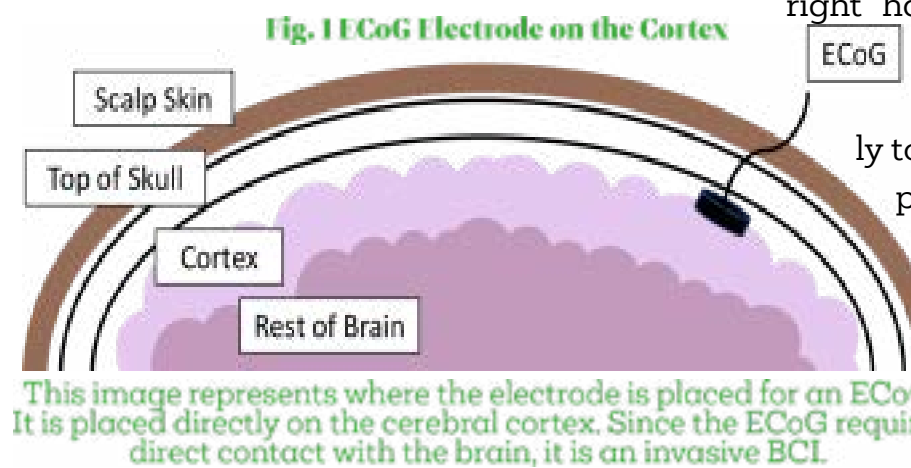
However, you do not receive this feedback when you are using or controlling a BCI (Wolpaw, 613-619). The only feedback the seven participants in Wander et al.'s study received was visual feedback as they moved the cursor across the screen. Behind the scenes, a researcher and doctors have placed an electrode directly onto your brain to measure the signals. This process is called electrocorticography (ECoG). Wander et al. placed the electrode grid on the surface of the brain, which measures activity across the cortex. The researchers of this study were measuring the patient's modulation of a specific range, 70-100 HZ, of the

high gamma (HG) band which encompasses 70-200 HZ.

Essentially, you think about moving the cursor as if you were moving it with your hand. Inside of the brain, a specific group of neurons would grow more active and the HG would modulate across the cortex (Ray, et al., 11526-11536). As discussed earlier, Wander and their colleagues were monitoring this HG modulation and then using it in the BCI calculations. These BCI calculations are what enable you to move that cursor across the screen simply by thinking about it without moving your body, as if you are, to continue my Jedi metaphor, "one with the force."

But how could Wander et al. do this? How exactly do they turn your brain's HG signals (representing neuron firing rates) into an action, a movement of something outside of your body? Generally, BCIs measure and utilize firing rates within groups of neurons in the sensorimotor cortex. Based on these firing rates, the BCI calculates the motion that you want to make. For example, when you think about moving the cursor, a group of neurons will grow more active and another will grow less active; if the group of neurons representing "left" has increased firing rates and the group representing "right" has decreased firing rates, the BCI

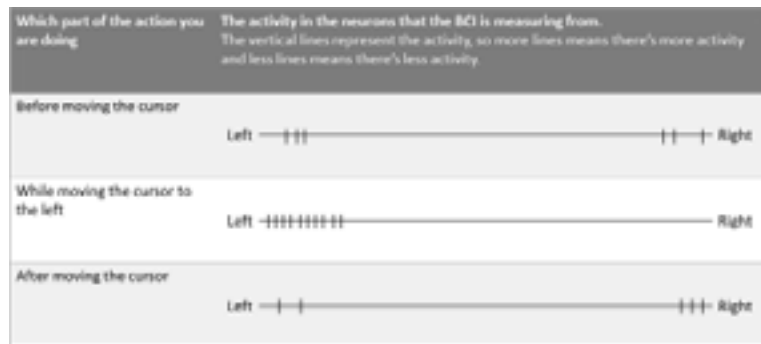
will be able to predict that you want to move the cursor relatively to the left (Bandara, Kiguchi). This process can be a little messy and is a difficult computation and interface because computers and biology don't always play perfectly well together. Part of learning how to use the BCI in-





cludes learning how to get the BCI to accurately move the cursor the way you want; as with many skills in life, you have to practice to get better.

**Fig 2. Neural Activity While Manipulating the BCI**



This image illustrates the changes in neural activity that might occur when you think about moving a cursor to the left. The neuron that represents the "left" movement in your brain will grow more active. The one that represents the "right" movement will grow less active. Note: This image is mock data, generated to be used only as an example.

Taking a step back, let's return to the fact that people can learn to control the BCI and get better at it with practice. Participants have described the experience of learning to control the BCI as very similar to how they would normally learn a physical action: they are cognitively focused on each part of the movement initially and over time, the specific steps of the movement become more automatic and they focus on the goal (Fitts, 381-391). You may have experienced this phenomenon while learning a new action: at the beginning, you have to focus on each step and part of the action, but as you practice it, you don't have to think about the individual steps any more than you do when you put your clothes on in the morning. So how does this change normally happen?

First, there are three distinct motor skill learning stages: cognitive, associative, and automatic (Fitts, Posner). Fitts and

Posner first described these three stages in their book *Human Performance* in 1967.

In the first stage, the cognitive stage, you are learning a new motor skill. Your movements are slow and irregular, and you have to think intentionally about not only the end goal of your movement, but also each step in the movement. For example, think about learning how to shoot a basketball. You don't instantly know the proper form and can't consistently sink a shot. First, you have to learn and practice the individual steps that combine together to get you that perfect form and get off that perfect shot. You have to actively think about how to properly pick up the basketball from your dribble, how to plant your feet, how to ensure your elbow is properly pulled in next to your body, how to hold the ball on one hand while balancing the ball with the other, and so on. You often have to narrow in on just one step of that movement, practicing properly planting your feet over and over until you get used to it.

As you get more used to some steps of the movement and can do those without thinking, you transition into the associative stage—stage two.

In stage two, some steps or parts of the movement become automatic and movements become smoother. When shooting the basketball, you don't have to focus as much on each individual step, yet you aren't consistently getting the whole movement quite right. You still have to think about some of the harder steps in the movement (such as properly aligning your arm and shoulders to get that perfect shot off), but you're getting better.

Finally, in stage three, movements are consistent and smooth, controlled mostly automatically rather than you having to consciously think about each step (Weaver). At this stage, you can sink a shot without having to focus on the individual steps of the movement. You do not have to devote so much attention to properly pick up your ball from the dribble, plant your feet, and align your arms as you pull the basketball up into position.

As you progress through these motor skill learning stages, different parts of your brain will be more or less active. In the first two stages (cognitive and associative), the prefrontal, premotor, and parietal brain regions are more active. In the last stage, the prefrontal, premotor, and parietal brain regions become less active. Instead, brain activity is predominantly in the cerebellum, which controls and manages more automatic movements, such as breathing and food digestion (Weaver).

**Fig 4a. The Lobes Related to Motor Skill Learning**

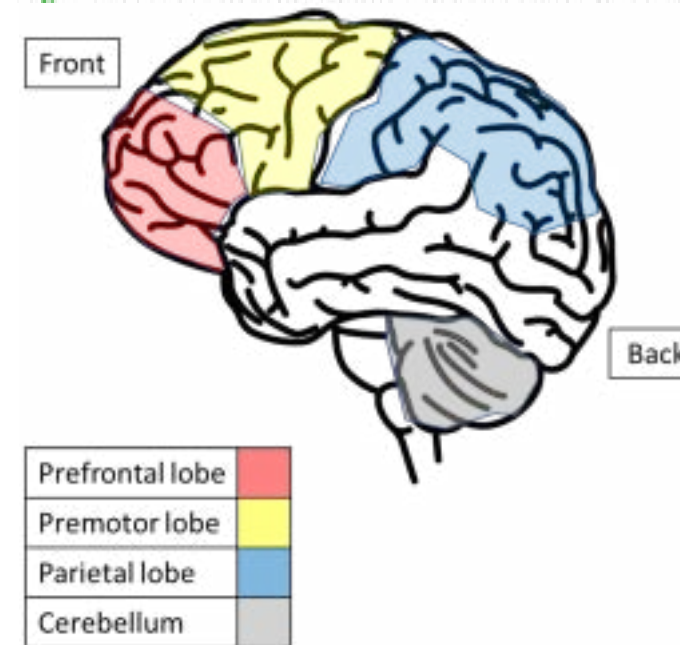
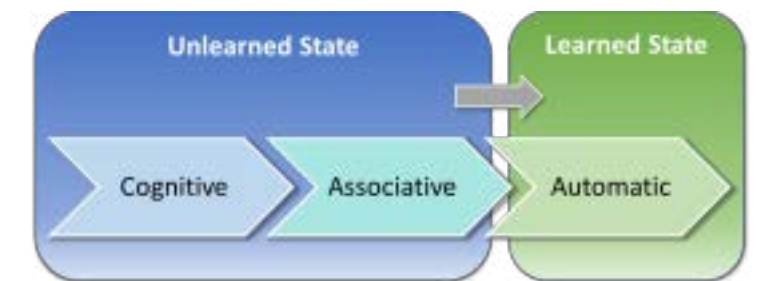


Image 4a visually represents the approximate location of the brain areas that are important in motor skill learning.

But does this, or a similar process, also happen during BCI motor skill learning? BCI motor skill learning is different from standard motor skill learning, of course, because it involves a computer and moving something without your body. Will the underlying neurological and cognitive processes, however, remain the same since they are similar processes?

That's what Wander et al. were investigating. They tracked participants' performance to note when they transitioned between unlearned to learned states; the unlearned state incorporates the cognitive and associative stages (stages 1 and 2) and the learned state is the automatic

**Image 3b. The Relationship Between Learning States and Stages**



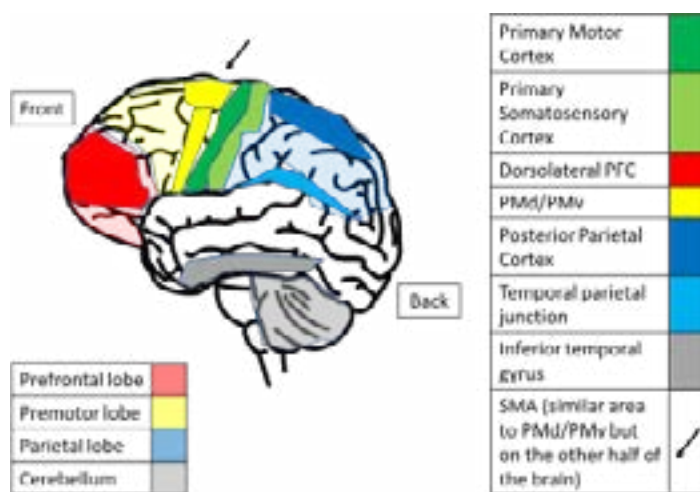
In this image, you can see an illustration of the relationship between the states (learned and unlearned) and the stages (cognitive, associative, and automatic).

stage (stage 3). Wander et al. also recorded activity from across the cortex, not just the sensorimotor cortex whose signals they measured and analyzed to control the BCI. Wander et al. measured the primary motor cortex (MC), primary somatosensory cortex (SC), dorsolateral prefrontal cortex (PFC), dorsal/ventral premotor cortices (PMd/PMv), posterior parietal cortex (PPC), temporal parietal junction, inferior temporal gyrus, and supplementary motor area (SMA).

Let's refer to those first five areas—the MC,

SC, PFC, PMd/PMv, and PPC—as “Learning Areas,” since those areas were more active while participants were manipulating the BCI during the unlearned state, while they were still learning how to properly perform the movement. During the learned state, Wander et al. found that activity lessened significantly in those Learning Areas. There are three general brain areas that incorporate those Learning Areas: the frontal cortex, the superior

Fig 4b. The Areas of the Brain that Wander and Colleagues Measured



Labeled above are the areas that Wander and colleagues measured from. Note the overlap of the first 5 brain areas on the right table (the Learning Areas) with the first 3 areas on the left table (the areas important in motor skill learning).

parietal cortex, and the posterior parietal cortex. This lines up with what happens in your brain when you learn a standard motor skill. Think back to when you read about the three stages of learning a motor skill: cognitive, associative, and automatic. During those first two stages, which align with the unlearned state, the frontal and parietal cortex are more active. In the third stage, the learned stage, those cortices are less active. Wander showed that a similar process happens during BCI learning. In other words, Wander et al. found that there were changes in activity across the

cortex during BCI learning. Those changes correspond both to Fitts’ stages of motor skill learning and to the areas of the brain previously known to be more active during motor skill learning. These results both support previous work and suggest that BCI learning is neurologically a very similar to, or possibly even the same process as standard motor skill learning. This link doesn’t make BCIs any less impressive or exciting, but it does illustrate that we can utilize our existing knowledge of neurological processes when we’re using BCIs to perform a similar task. We have a starting point of understanding what’s happening neurologically while learning how to move a cursor properly with your hand. We can use that knowledge to better understand moving a cursor without moving your body, just by thinking about it.

Wander et al. proposed that, based on their findings, more research can be done into changes in brain systems in living organisms—in vivo—using a BCI. What brain processes and changes would you be interested in learning more about? One potential exciting area for future research, especially when utilizing non-invasive BCIs, would be exploring brain activity while learning a first or second language. There are limitations in current BCI technology, especially for speech BCIs. Brain signals must be measured from across many cortical regions to figure out what you want to speak through a BCI (Rabbani, Qinwan, et al., 144–165). Speaking a language is more complicated than moving a cursor on a screen. Still, we might be able to use BCIs to study hearing or first language learning

at a young age, though non-invasive BCIs would be especially crucial to use in those studies. Invasive BCIs, like the ECoG, give the researchers cleaner brain measurement data, but are also riskier and can have more complications than a non-invasive BCI. Because of this complexity, invasive BCIs are often used with caution and with volunteers who will benefit from the BCI.

As well, there are some exciting current BCI applications that are benefiting the volunteers who are using them. For example, BCIs have been used in attempts to work around motor disorders or disabilities, such as a loss of motor control from a stroke or Parkinson’s disease (McFarland, Dennis, et al., 37–52). The BCI can enable people who have lost some motor control to briefly regain that ability and enjoy manipulating their environment in a way that many of us take for granted each day. Additionally, we can learn more about the details of these and other diseases through studying the BCI learning in these situations or even from understanding the natural progression of a disease over time in the cortex.

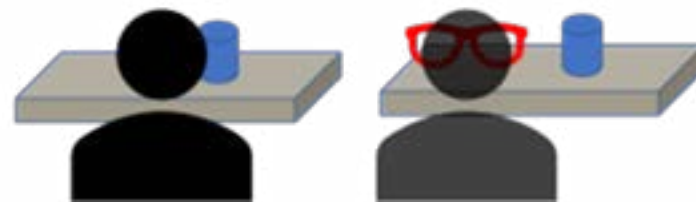
Another exciting potential area of research would be combining BCIs and Exergames. Under Dr. Anna Fisher at Carnegie Mellon University, PhD Candidate Cassandra Eng is currently researching the effects of Exergames on executive function in children. Exergames are cognitive games that incorporate an exercise that is related to that game. A fun example of an Exergame is one similar to the Virtual Reality (VR) game Beat Saber, but it incorporates a stroop-like element where you have to hit the blocks in the opposite direction than

you usually would (Eng). BCIs that incorporate a similar multidimensional task could illuminate both movement-related and cognitive systems as well as the systems related to the combination of the movement and cognitive systems (Exergame). Furthermore, they could provide insight into executive function, whose exact definition is currently the subject of discussion (Doebel, 942–956), but whose importance is widely accepted. Wander and colleagues also proposed that BCIs offer the opportunity to study the effects of sensory deprivation on the learning processes. For example, imagine that you were trying to move a cursor across a screen with your mind as you train to become a Jedi, but you could not visually see how well you were performing. This lack of visual feedback will likely affect your learning, as you often use sensory input to learn and improve such movements.

We can see an example of this through a study by T A Martin and their colleagues. Their study was researching the changes on the participant’s ability to throw an object while looking through prisms that shifted their visual field slightly to the side. Essentially, imagine you were wearing a pair of glasses that shifted everything you were seeing over to the right. The blue solo cup sitting on the table in front of you would appear to be a few inches to the right of where it actually was with respect to your body. Now, imagine trying to throw a ping pong ball into that cup. It would take you a little while to physically adjust to that change.

An important nuance in this study is that you aren’t supposed to think hard

**Fig 5. The Shift in the Visual Field from the Prisms (Glasses)**  
Before Glasses      After Glasses



In the image above, nothing has physically moved; you've simply put on the glasses. To you, it appears as if everything you can see (including the table and cup) has moved, because the glasses have shifted your perception of reality.

about trying to get the ball in the cup. Martin and their colleagues were interested in seeing the more “subconscious” correction, rather than a conscious attempt to correct for the shift that the participants knew is happening to their vision because of those glasses. Overall, this study demonstrated that visual and sensory feedback is important for learning and fine-tuning of motor movements. Behind the scenes, participants’ brains were over time “subconsciously” accommodating for that visual shift based on how accurate the throw was; when a movement wasn’t quite right, the brain would take note of that and try a new, slightly different movement, over time narrowing in on the updated motor movements necessary to successfully throw that object to the target (Martin, et al.).

While BCIs often don’t have most of your normal sensory feedback, they do still have visual sensory feedback on how well you’re performing. Martin and colleagues have demonstrated how important visual feedback is in learning motor skills. With that in mind, it would be fascinating to study motor skill learning without this visual or any other sensory feedback to further uncover if the brain learns in other ways.

In summary, BCIs are an exciting

technology that has many applications, some of which involve better understanding of the brain and its processes, systems, and changes over time. Because of BCIs, we can now study brain systems in vivo, and research suggests that learning BCI “motor skills” involves the same neurological processes as normal motor skill learning with our body. When you think about SciFi or ways we can use the advances in our society’s technology, keep in mind that budding jedis and magicians are out there, training right now, learning to move cursors across screens with just their minds or even speaking synthetically, just as you would do through using your own body.

## KEY TERMS

- Brain-computer interface (BCI): an area of technology which measures brain signals and utilizes those signals to control some computer-controlled action. BCIs can be invasive or non-invasive depending on which brain measurement technique they use.
- Invasive BCIs utilize techniques that measure brain activity from inside the body.
- Non-invasive BCIs utilize techniques that measure brain activity from outside the body, such as an EEG.
- Cognitive (difference from neurological): mental processes or matters such as memory, language, learning, etc. Generally, cognitive science is more abstract than neurological science; it is closer to the softer sciences such as psychology.
- Cortex/Cortices: often shorthand for the cerebral cortex, which is the outer layer of the brain. The word “cortex” can also refer to sub-parts of this area (such as the motor cortex).
- Electrocorticography (ECoG): a brain imaging technology similar to EEG that measures electrical signals in the cortex via an electrode grid placed directly on the surface of the brain.
- Electrode: a device which can measure and record electrical activity in biological tissues (such as the brain).
- Executive Function: a set of cognitive processes that are important for behavior control, including inhibitory control. Its importance is due in part due to findings suggesting that executive function in childhood predicts important life outcomes, such as academic achievement and long-term health (Blair & Razza).
- Exergames: physical activities that are driven by cognitive games provided technology, such as video games on Virtual Reality (VR) which involve some exercise related to the game.
- Hertz (HZ): a unit of measurement that represents one cycle per second. In the brain, there are waves of activity that are measured in hertz.
- In vivo - in biology, this phrase often refers to

research or work done on living organisms.

- Intractable Epilepsy: a condition where there are seizures that cannot be controlled with treatment. People with intractable epilepsy may be unable to stop shaking, have stiff muscles, or have other difficulties with movement. BCIs can be an exciting opportunity for people with intractable epilepsy or other disabilities that affect movement; through BCIs, they can sometimes perform movements that they were unable to perform with their own body.
- Modulate: vary or change the intensity of a resting state.
- Neural: matters relating to a nerve or the nervous system.
- Neurological (difference from cognitive): matters relating to the biology, chemistry, and neural parts of the nervous system. Generally, neurological science (neuroscience) is less abstract than cognitive science; it is closer to the hard sciences.
- Neuron: a type of cell also called a “nerve cell” that makes up the brain and nervous system. Some of these cells are how your body gathers information about the world around you and your environment. Other cells send motor commands from your brain to the muscles in your extremities. Other cells help make up the “circuit board” of our brain that perform computation and process information, from identifying what that strange smell is to doing college algebra to stroking that brush just right to make a painting come alive on canvas.
- Nervous system: a system of nerve cells and fibers that, for humans, includes our brain, spinal cord, and other nerves throughout the body connecting to the brain or spinal cord. Through this system, our body communicates to our brain and our brain communicates to our body.
- Sensorimotor Cortex: the area of your brain that processes most of your sensory (“sensori”) and motor information. For example, this area helps control your movement when you reach out to open a door. It helps you both physically move your arm and also perceive (sense) where your

arm is in space to ensure that you're properly moving it.

- Stroop effect: an effect where a basic task has stimuli or elements that are mismatching (or incongruent). For example, in the standard Stroop task, one reads words of colors that are written in different colors (e.g., "red" written with blue ink). You then have to say the color of the ink, rather than the word. This task can be cognitively difficult since normally, you would automatically read the word.
- Subconscious - relating to "background" parts of the mind that you are not fully aware of. In this paper, this term is used rather loosely to describe the general idea of processes happening in your brain that you aren't actively paying attention to; it is not used strictly scientifically.

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## INTRODUCTION

In a world of screens and instantaneous digital publishing, what is the role of zines? Zines are small, self-published DIY magazine-like publications that use original or borrowed images and text to discuss a wide range of topics. They are often characterized by their “scrappy messiness” (Piepmeier 221) or “anti-aesthetic.” They employ an informal style that reflects their DIY ethic and mirrors their roots in 70s punk culture. Zines can cover an unlimited variety of topics. Some popular topics, however, include personal hardships, being queer, feminism, political or legal issues, and popular culture (Knobel and Lankshear 3). Zines are often used to challenge established norms, provide social commentary, and as a means of self-expression.

The decision to create a zine is one that many still make, however. Zine Fests, such as L.A. Zine Fest and NYC Printed Matter Spring Zine Fair, where people share zines and creative ideas, still occur regularly. The continuance of the zine, however, suggests that they have advantages, challenging the 21st century’s primary focus on everything digital. Zines rebel against the cultural dominance of internet blogging platforms, providing similar benefits in the ability to self-publish, while also overcoming some weaknesses of digital publishing. These include providing a more intimate reading experience, giving creators “safety in-print,” helping creators avoid copyright and community standard restrictions, facilitating a community of creators, and allowing for more creative decisions.

## ZINES ARE INTIMATE

The essential materiality of the zine allows for increased intimacy. The physicality of a zine allows for the stimulation of senses which brings attention to the reader’s body, helping to promote emotional responses and full engagement. The sensations of materiality, such as feeling the texture of the pages between one’s fingers, smelling the paper, and hearing the pages turn, promote the complete engagement of the reader in what they are reading. The materiality of a zine also warrants feelings of personal possession and care. Although zines are a medium that is meant to be held, digital publishing has “made the material zine form more important, salient and unique” (Piepmeier 224).

Many zines are also handwritten, reflecting a unique feature of the creator that promotes connection. The handwriting in the zine is directly a result of the creator’s mannerisms, which allows for the zine to feel less removed from the creator. This personalized delivery is typically absent online. Personal touches on each zine, such as edition numbers, also allow for increased intimacy (Blake 37). The knowledge that this particular edition of the zine belongs to the reader can create further affection for the work. The increased intimacy of zines is evident in their materiality, handwritten text, and personalized touches, such as small gift items and edition numbers.

## SCRAPPY MESSINESS INCREASES AFFECTION

The genre of the zine also allows for a type of “scrappy messiness” to exist that promotes connection with the read-

er that authors online struggle to develop (Piepmeier 221). This sort of informal style is demonstrated in the zine “For Girls Who Cry Often.” On this page from the zine, the drawings are scattered and have an almost doodle, low effort quality. The text is messily handwritten and cluttered on the pages. The handwriting is often slanted and varies in size. This messiness, which reminds the reader of a diary entry or a notebook page, allows the viewer to feel more connected to the creator.

Ripped pages and collaging, further promote intimacy in a way that digital formats are unable. In this zine, titled “V,” details, such as the ripped pages glued onto cardboard, cut and pasted images, and visible tape, display this messiness in form that can bring the reader and the creator closer together. This messiness in presentation is a result of the zine’s paper construction that cannot be recreated as effectively online. Also, errors in zines are often evident. For example, in the zine series “East Village Inky,” the creator often adds notes that they forgot what they were going to draw in an empty space on the page and crosses out miswritten words (Blake 41). The presence of errors reminds the reader that the author is human and imperfect.

### **ZINES PROVIDE PROTECTION FOR MINORITY OPINIONS AND GROUPS**

The in-print, private and small distribution nature of zines provides the reader with safety that may not exist in online spaces. The internet and platforms like Facebook have allowed anyone to potentially reach a global audience. For many groups of peo-

ple, the internet can be a hostile place. When posts online, they often have very little control over where it goes. Zines provide an avenue for distribution that can feel safe through the increased creator privacy and control. Feedback from the reader occurs in more controlled ways that encourage civility. The topics often discussed in zines, such as feminism, queer issues, political discourse, and minority struggles, have been seen to be the prime target of attacks by the intolerant. Through hand or mail distribution, aggression towards an author is less common due to practical barriers to harassment.

Zines encourage pure self-expression and uncompromising sharing of opinions. As Blake states in her paper titled “Analysis of Twenty-First Century Zines,” “when makers don’t have to fear retaliation, they do not need to compromise the radical nature of their media” (59). Zines allow one to talk about personal topics and radical ideas in a space where they have more control and safety than in digital platforms.

### **COPYRIGHT AVERSION**

Blogging platforms, such as Facebook, have become increasingly strict with copyright infringement and community standard policing, clashing with the culture of artistic sharing and remix in zines. According to Facebook’s “Transparency Center,” on Facebook and Instagram there are “over 15,000 reviewers across the globe reviewing potential violations.” In 2020, Facebook removed



around 5,307,000 posts for copyright violations after they had been reported. While many of these posts are most likely plain stealing, it is also likely that many of these removed posts are non-malicious acts, such as the harmless sharing of a beloved movie clip with followers, an interesting image from a magazine, or a snippet of a song. There is often a lack of nuance in these copyright takedowns that may restrict creativity. Worries of plagiarism could lead to widespread artistic stagnation in a world where “creativity is a remix” (“Creativity Is a Remix | Kirby Ferguson.”). Zines, however, frequently play with copyright law in creative ways that relieve some of these worries. Zines “challenge the dominant trend toward proprietary informational rights, borrowing freely, rarely crediting mainstream sources, and usually crediting underground ones” (Sellie 46). They regularly use appropriated texts and images from other sources. For example, this image from the zine series “In-Appropriated Press” features a collage of different images without any regard for who owns them. Cut and paste is a defining feature of zines.

Alycia Sellie, discusses how “a zinester used a well-known text from Roland Barthes” with no regard for citation, placing the text in the middle of their zine (10). Sellie also highlights that while most zines have no mention of intellectual property, some use experimental forms of licenses, such as copyleft, Anti-C, and DIY licenses. These licenses attempt to allow for the free sharing and distribution of the zine. A zine might also use phrases to actively protest copyright restrictions. Other zinesters make

their own “DIY Licenses,” such as this zine named “Schism” from the New York State Library Mike Gunderloy Collection.

DIY licenses may not have the force of law, but they are effective in promoting respectfulness within the zine community and starting a conversation regarding intellectual property. This culture of relaxed enforcement and copyright activism is often not present in digital self-publishing with algorithms and human reviewers scanning content, highlighting a potential advantage of zine publishing for those who wish to push the boundaries of fair use.

### **ZINE’S ROLE IN FACILITATING HUMAN INTERACTION**

The community-based and collaborative aspect of zine culture can be seen as a welcome from potentially isolating digital publishing. Online self-publishing platforms have long been advertised to be effective at facilitating human connections, but there has been a considerable amount of evidence highlighting how they fall short of this. A study from the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine found that young adults who spent “more than two hours a day on social media were twice as likely to have perceived social isolation” compared to those who spent 30 minutes or less (Sandoiu 1). Those who spend more time on digital-self publishing platforms tend to feel more isolated than those who do not. Zines and print in general can help people satisfy this need for human connection. Zine sharing and creation events encourage people to come out of their homes and spend time with one another. When asked about the

motivations for holding zine events, one of the organizers of the 2017 L.A. Zine Fest stated that “feeling a little like our creative experiences were a little bit isolating” emphasized the need for spaces of creative interaction (French 2). In the 2017 L.A. Zine Fest, there was a section named the “Wonderspace” where a local art professor led workshops to teach the DIY creation of zines and other crafts. This section allowed people to work side by side, promoting connections that are usually absent when one is working on a blog or posting on Facebook (French 1-2). Zine events are importantly inclusive as well, welcoming “teenagers, children, adults, any age range, and every race” (French 3). Zine’s culture of community and in-person interaction can help individuals retreat from the potentially isolating world of digital self-publishing.

### *THE DIY AND CREATIVE CHOICES*

Zines and print publishing also allow the creator to make more creative decisions than many online publishing platforms. When self-publishing online, authors rarely have the technical expertise required to make a website appear exactly as they wish. Authors are forced to contract off web design to experts, pay large sums to use digital design tools, or use recycled templates on platforms like WordPress or Canva. This calls into question if the DIY ethic can exist in online spaces. As Chloe Parks points out, “if the digital carrier of user-made content is not created by the author/artist/zinester themselves—is it [the DIY ethic] even comparable?” (14). Is using a WordPress template truly DIY? DIY

is championed for the “distinct freedom of expression that comes from completely detaching oneself from corporate sponsorship or necessity” (Parks 14). In DIY subculture, there is a focus on authenticity, uniqueness, accessibility, and independence. Zine creation fits perfectly into the DIY principle. Zine creation does not require high upfront investment or skill. Their design is intuitive with simple cutting, pasting, and folding techniques. If one wants to move or add an image to a zine, they can simply print it out and paste it in any position they want on the page. Picking up a pencil and doodling is always an option with zines. It is not necessary to rely on expensive design software or coding expertise. Zine creators also have to make decisions, such as what size paper to use, what type of paper to use, whether to handwrite, typewrite, or word process, whether to rip or cut the paper, and how cluttered the page should be. All these choices lead to “a level of personal involvement that is not as often possible in electronic media” (Piepmeier 222). The existence of only a limited amount of templates and lack of tactical components on the web takes these decisions out of the hands of the creator. Each of the design choices a zinester makes also influences the way the content is read, allowing for rhetorical effects that may not be present online. As Anna Blake points out, “a small zine may be handled as an intimate object while a zine printed on a newsprint may feel less precious” (34).

This page from a zine named “East Village Inky” also uses the limited size of a page to emphasize the stress and conflict

present in the narrative (Piepmeier 224). There is a conflict between the size of the page and the amount of writing jammed onto the page. The writing is frantic and gets progressively smaller down the page, mirroring the wild emotions of the character. The materiality of the zine can be used strategically to aid the storytelling. The form and the content of the zine can be read together to create meaning and express emotions. These considerations are often absent on blog pages, where the page can be essentially infinite due to scrolling, eliminating space constraints. Content and form cannot interact as seamlessly. One can have a cluttered web page, but the option to easily zoom in is always present, and there must be room for navigation menus. Zines allow for true DIY publishing where the creator can make choices about every step of the creative process that enhances the authenticity, uniqueness, and rhetorical effect of the media

### *ZINE AS AN ALTERNATIVE*

Digital self-publishing has dominated the recent decades, pushing zines into sub-cultural spaces and encouraging scholars to question their continued relevance. Those who persist in zine creation and appreciation, however, rebel against this domination with purpose. Zines are intimate pieces that exhibit endearing messiness and human connection through materiality. Zines challenge traditional ideas of intellectual property, increasingly contrasting with the policies of digital publishing platforms. They foster human interaction and collaboration at a time when people are increasingly feel-

ing the isolating effects of prolonged social media consumption, and they also reward zinesters for their persistence with more creative decisions that allow adherence to DIY ethics and increased rhetorical effects. Digital publishing unquestionably has a significant place in the contemporary world. It has revolutionized authorship, spreading information further than many can imagine. Analyzing zines showcases some of the struggles that digital authors face, however, and emphasizes that there is still a place for older technologies in the world. As Chloe Parks states, “There are movements trending around the world for a return to simpler, more hand-made manufacturing as a rejection of global corporation and censorship, and zine-making certainly aids in that rejection...” (5). The zine in the digital age can be seen as a significant form of self-expression that invites the reader to look away from their screen and start creating.

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# THE INTERNET: PORNOGRAPHY'S ALLY, PEOPLE'S NIGHTMARE

KATHERINE PEPIATT

What is the cost of trauma? Not the physical and mental toll that the survivor endures, but what is the monetary value? How much is trauma worth? Currently, the abuse of child pornography victims is valued at a minimum of \$3,000.

Until the age of nine, Amy, whose real name is protected for privacy purposes, was sexually abused by her uncle. He lived next door to her family's house; he built her trust and then exploited her in the basement of his home—a home that Amy still cannot bring herself to enter to this day, a home where she was raped and photographed.

When Amy was nine years old, her uncle was arrested. In state court, he pled guilty to one count of rape and two counts of child abuse, receiving a twelve-and-a-half-year sentence. In federal court, he received a concurrent twelve-year sentence, pleading guilty to one count of child pornography (Bazon). With her uncle behind bars, Amy was left with the challenging task of piecing her life back together.



Diagnosed with both PTSD and depression, how could she move on? How could she trust or love? How could she live with what had happened?

These questions haunted Amy for years. They clawed their way to the forefront of her mind, reaching their prominence when she was seventeen years old. At seventeen, Amy learned that her uncle had shared her images with other people. She came to the shocking realization that people continued to exploit her trauma every day—people she has never met. Amy's photos are available across the internet for anyone to find, to see, to exploit.

Amy recalls, "I just felt so full of shame" (Bazon, par. 28). Who has seen her at her most vulnerable moments? In the article, "The Complex Experience of Child Pornography Survivors," researchers examine how the knowledge of continued exploitation impacts victims of child pornography. The authors study the psychological effects of enduring continued trauma. For survivors of child pornography, they find, "the lack of control over the ongoing sharing of their abuse images and the public accessibility of those abuse images can be one of the most difficult aspects of the abuse to overcome" (Gewirtz-Meydan et al. 239). In their study, they found that almost half of respondents identified that knowing these abusive images are still being shared presented challenges different from the abuse itself (Gewirtz-Meydan). Survivors of child pornography have the grueling challenge of enduring perpetuated trauma; they are haunted by the fact that they continue to be exploited by strangers. The accessibil-

ity of these photos is a major issue. Due to technological advancements, these images are all too easy to share and download. Distributing these compromising images on specific pornography websites or elsewhere continues the cycle of abuse for victims of child pornography because they must live with the fact that their exploitation is actively shared and watched.

For Amy, this is one of the hardest aspects of her trauma to overcome: "I think what bothers me the most is that my child sex abuse images are being used to groom and entice other kids to be abused. That hurts me so much. I feel so helpless for those kids, those future victims on and on forever" ("Victims Respond," par. 8). This is evidence that the sharing of child pornography via the internet immortalizes feelings of trauma and abuse. How can a survivor of child pornography overcome the fact that their exploitation is used as a tool to continue a cycle of violence and manipulation?

At age 17, Amy came to this appalling realization when the Justice Department sent her a crime-victim notice (Bazon). Someone had been caught with pictures of her; her pictures are ingrained into a web of exploitation. As Amy explained, "I know that my pictures are still out there forever haunting me, not letting me ever forget" ("Victims Respond," par. 8). With this crippling, sickening awareness, Amy scrambled to find some way—any way, to help her heal. Therefore, Amy and her family sought help from James Marsh, an accredited lawyer who works with survivors of sexual abuse, in the hopes that she could find a sense of justice under the law.

Together, Marsh and Amy began their fight for restitution. They found the missing piece of their puzzle hidden within a provision of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) (Bazon). Passed in 1994, the VAWA was the first U.S. legislation to criminalize domestic violence and sexual assault ("Violence Against Women Act"). Buried within this legislation, Marsh found a provision that "gave the victims of sex crimes, including child pornography, the right to restitution" (Bazon, par. 29). Under the Violence Against Women Act, Amy had a right to restitution if she could prove that anyone seeing her abusive images perpetuates her trauma.

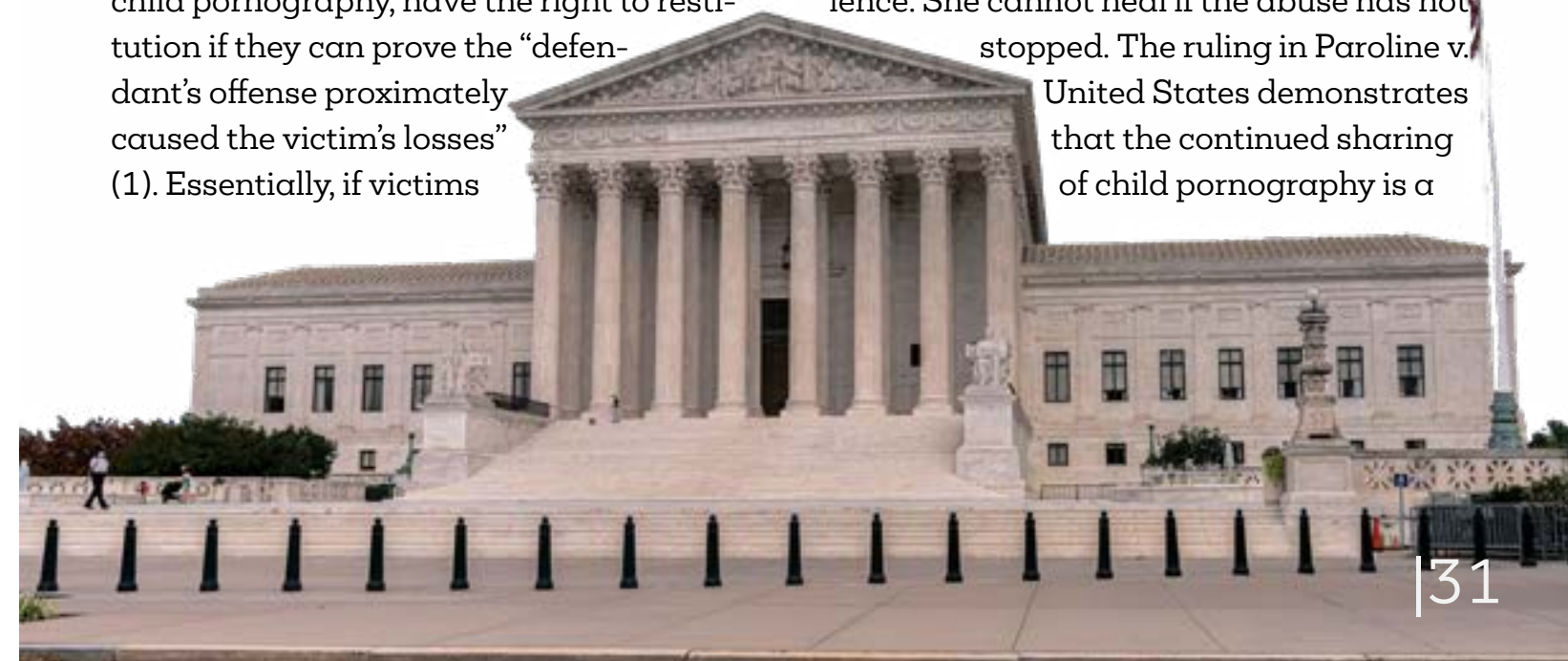
One of Amy's cases made it to the Supreme Court in the form of *Paroline v. United States*. Doyle Randall Paroline had been caught with child pornography, including two images of Amy (5). In a previous ruling, the district court denied that Amy had claims to restitution. However, in a 5-4 decision with two dissents, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of Amy in 2014. Their ruling stated that Amy, and other victims of child pornography, have the right to restitution if they can prove the "defendant's offense proximately caused the victim's losses" (1). Essentially, if victims

can demonstrate that the digitalization and continued exploitation of their images perpetuates their trauma, they are entitled to restitution.

During the trial, Amy gave a compelling speech on how the immortal life of these images continues to haunt her. She laments,

Every day of my life I live in constant fear that someone will see my pictures and recognize me and that I...will be humiliated all over again. It hurts me to know someone is looking at them—at me—when I was just a little girl being abused for the camera. I did not choose to be there, but now I am there...forever in pictures that people are using to do sick things. I want it all erased. I want it all stopped. But I am powerless to stop it just like I was powerless to stop my uncle.... My life and my feelings are worse now because the crime has never really stopped and will never really stop.... It's like I am being abused over and over and over again (12).

As Amy pleads to the court, she emphasizes the idea that every time someone views her images, it continues the cycle of violence. She cannot heal if the abuse has not stopped. The ruling in *Paroline v. United States* demonstrates that the continued sharing of child pornography is a



The Supreme Court ruling resulted in the Amy, Vicky, and Andy Child Pornography Victim Assistance Act of 2018 (AVAA). This act was created on the *Paroline v. United States* claim that “every viewing of child pornography is a repetition of the victim’s abuse” (“Amy, Vicky, and Andy,” par. 3). Guaranteeing survivors of child pornography a minimum of \$3,000 in restitution, this act provides survivors the ability to receive recognition of their continued trauma. Since it has been established that this vicious cycle of abuse that happens when images of abuse are shared exacerbates an individual’s abuse, the assumption is that this money will be used to access trauma resources and counseling. The money also helps to lend victims a sense of agency. With the passing of AVAA, for instance, Amy says she “finally began to feel that [she] had some power” (“Victims Respond,” par. 6). Amy’s fight to demonstrate that the sharing of child pornography is a legitimate form of trauma has led to important first steps in child pornography legislation.

The AVAA also establishes the need for an advancement in child pornography legislation. While the recognition of the continued trauma of child pornography survivors is beneficial, legislation must also be preventative. Legislation needs to directly address how technology allows for the continued sharing of child pornography, and there needs to be proactive measures taken on pornography sites to prevent the initial sharing of pornographic images of children. Before the internet’s invention, the spread of child pornography was better regulated, and the images were not immortalized. In

fact, Carissa Hessick—a law professor at the University of North Carolina—claims legislation was so successful that in the early 1990s, “the commercial circulation of child pornography images [had] essentially ceased” (4). However, in 1991, when the internet became readily available for public use, there was a drastic spike in the distribution of child pornography. In 1994, 61 defendants in federal court were sentenced for child pornography offenses while in 2011, there were 1,880 (Bazon). Yet the number of individuals sentenced nowhere near represents the number of children who continue to suffer in this cycle of abuse. In 2019, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children reported 69.2 million images and videos of child pornography (“The Children of Pornhub”). 69.2 million.

These horrifyingly large numbers at rapid growth demonstrate the role that the internet and technology play in this issue. Currently, of course, there is legislation that render child abuse and child pornography illegal. In fact, since the internet is such a common arena for the spread of child pornography, these violations fall under federal jurisdiction (“Citizen’s Guide”). The government recognizes the role the internet plays in providing quick and easy access to child pornography. However, the lack of regulation on internet sites and pornography websites plays a large part in the continued sharing of these images. This is a major problem because, as stated in *Paroline v. United States*, every time an image is shared, it causes emotional distress to the victim.

Amy recognizes that there is little that

can be done in her case specifically: “I know that not even the United States Congress can make that go away. You can’t erase my pictures and you can’t change the terrible things that happened to me and are happening today” (“Victims Respond,” par. 9). Yet, by enacting legislation that regulates pornography websites, other children’s continued trauma may be prevented.

One major issue with attempts to mitigate the spread of child pornography is that numerous pornography websites, like Pornhub, allow for content to be directly downloaded to a personal device (“The Children of Pornhub”). In his 2020 New York Times article, “The Children of Pornhub,” Nicholas Kristof highlights the gross lack of regulation on pornography websites. It is appallingly easy to find videos of children being sexually exploited. Since people can download content directly from the site, it is very difficult to know exactly who has what content. One woman that Kristof interviewed in his article claimed that “Pornhub became [her] trafficker” (par. 7). Sites like Pornhub continue the cycle of violence that these children have endured. As Kristof notes, “Pornhub has recently offered playlists with names including ‘less than 18,’ ‘the best collection of young boys’ and ‘under-age’” (par. 33). A logical conclusion to this important issue is to create heavier regulations for pornography websites. Content should be reviewed before it gets uploaded, and the download features should be disabled. In order to prevent the spread of these videos and images, the law must be more strict in their practices.

In another article, “An Uplifting Up-

date, on the Terrible World of Pornhub,” Kristof acknowledges that the solution is not simple. It will require a wide range of action in the form of government regulations and criminal prosecution. Still, some hope is on the horizon with currently proposed legislation that will tighten restrictions on pornography websites. On December 17, 2020, Jeff Merkley introduced the Stop Internet Sexual Exploitation Act (SISEA) to the Senate. The SISEA would require that all uploads of sexually explicit conduct on online platforms have verified consent from all participants and that all participants are of legal age to consent to sexual acts (Merkley). Additionally, all online platforms publishing pornographic images must explicitly state how an individual can request to remove content from an upload site (Merkley). When the SISEA was introduced to the Senate, it was read twice and subsequently referred to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation (Merkley). However, no action has been taken since the initial introduction. It is imperative that the SISEA remains at the forefront of legislative priorities because with this bill, there will be stronger regulations to prevent the internet spread of child pornography. This is an important step in stopping the perpetuated cycle of trauma that survivors of child pornography face as their images are distributed across the internet. Preventative legislation is the next critical step in working toward a world where the role the internet plays in the cycle of abuse for child pornography survivors ends. Amy continues to receive crime-victim notices in the mail, constant reminders that her

past continues to haunt her present. She has fought in over 150 court cases, winning over \$1.6 million dollars (Bazelon). However, no amount of money will allow Amy to truly heal from what happened to her. Every crime-victim notice, every court case, every dollar, is a stark reminder that she continues to be exploited. Amy's trauma should not be worth \$3,000 per sharing incident. It should be worth real change.

### **ADDENDUM**

The author and editors acknowledge that the evidence used in this essay are all examples of child pornography where there is a known adult abuser. While this evidence was appropriate to use to support the claim that preventative legislation is needed, it also narrows the scope of child pornography abuse. There are instances where underage children create and upload media themselves without full knowledge of the ramifications, and they must deal with the short- and long-term consequences of these actions. Additionally, child pornography can originate without a known abuser. "The Internet: Pornography's Ally, People's Nightmare" addresses a single instance of the child pornography crisis. As demonstrated, there is a distinct need for preventative legislation, but it is also important to consider the variety of ways that sexual exploitation can be uploaded and shared across the internet.

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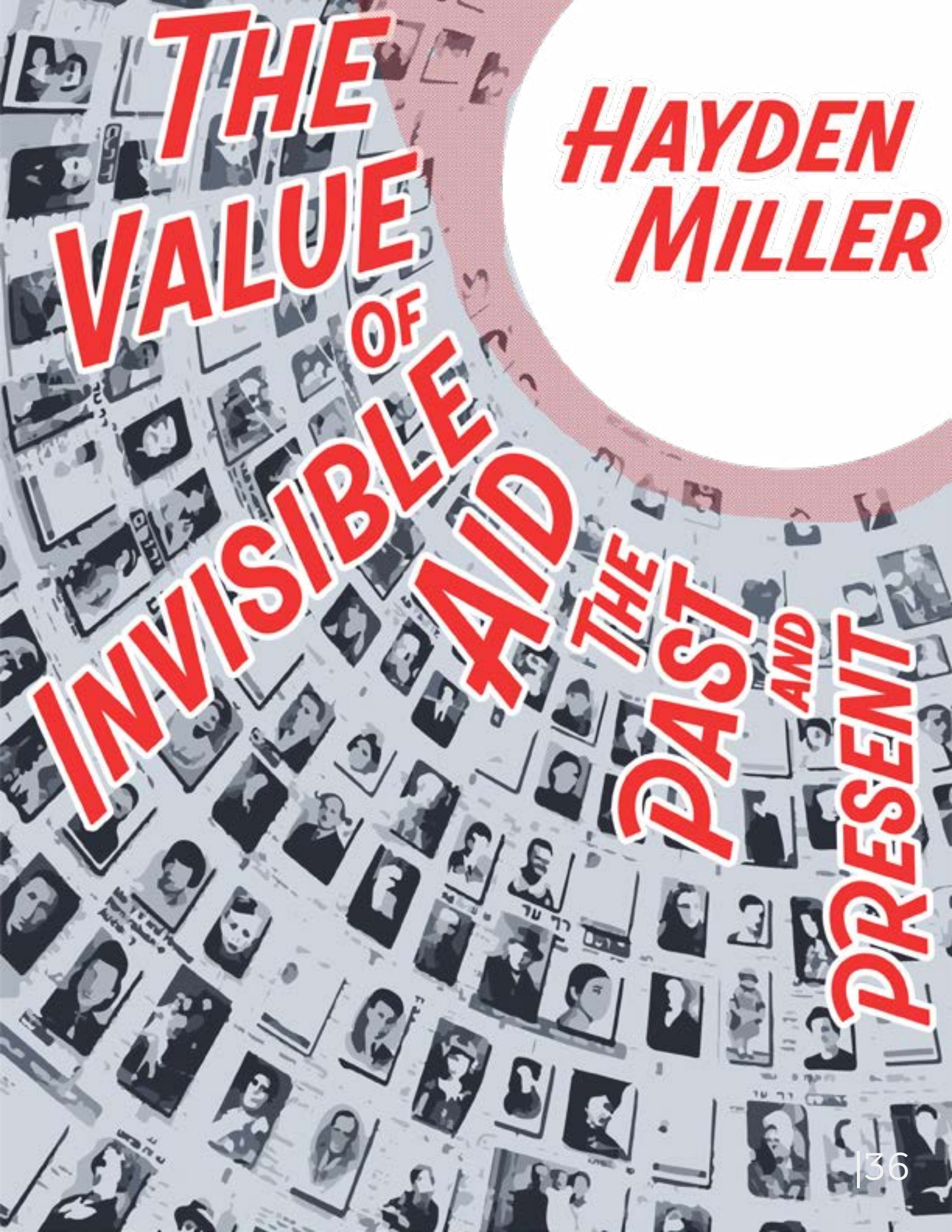
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## HAYDEN MILLER

*“Stand up for what you believe in even if you are standing alone” - Sophie Scholl*

In March of 1933, when Adolf Hitler attained the power to command the country of Germany, terror stormed the continent. He planned for Germany to become a war state and conquer all of Europe for the sake of the Aryan race, a supposed master race of non-Jewish Caucasians (“Hitler Comes to Power”). This meant complete alienation and withdrawal from any part of German society, along with a life painted in resentment for the Jewish people. This same year, Otto Frank moved to Amsterdam to start a company that produced a gelling substance to make jam. His daughter Anne joined her parents and her older sister Margot the following year. Shortly after, in May of 1940, the Nazis invaded the Netherlands, making life as a Dutch Jew extremely hard. Soon, Margot Frank would receive a letter to report to work at a camp in Germany.

The family immediately knew they had to move quickly or Margot would be one of the many sent off and never seen again. Johannes Kleiman, Otto’s friend and business partner, brought about the idea of a secret annex behind Otto’s company warehouse that could hide the family. The space was perfect for hiding the Franks until four other individuals joined and went into hiding as well. Although space was limited, they made it work for two prolonged years before their discovery and arrest on August 4, 1944. Before that day, there was a successful system of silently housing and hiding eight illegal Jews in an attic. Miep Gies happened to be one of the few who as-

sisted the Frank family. She had worked for Otto Frank’s company, Opekta, and often performed live demonstrations on using the product. Her occupation in the annex was to grocery shop with the help of Bep Voskuijl, who also supplied the individuals stowed away with clothing and language classes (Hearst 18). During the Nazi occupation, Jews were forbidden from running any businesses; Johannes Kleiman, who later obtained the nickname “Jo,” essentially became director of Opekta. Meanwhile, due to the ban, Otto secretly continued to direct the company, and eventually Jo became a member of the Secret Annex helpers (Hearst 12).

Jo and Victor Kugler were mainly in charge of the finances and safety of the hidden individuals; the two were both arrested for hiding and aiding the Jews. While in arrest, “Otto expressed feelings of distress for having the helpers involved in their hiding,” to which the helpers replied: “Don’t give it another thought. It was up to me, and I wouldn’t have done any differently” (Hearst 12). These individuals risked their own lives for the sake of those being prosecuted for something they were born into. While others stayed silent and watched the horror unfold, these heroes did what they could for as long as they could. In contrast to the secret annex which ended in the bloody hands of Nazi terror, there are countless stories of individuals who hid and survived or even escaped. I sit in this modern coffee shop writing an essay about what others suffered through and what my own family suffered from less than five generations ago. Chills rush through my body as I think of the hun-

dreds of family members who died under the terrifying Nazi rule. But if it wasn't for one man, one seed of aid in a cloud of evil, I would not be sitting here today writing this paper, and my family would have never existed.



Fig. 1. One year old, Sidney Aschkenas in Zurich, Switzerland

My great grandfather, Sidney Ashe, was born on January 29, 1915, in St. Gallen, Switzerland. His father, Yechiel Michel Aschkenas, supported the family of 15 as a salesman by selling pots and pans by horse and carriage and later became a wealthy merchant. His father was an avid scientist who served as a delegate during the First Zionist Congress in 1897 in Basel, Switzerland. He was close comrades with

Abraham Isaac Kook, who also served as an active Zionist and later the first Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Palestine.

This eminent Rabbi happened to be staying with the Aschkenas family in 1915. At my great-grandfather's bris, he was the sandek, the person who holds the baby, which is considered a great honor. An innovative and influential thinker, Rabbi Kook believed it was essential that young boys supplement Torah study with athletics and physical fitness. His idea was to take care of



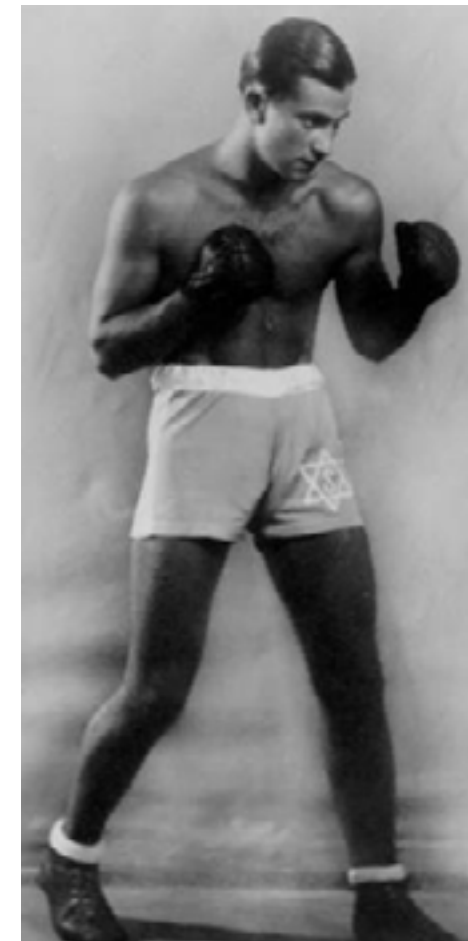
Fig 2. An Ashkenas family photograph, Sidney Ashe, one's on the bottom right

physical self as a way to show religious devotion. This philosophy may have influenced my great-great-grandfather because in addition to my great-grandfather's talent at boxing, several of his brothers were also athletic. The Aschkenas family moved to Cologne, Germany, where my great-grandfather, the youngest of 13, attended school and joined the Maccabee Jewish Boxing Club. This Club was one of the only two Jewish boxing clubs in all of Germany prior to the Holocaust. In the pre-World



War II era of exclusion and persecution, sports helped combat the ugly anti-semitic stereotype of Jews as weak. By the mid-1930s, Jewish athletic clubs in Germany had 50,000 members and were among the largest organizations of German Jewry. Athletics helped preserve the self-respect and self-assertion of Jews across Europe. With the rise of Nazism and the passage of the Nuremberg Laws, which excluded Jews from every aspect of German Society, my great-grandfather could not stay in school, get a job, or earn a living. As a teenager, my great-grandfather left to live with his older sister in Metz, France, where he turned to professional boxing to earn an income. As a 5 foot 8 inch welterweight, he boxed in money tournaments across Europe and was named the amateur boxing champion in Switzerland in 1933. Returning to his mother's bedside in Germany for her final days in 1936, he was arrested by the Gestapo as a "spy."

A SS Nazi officer recognized Sidney in jail as a past boxing opponent and friend, and to save his life, he arranged for him to be picked up by a truck the following day. When the truck arrived, Sidney and several other men were transported to the countryside. Waiting for them was a long line




of German officers who were drafting men into the army. Sidney defiantly declared himself as a Jew, and embarrassed by their mistake, they returned him to jail. When the SS officer heard what had happened, he smuggled Sidney out of Germany to Switzerland by train. His parting order was "don't ever come back." He did not. Instead, my great-grandfather immigrated to the United States in 1937 with the help of a sister who was a U.S. citizen. He found his new home in Brooklyn, New York, and changed his name from Sidney Aschkenas to Sidney Ashe. His sister had found him a job on an assembly line for four cents an hour but, frustrated by the low pay and his limited English, Sidney quit on his first day.

When his sister warned him that he would be deported if he did not have a job,, he once again began boxing professionally to earn his keep. He was fighting monthly, unlike current fighters who annually fight. By December of 1938, he had won nine of 16 matches. At this time, however, the box-



ing community in New York was becoming extremely dangerous. The Jewish and Italian Mafia would place bets on Sidney's opponent and threaten his sister for Sidney's safety. Sidney became a truck driver and eventually met and married my great-grandmother, Adele Schaikkewitz. The two moved to Norfolk, Virginia, because antisemitism and anti-German feelings still lingered after the war. so driving around with a German accent was not easy. In Norfolk, the two opened a jewelry store, had three children, and later moved to a nearby town, Virginia Beach. Twenty years later, my great-Uncle Michael began to wonder what really happened to our family in those four years. He searched for ways to get access to records of the deaths of his relatives. And in 1998 he received this letter from the Red Cross.

 **American Red Cross**  
January 26, 1998

Mr. Michael Ashe  
729 Vanderbilt Avenue  
Virginia Beach, VA 23451

Our Reference: ISS-H-56747  
Sought Persons: Carla/Yaya ASCHKENAS  
Roschen/Rosi ASCHKENAS  
Josef L. ASCHKENAS  
Regina R. ASCHKENAS

**The Holocaust and War Victims  
Tracing and Information Center**  
4700 Mount Hope Drive  
Baltimore, Maryland 21215-3231  
(410) 764-5311  
Fax (410) 764-4638

Dear Mr. Ashe:

After carefully reviewing your tracing request, we submitted it to the International Tracing Service (ITS) in Arolsen, Germany. The ITS is administered by the International Committee of the Red Cross. With over 47 million documents in its archives, it is the largest repository of original Nazi documentation in the world. The ITS has provided the following response:

Josef Aschkenas was committed to the Concentration Camp Dachau from the Concentration Camp Auschwitz on September 1, 1944, Prisoner's Number 95344; was transferred to the Concentration Camp Dachau/Kommando Kaufering (date not indicated), to the Concentration Camp Flossenbürg on January 7, 1945, Prisoner's Number 42420; died on February 6, 1945 in the Concentration Camp Flossenbürg/Kommando Leitmeritz.

We regret to inform you that no information is available about the other three persons for whom you are searching.

We know it is distressing that after years, even decades, of searching, answers remain incomplete. Because so many documents were either lost or destroyed near the end of World War II, there are inquiries for which the ITS cannot provide answers. Fortunately, additional documentation from the Nazi era continues to be shared with the ITS. We will keep your case open and automatically let you know if we receive any new information regarding your request.

If you have any questions, please contact your local American Red Cross chapter.

Sincerely,



Steven Mandell  
American Liaison Officer for the ITS

Sadly, there were only records of Josef Ashkenas, Sidney's eldest brother. The other records remain unknown in the gaping depths of erased history. Countless names, souls, families that neither I nor anyone will ever know, lost among the millions upon millions of lives, gone but unforgettable.

My great-grandfather's story is one of the few that successfully made it out alive. However, the suffering of Jews never ended and probably never will as long as the reigns of antisemitism are intact. In 2018, the U.S. experienced a wake-up call when a white supremacist gunman opened fire on Pittsburgh's Tree of Life Synagogue as congregants were engaged in worship. The attack claimed 11 Jewish lives and is evidence that antisemitism is still alive and well in the world today. I even recall moments in my own life where I was mistreated for the fact that I was born Jewish. My story begins in my days as a young schoolgirl in Virginia Beach, Virginia. Throughout my educational life, I was always the only Jew. I was the only person to receive glares and stares during the one week we discussed the Holocaust. I was the only person who received absences and persecution for missing tests on Rosh Hashanah. My first personal experience with antisemitism began early on in middle school when my own peers found humor in uttering jokes of, "What's the difference between a pizza and a Jew? A pizza doesn't scream in the oven."

In some sick way, I chuckled back at them, as the feelings of shame melted into my skin. My parents had always taught me that being Jewish was supposed to be a special thing, but it never felt that way. High



around the corner, and my Jewish identity was put to the test as sketched, scratched, and carved swastikas covered every bathroom stall and desk; it was unlike anything I had ever seen. How could this have been allowed? How was a Jewish girl supposed to be okay and thrive as a student in this environment? Jewish friends were non-existent (except from Hebrew school, of which I had

all of six students in my class), and it felt as if my entire Jewish identity had been erased and ripped from me. I was fortunate enough to have a Bat Mitzvah, but that weekend served as the only Jewish experience any of my friends had ever shared with me. It is truly scary to think that only a few generations before me, my family was both escaping and perishing from one of the most extreme genocides in history. Being the only slice of Judaism someone has ever experienced was always an interesting task of mine. Educating those who had never heard or seen any part of Judaism baffled me. Since these dark times of my Jewish adolescent identity, where it felt as if the only thing that came from being Jewish was humiliation, I have grown immensely. I am not only stronger because of the bullying, but also more confident in who I am, not only religiously but in all areas of my life. Shining light upon my own culture is something I will continue to do and carry on with me my whole life.

The Holocaust and World War II will always be an impactful time in history. We pray something like that will never happen again, especially around this time of year—a time of giving and reflection. Yes, people across the world are giving gifts, donating, and doing charity work, but we must not forget the people on this planet who are helping all year round, not just in charity but in activism, representation, and helping our planet and animals. I wish to be someone's invisible aid one day and be the impact that changes someone's life. Genocide is still prevalent today as many cultures still face prejudice and alienation. Countless races, religions, and ethnicities suffer

treacherous obstacles daily for something they were born into. The concept of help is a cycle. Humanity sees people help, and that makes them want to help as well. The helpers of the Secret Annex, the SS officer who helped my great grandfather escape death, even me illuminating my religion to the eyes of the uneducated—these acts are so valuable. Do not be the coward hiding from predatory entities, ignoring the acts of bigotry in this world.

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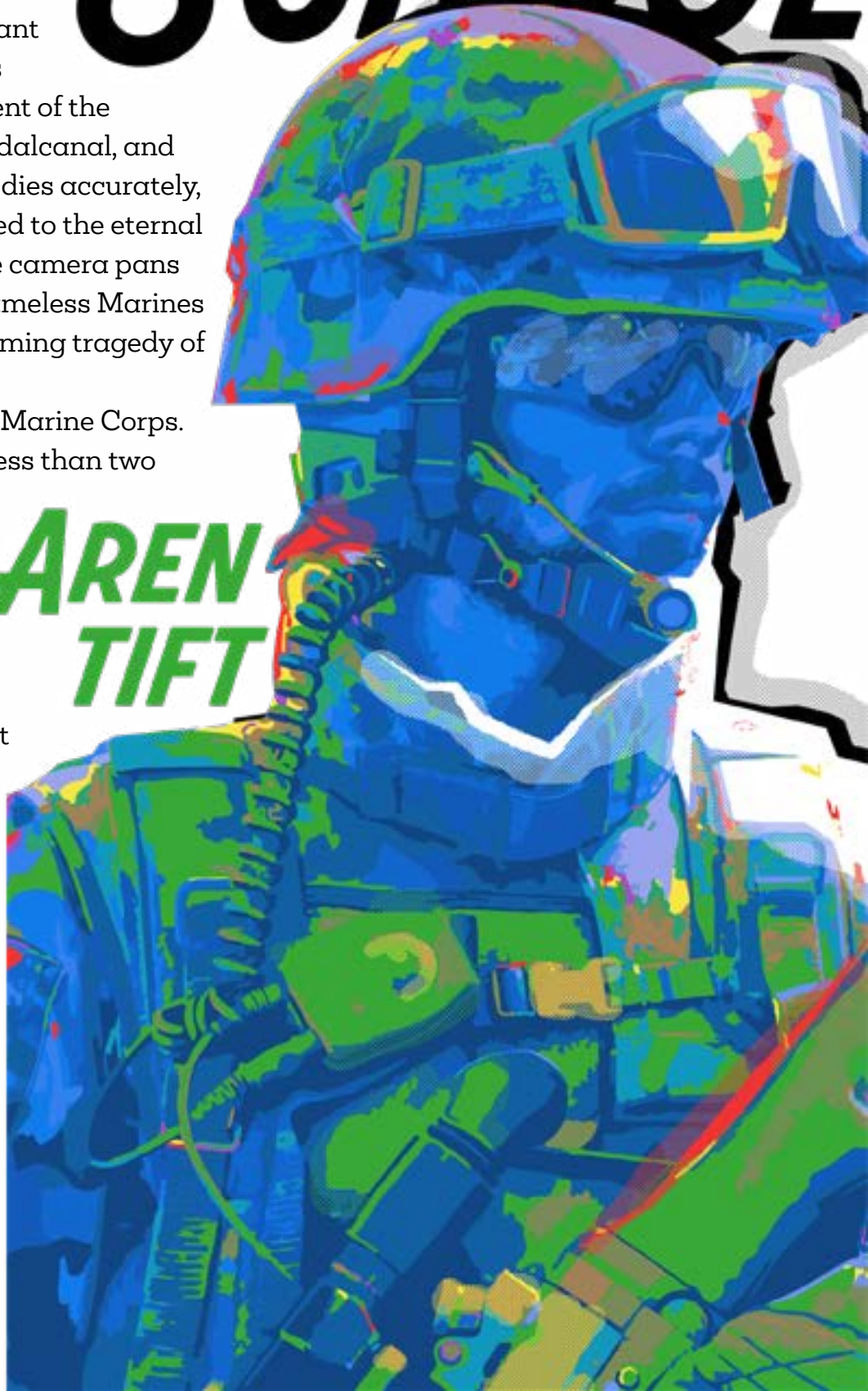
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# FINISHING SCHOOL

The film *The Pacific* (2010) highlights the brutality of Iwo Jima. Although brutality is at the forefront of the film, there is one scene of glory that stands out. The scene spotlights five Marines raising the flag together on Iwo Jima. *The Pacific* shows Sergeant John Basilone, a Marine Corps legend, dying. He was a recipient of the Medal of Honor, a hero of Guadalcanal, and a role model. On the screen he dies accurately, struck by a mortar and resigned to the eternal in slow, agonizing fashion. The camera pans skyward as countless other nameless Marines perish beside him in the consuming tragedy of warfare.

My dad belonged to the Marine Corps. For eight years, I saw him for less than two months of each year, never consecutively, and never more than a short period of time. He was a helicopter pilot for the Marines. He was always gone, sent on deployments, serving as a combatant in Iraq and sometimes as an instructor in Florida, California, and Pennsylvania. My mother grew tired of the constant moving and one day he departed, leaving the rest of the family in Clifton, Virginia. Growing up, I was told it was the best thing to be done; to give my father to the Marine Corps. In hindsight, it probably was. That never made it hurt less. That hurt did not

AREN  
TIFT



end when he left the Marine Corps. It did not even end when I joined the Marine Corps. When he first left, I was proud, I was young, I was naive. I was born on a Marine Corps base in California. My childhood was spent wanting to be nothing more than a Marine. I ran around with a beat-up wooden musket from Williamsburg, pretending I was fighting pitched battles. I was always the victor, or I proudly made my last, glorious stand in the woods behind my home. When we visited my dad, I was overjoyed to be surrounded by Marines. When he got the chance to bring us to a Marine Corps expo in Washington D.C., I was exhilarated by climbing on the vehicles, wearing a flak, and manning a tank simulator with my older brother. When he left for Iraq, he dedicated one day each to his sons. When it was my turn, there was only one destination: the Marine Corps Museum in Quantico.

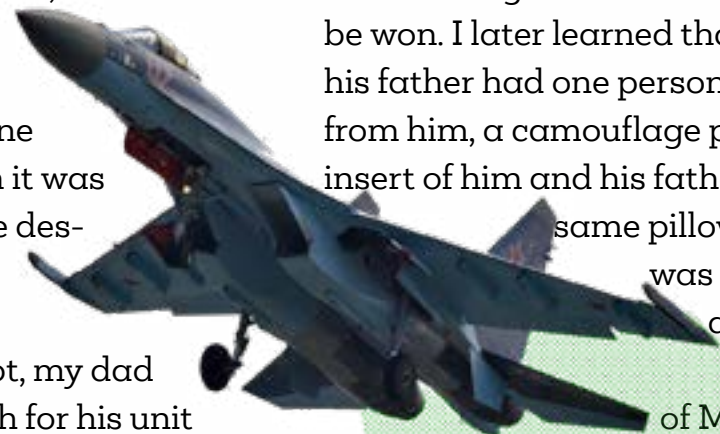
Once, as a senior pilot, my dad got to choose the flight path for his unit as they left a nearby base. He decided it was best to break more than a few rules and fly his Huey helicopter right over our little townhome while I ran outside feeling the surge of wind and hearing the beating roar of the rotors. I became infatuated with the Marine Corps, obsessed even.

I quickly began consuming war movies at a young age. I cannot remember the first, but I vividly remember seeing *We Were Soldiers* (2002) early on. I loved it. Sure, they were not Marines, but seeing the action and heroism only furthered my persistence. On a visit with my dad, I got to see *Saving*

*Private Ryan* (1998). I was much too young, not even 12, but I was amazed by that final last stand. I did not fully comprehend those first 30 minutes of the movie where they land on Omaha Beach on D-Day. Where a young man lays with his guts spilling out and all he can cry is “Mama! Mama!” Fighting down to the man seemed honorable, respectable, maybe even desirable.

One day, while at my friend’s house, his mother came in stoically. She said that the kid across the street had lost his dad to a suicide bomber. We were angry. Our pretend vengeance was running around the woods with BB guns hunting the terrorists and winning that war which could never be won. I later learned that the kid who lost his father had one personal possession from him, a camouflage pillow with a photo insert of him and his father. I had the exact same pillow. When my dad was sent to Iraq, I saw a news report. I saw the footage of Marines enduring the most real-life battle yet. There were helicopters flying over. The same as my dad flew! I remember my mom wearing a grim look.

In middle school, things changed for me. I had become an angsty teenager. I saw everyone else had a dad and questioned where mine was. I was also a little bit older now, so I got away with watching more mature movies. I progressed to watching *The Hurt Locker* (2008). Things became a little more real watching the Hollywood interpretation of a jaded soldier whose business was defusing the Improvised Explosive





Devices (IEDs). This knowledge of knowing IEDs were the main killer in Iraq and Afghanistan tainted my idea of war. There were no grand, romanized battles. A single blast and you were dead, dying, or forever torn.

I saw *Black Hawk Down* (2001), a depiction of a fight in Somalia centered around two helicopters getting shot down. Helicopters like my dad flew. I realized when a helicopter is shot down, the priority of the pilot, my dad, is to drive the cockpit into the ground so the crew can survive and continue fighting. I watched *Fury* (2014) in theaters. Any number of people can remember the valiant Sherman tank crews' final standoff. I only remember the crew washing the splattered organs of the killed crewman within the tank and the sight of a crewman losing his head to a shell when they began fighting. Violence was real to me now. War was real. My dad returned from the Marine Corps.

I began learning about the War in Vietnam, however it was not a film that initially got me interested, it was a book that my dad recommended. *Lima 6* is a story of an infantry officer deployed to Vietnam, it captures the essence of the Vietnam War better than most. The Marine Corps made it a required reading for years. One passage always stunned me, the young infantry officer is removed from his front-lines platoon and sent to be the receiver of casualty reports.

Every day, he hears names he is familiar with from his own unit. Every day, he hears whether they were killed or wounded and how it happened. Every night, he

hallucinated seeing the Marines he heard over the radio as ghosts. If they died, they appeared with that missing leg or arm. If they were wounded, they were there crying in agony. This shook me. It caused me to watch every Vietnam movie I could. The first being *Apocalypse Now* (1979), a Vietnam classic. It does not just examine insanity. It satirically and cruelly depicts the futility of Vietnam. There was also *Hamburger Hill* (1987), which showed how the U.S. threw every bit of military might to take a single hill in a jungle of Vietnam. Then came *Full Metal Jacket* (1987).

If you have seen *Full Metal Jacket*, you know. You have seen a slice of Parris Island, the Marines' foundation on the eastern seaboard. The place where Marines are made. It is a God forsaken swamp, its only role is to inflict pain and build endurance. Yet, this film was bold because it showcased what boot camp was like for Marines. The best actor in the movie was R. Lee Emery, the term actor being used loosely. R. Lee Emery was formerly a Marine Gunnery Sergeant who was hired as an advisor to the movie. He got the role and most of his dialogue was unscripted because it is hard to capture the character of a Marine without being an actual Marine. As someone who endured bootcamp, he captures a drill instructor perfectly. *Full Metal Jacket* almost didn't need a second half of the actual Vietnam War. It nailed it. From the physical pain and mental exhaustion to the depiction of suicide, some of the events that this movie captured may have long changed, but the memories are still there on that ter-

rible island. It showed the institution of the Marine Corps for what it was, and still is. A finishing school in violence.

I entered high school with this new understanding and my dad now returned. I hated it. I hated him. How could this be the truth? In high school, I began watching documentaries. I read too many books that told the truth. The military, and the Marine Corps were factories to produce violence. I learned of how brutal the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan were. I made the mistake of reading, and later watching, *Generation Kill* (2008), which covers in painful detail the invasion of Iraq by Marines. The book shatters the clean images of Marines holding a city against jihadist onslaught that I got from news footage. It was 19-year-olds having to run through a country, seeing burning vehicles and hundreds of enemy bodies left in the desert, unclaimed and rotting. I made the mistake of watching the real footage of war when I was 17. I saw uncensored clips of fighting, bombings, and brutality. With ISIS, I saw first-person footage of U.S. soldiers being killed. For the first time, I saw war not through the lenses of entertainment, but for what it was. War is gory and depressing. Most of all, war is disturbing.

The grand irony is that this experience made me want to join the Marines more. No, I didn't want to see war. Yet, maybe I did, just to say I had access to a special club. Joining the Marines at the lowest rank was the perfect revenge on an absentee Marine officer father. It could be an act to take those years of his absence back by being absent myself. I was going to enlist.

The only problem is that he encouraged my enlistment. He offered going to college for a year as his only piece of advice. I went to James Madison University. I stayed for two years. I watched *Once A Marine* (2020), a gut-wrenching mix of combat footage and the aftermath of war from actual Marines. They speak frankly on PTSD, substance-abuse, and loss. Then I knew. I had to go. I had to know. Finally, he advised me to go to the Marine Corps Reserves and see what it was. So I did.

I left, spending over seven months going through training. I spent less than 12 consecutive hours in the civilian world during that time. I became a Marine. My dream. Only as I should've learned long before, it is not a dream. I returned home changed by reality. Those imaginary battles I acted out as a child were real. During those seven months, I had learned from enlisted Marines what war was like. What losing your best friend is like. I had seen *The Pacific* (2010) before and after leaving. It had a different meaning before than it does now. It shows the grotesque actions of World War II as Marines fight the Japanese. There was one scene that resonated with me when I returned home. It depicted two friends meeting, one who had survived the fighting in many early battles, and one who was to depart for the next onslaught. The newer Marine envies the veteran and he reflects that he has to go, that he was lucky, and how he was a hero back home. The older can only see just how little his friend knows of what is to come. My romanticism of combat was dead. I was back at James Madison University and life was different. I

had no battle to run towards, nothing left to prove to myself, or anyone else. I am a Marine after all.

I found myself watching Valley of Tears (2020), a dramatic recount of the Yom Kippur War in Israel, with my dad. For the first time he began to talk about Iraq and Afghanistan and what it meant to him. My dad told me of a student and close friend that he had trained when he was a flight instructor. The first day of the invasion of Iraq, my dad lost him. When his friend began landing, a large dust cloud kicked up from the rotors. The helicopter did not balance out and crashed within seconds, killing his friend and all other Marines aboard. Within 24 hours of the onset of war, he was deprived of ever seeing his buddy again. From 2002 to 2009 he lost more students and friends to combat or preventable accidents than unavoidable circumstances. After over two decades of war and service, he had nothing to show for it. No war won, and no great accomplishment as a consolation for all that he gave up. Maybe it was my own revealing experience. Maybe it was the intersection of reality and Hollywood that made it clear. My personal relationship with him

and the Marine Corps was misunderstood. He did not leave our family behind because he wanted to; he had to. I was not obsessed with war because I needed justification or vindication; I needed to know why. Now, I had an answer.

Ultimately, it is bittersweet. I have a life that I do not want to abandon like my dad had to. I can be anything. Yet, that childlike, nostalgic voice still haunts my thoughts, "You are going to be a Marine." Not just a reservist, but a full-blown Marine just like my dad. When news of war in Ukraine broke at my unit, my 18-year-old counterparts were elated. A chance to go to war. Silently, some older, more worn part of me knew it is not like the movies. There is a real possibility I could see them lay in that unnatural, rigid position of death. A chillingly real position films rarely capture. There was footage shown in training of a young Lance Corporal being dragged limp, already dead, in Iraq that still haunts me. A picture is playing in my mind of my dad's friend being zipped in a body bag halfway across the world while I was barely a baby. I will always answer the call, but I have not forgotten the difference between what is shown on screen and what is real. I lived the consequences.

In Full Metal Jacket, R Lee Emery utters one of his final lines, "Most of you will go to Vietnam. some of you will not come back, but always remember this: Marines die, that's what we are here for, but the Marine Corps lives forever and that means you live forever." When I first heard these lines, I may have believed in the romantics of immortality. Now, I hear the sadness in

his voice gained from living through it. The Marine Corps may live forever, but some of us will forever have to live through the Marine Corps.



# Special Section on Mental Health

The RhetTech staff proudly presents the volume four special section on mental health. Our staff acknowledges that many of these topics are difficult to read for some members of our audience. We encourage you, at any time, to take a step away from a piece that weighs heavily on you.

In the last few years, the world and how we interact with each other has changed rapidly and without warning. Simple interactions like shaking a hand, giving a hug, or being in the classroom have become riddled with nuance. The undergraduate experience is meant to be a time to learn more about oneself and the world we are surrounded by. For our writers and staff, global change has not only drastically shaped how we have received our undergraduate education, but has also shifted what we have taken from it. Although we have learned new meanings for perseverance and connection, mental health has also been brought to the forefront of conversation. For this volume, our staff made the intentional decision to add new perspectives to this conversation by dedicating the special section to mental health. The special section includes various narratives and research on different mental health topics, with a special note on how mental health affects not only one person as an individual, but also affects the people around them. This section takes on mental health from several angles, from demographic considerations to gaslighting to eating disorders.

Through the dedication shown by our RhetTech team and our authors, we are happy to share this section with you. We hope you enjoy these pieces as much as we have and that this section sparks intentional reflection among our readers and generative conversation brought forward.

We also want to express our very sincere thanks to the members of the 2021-2022 RhetTech Editorial Board. This year has gone extremely smooth solely due to your hard work. We are grateful not only for the ways we have grown together in our field, but also for how we have grown together in friendship. It's been a pleasure to work with all of you, watching your ideas flourish and your contributions leave an impressive mark on the future of our journal.

RhetTech Managing Editors,  
Krystle Brown and Emma Loscalzo



About 0 results (0.51 seconds)

Did you mean:

**A**nxiety Hack | Calm Toolbox” is the most-watched YouTube video from the mindfulness meditation app, Calm. This simple, one-minute video about staying grounded in your five senses is approaching 14 million views.

Seeing mindfulness reduced to “quick hacks” saddens me.

Behind Western mindfulness products, like the Calm app, is marketing that focuses on promised end goals for customers: “Get our app, buy a subscription, and feel better right away!”

Most people focus on end goals — and love, love, love quick, easy fixes. I once saw someone on social media say, “I’ve been using a meditation app daily. WOW, I feel so relaxed now!” as if they needed to announce how they’ve achieved their goals to the world.

With mindfulness apps, many people want a convenient meditation tool that makes them feel better, help them to relax, reduce anxiety, and have more restful sleep. However, the marked benefits of mindfulness are by-products, not end goals. Mindfulness was not intended to be a tool to feel

**MINDFULNESS IS A LIFESTYLE, NOT A HACK**

better and numb our problems.

Mindfulness may be a trend in society today, but it stretches back thousands of years, with roots in Hinduism, Buddhism, and traditional Asian cultures. Hinduism, in fact, doesn’t get enough recognition for its role in the concept of mindfulness. As early as 2300 B.C., Hindu followers in the Indus Valley, near today’s Pakistan studied texts and yoga practices that embraced the essentials of mindfulness, including acceptance, meditation, and contemplation.

Between 400-500 B.C., Siddhārtha Gautama, also known as the Buddha, founded Buddhism in India. Being aware and present in the moment is the core of this religion. Practicing mindfulness brings followers to a greater state of conscious-

ness, which brings followers closer to enlightenment. This is the goal of mindfulness, not quick fixes for everyday emotions.

Mindfulness entered the mainstream Western world in the 1970s when Vietnamese Zen Buddhist Thich Nhat Hanh made mindfulness accessible to all audiences with his literature. Meanwhile, Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn, a professor from Massachusetts, implemented it into a science-based stress reduction program in the medical field for patients.

Here are my thoughts: Anyone can adopt mindful living, with or without religion, but please respect its Asian origins. I don’t want it to be whitewashed and exploited through cultural appropriation by the Western world.

Mindfulness has survived for thousands of years and spread outside Asia; it makes a difference in people’s lives! Mindfulness is a lifestyle. We don’t stop being mindful when our dedicated meditation session ends.

A mindful person embraces wholesome, thoughtful living has heightened awareness and focuses on the present moment.

Look no further than one of the Asian roots of mindfulness: Zen Buddhist monk Sen no Rikyu’s Japanese tea ceremony, called Cha-no-Yu. Tourists in Japan get hyped about this popular cultural tradition, but they must have patience. The ceremony stretches on forever! The preparation, sitting down, tea brewery. If someone hands us a cup of tea, some of us would want to get it over with by gulping it down, then move on to the next thing occupying our minds.

The tea ceremony teaches us to respect and enjoy the process of having a cup of tea. Sure, it can reduce our anxiety and make us feel relaxed, but those are by-products; those are beside the point. The point is to adopt a mindful mindset in all we do.

According to [Dr. Tamami Shirai](#), a lifestyle medicine researcher at the University of California, San Diego, many Asians have traditionally carried out their daily lives in mindfulness without even trying. Even the most mundane rituals are done with mindfulness: washing the dishes, driving to work, waiting in line at the grocery store, eating a plate of frozen blueberries. Mindful living concentrates not on finishing these things, but on the actual work in the process.

But a lot of us, especially if we live in modern Western lifestyles, mindlessly whiz through these activities, eager to get stuff done and move on. Living like this means we’re never really living. Our hectic thoughts drive us to somewhere other than the present. We keep running without living. When we live as though our busy schedules are chasing us, we can’t take the time to remember that we are alive —breathing in each moment. Mindfulness helps us become more aware that we are living, human beings. That’s why many meditation practices focus on breathing, body scanning, and using the five senses to observe our surroundings.

By being mindful, we simply enjoy being alive. We appreciate everything around us and become more thoughtful about what we’re doing.

When I eat my daily frozen blueberries, I

savor the organic sweetness and thank the sun, soil, farm workers, truck drivers, and Costco for making it possible. I even think about how I'm absorbing the sun's energy through these blueberries. I exist because of the sun and earth. Any relaxation that I feel is a by-product. My true intention lies in my wholesome understanding of life and relishing the present.

Contrary to popular Western belief, mindfulness not only welcomes the good things in our lives, but also the bad. Especially the bad! Mindfulness doesn't silence the painful feelings and thoughts in our minds — it exposes us to them. We want to believe mindfulness is about a quiet mind, but it's the complete opposite — it can get noisy in our heads, even when performing a quiet meditation.

But we welcome the noise. It's difficult though, especially for the beginner, because we tend to fear our bad thoughts and feelings. By being aware of them, we prove that we aren't afraid and can make peace. Running away will only make us more fearful.

[The Miracle of Mindfulness](#) by Vietnamese Zen Buddhist monk, Thich Nhat Hanh, describes the decaying body of a dead human in detail. The mindless among us would want to turn away and stop thinking about a disgusting image. But being mindful of the body means welcoming the gross feelings, overcoming them, and accepting death as natural. Death isn't as scary as our thoughts and emotions make us feel.

This also goes for other painful thoughts, emotions, and judgments that

become conscious to us anytime, whether we're in the middle of a taxing life problem or sitting still on our sofa. Anxious or overwhelming thoughts can exaggerate the truth, whether or not they are based in reality. They can overwhelm us, unless we take them on with mindfulness. We train our brain to accept their presence in our minds and let them pass, as fleeting as fat clouds in a bright blue sky. Mindfulness toughens us up against these kinds of thoughts, by building our resolve, resilience, and antifragility.

As a result, being mindful helps us put things into perspective and act on life problems with grace, calmness, confidence, wisdom, and even speed. Letting our minds run amok is useless. Let's say while I'm browsing my Instagram page, out of nowhere, I get upset because my follower number is lower than most content creators in the travel blogging community. Instead of mindlessly believing the emotion (Everyone is better than me. I suck at social media!), I can pause and call out the emotion, which will prevent it from taking over my mind. Once I am aware of the emotion's presence, I can clasp my hands together, remember that the process matters more than the end goal, and get back to posting. Many of our thoughts and emotions are random, meaningless fluff.

They manifest without our conscious decision. But we can still recognize them for what they are, lead a mindful lifestyle, and tap into our living, breathing moment in the present.

In the face of inevitable problems, notice how wise and strong you've become!

It's okay to practice mindfulness in dedicated meditation sessions, whether you are plopped on a pillow doing a short breathing exercise by yourself or following lectures from a meditation app. Consider these as your gateway to a mindful lifestyle. But don't limit your mindfulness to short-lived techniques. There's no right or wrong technique, either.

Meditation apps and yoga bore me, so I never do them.

On some mornings after waking up, I'll spend a mindful minute sitting quietly on my bed. Sometimes at night, I will consciously scan my body from head to toe for a few minutes. That's really all the time I dedicate to full-on meditation practice.

I don't need dedicated sessions because my life depends on being mindful of every waking moment, considering I live with obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD), social anxiety, and intergenerational trauma. From my therapist and select books, I've learned how to adopt mindful living while having chronic mental illnesses. When learning about mindfulness in a general sense, I love learning from books, whether it's *The Mindfulness Essentials* by Thich Nhat Hanh (gentle and sweet) or *Everything is Fucked* by Mark Manson (not so gentle and sweet!)

Even certain films, indie meditative documentaries such as *Baraka* and *Samsara*, inspired my mindful living, with their intricate soundtrack and contemplative scenes captured all over the world. They stay on certain shots for a long time because the viewer is the narrator who interprets them in their own mind. That's why no narrator

voiceover is teaching you anything. (For your information, these are my favorite movies of all time. Hollywood can get outta here!)

Whatever you choose, never forget the point of being mindful: to live with intention throughout your day, month, year, and lifespan.

If you hack your way through mindfulness, you'll miss the entire point. Stop favoring the end goal. We spend far more time in the process — so enjoy it.

I'm an unapologetic Asian with mental health issues including, but not limited to, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), social anxiety, and intergenerational trauma. Treated OCD, social anxiety, and intergenerational trauma, that is. I want to assure the Asian American and Pacific Is-

even more prevalent. Asian Americans are facing a growing hatred because people have falsely associated the Asian race with COVID-19, all because the virus first took its toll in China. Being afraid of stepping our doors for work, school, errands, and travel is a heavy burden. What if someone yells a hurtful racial slur at us? Shoves us to the ground? These recent fears are just a

# To My FELLOW

lander (AAPI) community that it is always okay to seek professional mental health services. Now more than ever, please consider it. From March 2020 to February 2021, Stop AAPI Hate has reported nearly 3,800 anti-Asian hate crimes. Far more crimes haven't been reported at all. These incidents range from racial slurs to physical attacks, including being shoved to the ground or coughed on. The Atlanta spa shooting on March 16th 2021 resulted in the murders of six Asian women have made concerns of anti-Asian hate



## ASIAN AMERICANS

fraction of the racism towards the AAPI community in the United States. The history goes back centuries. Damaging stereotypes have been perpetuated throughout history, like the docile Asian who never speaks up or the Asian who never expresses emotion. Then, there's the asian model minority myth, which pigeonholes Asian Americans as successful, high-earning profes-



sionals, such as doctors or engineers, who don't show weakness. This stereotype puts pressure on Asian Americans who would rather be someone else.

Meanwhile, Asian Americans can face an identity crisis, torn between American culture which embraces individualism and Asian culture which embraces collectivism. Due to the lack of positive AAPI representation in the United States, AAPI are left with an identity crisis. Because some Asian Americans grow up with all white teachers, role models, and even book characters, they may suffer from low self-esteem. They can be conditioned to believe that they are inferior to white people. Their environment has denied them the chance to learn from role models who look like them.

Even the past can lurk into the present. Unresolved emotional issues can pass on to the next generation, known as intergenerational trauma. My parents may have survived the Vietnam War, but they still live with a heightened sense of danger. They have unknowingly conditioned their child — me — to excessively fear the world. There's also a chance that their traumatic

experiences in Vietnam have changed their brain chemistry, which can be passed down to my own brain. It's no wonder that everyday things can trigger my brain's emotions at a more intense level.

Between the anti-Asian hate crimes, stereotypes, historical racism, identity confusion, and intergenerational trauma, there is too much for the heart to handle, especially if they have been left unsolved for a long time. Long-term feelings of anger, rage, sadness, despair, and loneliness can be a result. That's where mental health services should come in.

Unfortunately, traditional Asian cultures have deemed mental health as taboo. Either mental health doesn't exist or it is heavily stigmatized. Your family may look down on you with the hurtful, false attitude that mental health problems are a sign of weakness. Saying things such as "You need to suppress your emotions and feelings. Get over them. You'll be fine." Because Asian cultures are family-centric, individuals may depend on the family — and sadly, their lack of helpful mental health advice — instead of mental health professionals.

The irony is that many Asians have not been raised in a familial setting where they can talk openly about emotions, feelings, or thoughts with their family members. These weighty subjects are being suppressed even further. Sadly, this means lots of Asian Americans are living with unresolved mental health issues. Although I acknowledge this statistic from the American Medical Student Association, it still pains me that a leading cause of death in young Asian Americans is suicide.

I believe our generation has the power to change things around.

I believe you can be the catalyst who rises over all the challenges of being an Asian American or Pacific Islander in modern American society. You can resolve your own conflict and trauma between the generation before and after you.

You don't have to be alone.

Your journey begins by going to the office of a mental health professional. Therapists bring unresolved problems to the surface, ones that you never knew about. You can come out of a therapist's office with more stability in your mental health, history, and place in life. I made the mistake of keeping my OCD thoughts and behaviors to myself. It wasn't until I couldn't stand them invading my trip in Western Canada that I woke up with the inevitable destiny — I really needed a therapist! Thanks to their help, I learned how to cope with my chronic OCD. Right now, I am visiting a culturally-competent Asian American therapist who is helping me sort through my immigrant experience and messy history to improve my low self-esteem.

I've learned a lot about my mental health issues while understanding my identity as a second-generation Vietnamese American from my therapists. I feel like an Asian reborn; one who is ready for anything that comes my way.

I understand your fears about seeing a therapist. After all, your family may not support you, and may even shame you. The stigma in our culture and society wants you to be quiet about your mental health.

Understand that your family and society may have falsely conditioned you to feel hesitant about mental health services. After all, ancestral attitudes are outdated, not taking today's dire circumstances and Asian-specific mental health issues into account.

Your mental health was never their responsibility.

It's yours.

Today you can trust mental health services, which have been built upon growing scientific knowledge and experience with real patients over the decades. You may be an Asian who respects family, culture, and tradition; but you are also a human being who is programmed to be social, not to deal with problems by yourself. Even if you don't think you need mental health services, you might want to try it out. You could have unresolved issues and traumas that you aren't even aware of. They could be causing your unwanted physical and mental symptoms. Your therapist will guide you on the right track towards recovery. Unpacking your issues takes time, patience, and most of all, grit. But believe me, it's a rewarding journey. You will be freer, wiser, and more resilient than ever before.

In today's world, lots of people are saying, "Stop AAPI Hate" and "Stop Asian Hate." I would also add, "Stop AAPI Reluctance Towards Mental Health Services."

This is your time.

It's time to stop bottling up your thoughts, emotions, and feelings.

It's time to defy the hate from society and history.

It's time to break away from the outdated, false attitudes about mental health. It's time to create positive change in your generation and the next. It's time to be responsible for your mental health.

It's time to go see a therapist.



# OK?

issue  
no. 1

## reach out.

how to find the  
right therapist  
for you.

## comfort gamble

when binge  
eating takes  
over

## plant therapy

healing  
power of  
gardening

let's figure it out.

## A Note to You:

*This magazine covers some heavy topics such as depression, schizophrenia, and eating disorders. If at any time you feel triggered or overwhelmed, put the magazine down and step away. Take a few deep breaths, go on a walk, talk to a loved one, or journal.*

*When you feel up to it, come back.*

*We'll always be here.*

*Sincerely,*

**Princess Jackson**



**Feelings don't die**



**They multiply.**

**journaling™**  
Daily self-reflection

**Keep them at bay**



**With an entry a day.**

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A photo essay by Princess Jackson examines a binge eating episode of a college student.

*\*This issue is presented to you by sad fashion week.\**

You're not

**SAD**

You're smiling! You're still cracking jokes. You look happy.

You're doing good in school. You secured an internship for this summer. You have so much you're working on.

**You don't look like it.**

sad fashion week by princess jackson

## Bad Reception



Image Courtesy of Chuck Hodes/FOX

**Literature, movies, and TV shows give many people their first impression of those with mental illnesses. Our first column explores bipolar disorder through the portrayal of Andre Lyon from the TV series Empire.**

According to the [Mayo Clinic](#), bipolar disorder is characterized by extreme mood swings. However, contrary to popular belief, these do not occur in a short period of time. People with bipolar disorder experience episodes of **mania** and **depression** that can last anywhere from a few days to a couple of months. These are usually separated by periods of normal moods.

During a manic episode, people feel euphoric and have a high amount of energy. They can get agitated easily and have a decreased need for sleep. It's

also common that someone will make impulsive decisions such as going on shopping sprees or putting themselves in risky sexual situations. Hypomania is less severe than mania, in that people may not have any trouble functioning at school, work, or in their relationships.

Depressive episodes are quite the opposite. Someone might experience a loss of interest in activities that they used to enjoy and feel hopeless about life in general. They might have trouble sleeping and concentrating on tasks.

Andre Lyon, from the hit TV series Empire, is a character that struggles with bipolar disorder. One thing the show does well is showing the fact that someone can be successful and have a mental illness. Andre has a degree from Wharton Business School and serves as the CFO of his father's company.

In the first season, Andre displays symptoms of both mania and depression. He uses the Empire's account to buy a Lamborghini while the company is in the middle of a financial crisis. In the same season, he stops taking his medication because his father never acknowledges his success.

### KEY WORDS

**DEPRESSIVE EPISODE:** a period of time where someone feels profoundly hopeless or sad, usually characterized by lack of interest in activities that once excited them, changes in sleep patterns and ability to think or concentrate, and possibly suicidal thoughts

**MANIC EPISODE/MANIA:** period of time where someone feels euphoric and on top of the world. They have a high amount of energy and are more prone to making impulsive decisions such as going on shopping sprees when they can't afford it or having unprotected sex.

**HYPOMANIA:** a less severe form of mania

While the writers of Empire did a decent job of illustrating the symptoms of the disorder, they failed to combat the stigma of mental illness in the black community. In later seasons, Andre's character is reduced to an erratic and cunning businessman.

The dramatization of his illness perpetuates the notion that people with bipolar disorder are simply "crazy." This discourages people from seeking the treatment and support that they need because they are afraid of being met with hostility or insensitivity.

## First Aid: Plant Parenting



Image courtesy of Canva

With the onset of the pandemic, more people have been turning to indoor gardening - and for a good reason! [Research](#) has shown that spending time with plants provides several health benefits. Here are 5 reasons why you should pick up a shovel if you haven't already!

### 1.Reduces Stress

A [study](#) in the Journal of Physiological Anthropology discovered that caring for indoor plants makes people feel more comfortable and soothed. Participants were split into two groups and given different

tasks. One group repotted a houseplant while the other completed a task on the computer. Participants that worked with houseplants were found to have lower heart rates and blood pressure, while those on the computer saw a spike in theirs.

### 2. Improves Air Quality

Not only do plants convert carbon dioxide to oxygen for us, but they also remove harmful toxins from the air! In the 1980s, [NASA scientist B.C. "Bill" Wolverton](#) found that houseplants can remove up to 87% of toxins within 24 hours.

### 3. Increases Productivity

Always getting distracted? Buy some plants to decorate your workspace. In a study by the University of Exeter, employees saw a 15 percent increase in their productivity when plants were placed in the office. This effect was also found in college students who worked in a green work environment.

### 4. Promotes Healing

Patients that had plants in their room felt less anxiety and fatigue after their surgeries, according to a study by researchers at Kansas State University. Patients experienced lower blood pressure and heart rates and required less pain medication. Most studies about the healing nature of plants have been done in hospital settings, but similar effects may occur at home.

### 5. Gives You a Sense of Accomplishment

A study in an assisted-living facility found that residents experienced an improved quality of life after learning how to take care of plants.

"In my experience, anyone who plants something will then take better care of it and nurture it—being able to nurture is part of the human experience and brings joy," says Gwenn Fried, a horticulture therapist, in an interview with Prevention.com.



Depression can  
**GOOD** haunt you on the  
**DAYS.**

Don't let one day  
invalidate your  
experience.

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## Write Path

*Recipes from My Mother*

A personal essay about growing up with a mentally ill parent.



**I**n elementary school, my mom was usually in the kitchen making dinner as my sister and I walked home. We could smell whatever she was cooking as we made our way down the driveway. Fried chicken. Pork chops. Cabbage. Greens. It never failed to pick up my spirits after a long day.

**TW:** schizophrenia (hallucinations), bipolar disorder, chronic illness

When she wasn't cooking, you could probably find her watching the Food Network or the Travel channel. At every family gathering, my cousins would always ask my mom to cook the food. Everyone's favorite was her macaroni and cheese; it was a staple at every event. At one time it was my comfort food, but I've since grown to dislike it.

My dad used to work the night shift when I was younger, so my sister and I didn't get to spend a lot of time with him. Most of the time, we stayed with our mom. She taught us to read, write and count.

***The only thing she didn't get to teach us was how to cook.***

Things started going downhill once my dad was laid off from his job. Money started getting tight- the five of us had to survive off of unemployment checks and Food Stamps. My parents were savvy enough to pull it off but not without it taking a toll on them. My dad spent most of his time outside of the house, doing odd jobs like fixing cars and landscaping to make extra money. My mom's mental health started to take a turn for the worst.

When I was around nine or ten, I was sitting in the living room one day when I heard my mom screaming. Rushing in, I saw that she was sitting on the bed, shaking from head to toe. She gestured over to the corner with a trembling finger and said that a man over there trying to hurt her. All I saw was her vanity. I remember relentlessly trying to convince her that he wasn't actually there. But I also remember doubting myself.

***What if he was really there and I couldn't see him?***

A couple of years later, my mom started abusing alcohol. She hid underneath the covers most of the day, only getting up to go to the bathroom. At its worst, I could only talk to her early in the morning before she started drinking or late at night when she finally sobered up. Asking her something as simple as the time could solicit a storm of criticisms and insults. Our relationship with our mom became distant despite the fact that we were all living under the same roof.

However, I still found myself checking in on her throughout the day, trying to convince her to take care of herself. My mom and I were both avid readers, so I would

bring her books and magazines from the library to encourage her to do something besides lay in bed. I would always make sure to bring her the latest issue of the Food Network Magazine.

It took a while before she finally gave in. I knew things were starting to look up when she asked for certain books. The first few were by Anthony Bourdain, one of her favorite chefs.

This "up" was one of many. Over the years, her health has fluctuated without much explanation from her doctors. While she takes medication for her mental illness, I cannot say if this has helped her much because she still feels depressed most of the time. In addition, she has neuropathy which makes it painful for her to walk or do anything with her hands. She's also on dialysis which only increases the pain. While her condition can get her down at times, she is doing a lot better than she was a few years ago.

Rather than recipes, it feels like my mother's condition has been passed down to me. Helping to take care of her at such a young age has made it hard for me to detach myself from her situation.

***I feel lost in my other relationships if I'm not taking care of or fixing the other person.***

I couldn't fully enjoy my first year of college because she had convinced herself that I abandoned her. I held myself back from experiencing a lot of things such as making friends, dating, and partying because I would feel guilty for enjoying time away from her. Then there's always the fear that I might develop bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, or alcohol dependence because of my family history.

I've recently started going to therapy to unpack the effect that this experience has had on me. Even though I've helped take care of my mother for about ten years, I just found the words and courage to articulate the toll that it has taken on me a couple of months ago.

It's difficult to admit that a parent- the person that took care of you and provided all of your basic needs- has caused you so much pain and suffering. At times it feels like I'm being ungrateful. But I'm slowly learning that I have a right to acknowledge my feelings because that's the only way that I can start to live for myself.



"you okay?"

Hey, can I ask you something?

Yeah! What's up?

I'm thinking about going to therapy...

But I don't know where to start...

I think it's good that you're reaching out for help

I don't know a lot about therapy myself...

But I know someone who can help.

Mental Health Chat w/ Ashley Bailey  
Therapy: the benefits and your options  
Written & Edited by: Princess Jackson

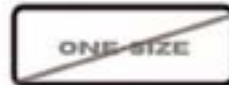


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### SYMPTOMS OF THE BLUES

\$0.00



Start to expand your definition of depression with this simple infographic featuring symptoms of Seasonal Affective Disorder.

- Feeling unmotivated
- Overcompensating with false happiness
- Unable to concentrate on tasks
- Appetite changes such as overeating

DEPRESSION LOOKS DIFFERENT ON EVERYONE. THAT'S WHY IT'S IMPORTANT TO DO DAILY MENTAL HEALTH CHECK-INS WITH YOURSELF.

DAILY CHECK-IN



"you okay?"

"you okay?"

"you okay?" is an advice column where we answer the questions you're afraid to ask yourself. It's okay- we all have them! In this issue, we will be talking about therapy with Ashley Bailey, a student counselor at North Carolina Central University.

"Your therapist is going to be someone who's neutral. They don't have this previous personal relationship with you so they are going to be able to help you navigate from a non-judgmental standpoint [and] from a neutral standpoint that oftentimes we're not necessarily able to get from close friends, family, and loved ones."

## Who Should Seek Therapy?

There's an assumption that you need to be diagnosed with a mental illness to benefit from therapy, but that is not the case. "Plenty of people that participate in counseling or therapy don't actually have a diagnosis. They just need a little bit of extra support" says Bailey.

According to [Psychology Today](#), if something is stressing you out to the point where it interferes with your ability to enjoy everyday life, you might want to look into therapy.

A therapist can also be helpful if you're looking to gain a deeper understanding of who you are.

## How do I Pick the Best Therapist for My Needs?

"It really just depends on what the person themselves is actually looking for or what they think would aid them in the counseling process," Bailey says.

- **Identity:** Do you want a therapist that is from the same racial or ethnic background as you? Would you prefer that they are the same gender as you? Do you think you would resonate more with someone who is younger or older?
- **Specialties:** "[There are] counselors and therapists who specialize in different areas so that's something to you know make note of," Bailey points out. They can specialize in things such as addiction, marriage and relationships, and specific mental disorders.
- **Delivery:** Talk therapy is the most commonly known, but are other methods you can try. There's art therapy, music therapy, and horticulture therapy just to name a few.
- **Rapport:** "Some people may call or reach out to a specific therapist and have kind of like a consultation or a brief conversation with them just to get a better understanding of that individual and express what they might be looking for and then going from there."

## What are the Benefits?

"Mental health counseling can be very beneficial for individuals who are experiencing any type of difficulty or feel like they just need additional support with navigating through their experiences or any obstacles that they might be encountering in their current life."

And while our family and friends are great people to turn to, their advice can be biased. The difference between [talking to a loved one] and actually seeking counseling from a therapist is that you know your that-



# Hotlines



## To Find Mental Health Resources Near You:

[NAMI HelpLine](#): 1-800-950-NAMI

[SAMHSA National Helpline](#): 1-800-662-HELP

◦ TTY: 1-800-487-4889

## For Emergencies:

- **If someone is at immediate risk of hurting themselves or someone else call 911!**
- [National Suicide Prevention LifeLine](#): 1-800-273-8255
  - Spanish: 1-888-628-9454
  - TTY: Use your preferred relay service or dial 711 then 1-800-273-8255
- [Crisis Text Line](#): Text "HOME" to 741741
- [Veterans Crisis Line](#): 1-800-273-8255
  - Text: 838255
- [Disaster Distress Hotline](#): 1-800-985-5990
  - Text: 1-800-985-5990



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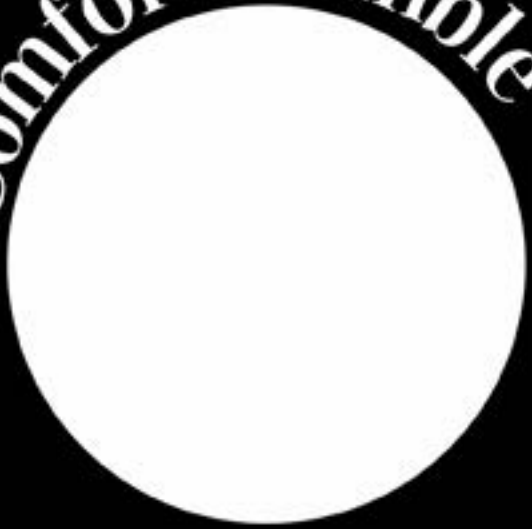


**WE KNOW YOU AREN'T  
FEELING LIKE YOURSELF.**

**GIVE US 100% ANYWAYS**

It might even make you feel better. :)

*Comfort Gamble*



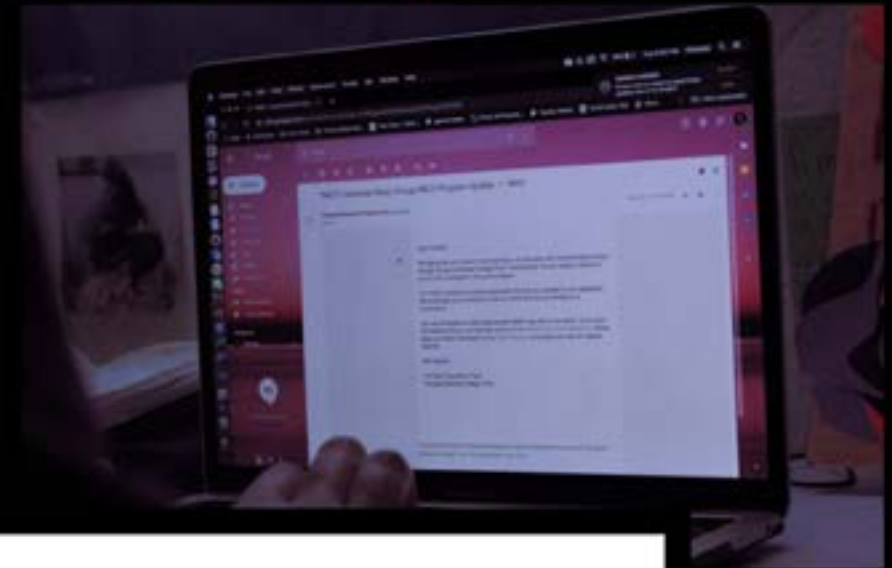
*A Photo Essay*



*Images by Princess Jackson*



TW: Disordered Eating



Dear Princess,

We appreciate your interest in participating in an internship with Universal Music Group through Thurgood Marshall College Fund. Unfortunately, we are unable to extend to you an offer participate in this year's program.



*Part I:  
Trigger*



## Part II: *Flight*



## Part III: *Guilt*





**Part IV:**  
*Like it Never Happened*



# TO THE BONE: STARVING FOR ACCURACY

VIVIAN NORRIS

## INTRODUCTION

I was so intent on watching *To the Bone* that I couldn't even wait for the film to come to Netflix. Instead, I pirated it off of a website and watched with rapt attention, drinking in each frame. Frankly I feel no guilt, years later, for the economic impact of this particular digital theft. As a child, in the beginnings of what would be a five-year battle with anorexia, *To the Bone* only pushed me deeper into my illness. Film portrayals of eating disorders have histori-

cally involved thin, white women suffering from anorexia. Given the prominence of fatphobic beauty standards and a culture of shame around food, it's easy for young girls to begin idolizing anorexic characters, and by extension, the disease itself. Rates of eating disorders are climbing, and with them, an alarming prevalence of pro-anorexia internet communities. These online forums promote eating disorder behaviors and unhealthy weight loss by providing "tips" and "thinspiration"

photos. By painting a glamorous picture of eating disorders, the media is partially responsible for the existence of these networks and for inaccurate, sensationalized public perceptions. *To the Bone* promised an updated depiction of eating disorders, but due to its narrow focus and reliance on misogynistic, thin-centric conventions, it became a source of misinformation and a cornerstone of pro-anorexia culture.



## AN IMMEDIATE CONTROVERSY

A Netflix Original unveiled at the 2017 Sundance Film Festival, *To the Bone* follows actress Lily Collins as Ellen, a 20-year-old anorexic, through the ups and downs of eating disorder treatment. After she is kicked out of a series of treatment centers, Ellen's family makes a last-ditch effort to admit her to a sought-after facility led by an unconventional doctor played by Keanu Reeves. Ellen reluctantly agrees, and her journey at the "Threshold" center begins.

Before its release, *To the Bone* gained attention due to its high-profile celebrity cast and the explosive popularity of its trailer, which has now been viewed on YouTube

over 8 million times. Many people were excited for the film's release, hoping that it would help raise awareness and lessen the stigma around eating disorders. Marti Noxon, the director, even suffered from an eating disorder herself (Butler 2017). However, *To the Bone* would only repeat the errors made in past depictions of eating disorders in film, and prove to be even more dangerous thanks to its massive audience.

Lily Collins's weight loss for *To the Bone*, paired with her acknowledged history of anorexia and bulimia, became one of the film's most controversial aspects after she announced it on television. The news created a stir on social media, with people debating whether or not the movie was furthering the simplification and fetishizing of anorexia, and many viewers were horrified that Collins's safety was put at risk. Collins assured viewers that she had worked with a nutritionist to lose weight "as safely as possible," but given that she lost a significant amount of weight in just four weeks, it is doubtful that her safety was actually well managed (Mallenbaum 2017).

In addition to online debates over Collins's weight loss, an alarming source of publicity for *To the Bone* was its prominence on pro-anorexia websites. Known colloquially as "pro-ana," these communities are found on Tumblr, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, and even Pinterest. These communities saw *To the Bone* not as a cautionary tale but rather as motivation to push their illnesses further. Anonymous profiles worshiped Collins's emaciated body on countless "thinspiration" pages, lusted after her visible bones, and edit-

ed scenes from the movie into despairing music videos. Even before its release, *To the Bone* became an anorexia bible. Objectively speaking, if a movie ends up on forums promoting eating disorders, something has gone horribly wrong.

There are actually very few movies about eating disorders. Exact numbers vary, but Wikipedia lists only 17 movies with eating disorders as a focus. Three of these movies feature completely separate main plots or major elements of horror or fantasy. Those elements discount the movies as real sources of information about eating disorders that can be taken seriously. Two are not available in English. Given the limited number of existing film representations, it was all the more crucial that the first blockbuster movie on the topic didn't present a sensationalized, oversimplified view of such a nuanced, sensitive topic. *To the Bone* fails, spectacularly, to rectify the harm done by other film representations of eating disorders, and will go down in history as one of the most irresponsible depictions of mental illness ever created.

So what makes *To the Bone* so dangerous? And why is it still so compelling - even to those who don't directly relate to Ellen's circumstances? The answer lies in the covert messages that *To the Bone* communicates. While at first glance it may appear to be just a movie about anorexia, it is so much more. It is a movie that stands on the shoulders of deeply ingrained gender roles and power dynamics, perverse intimacy, fetishization, and subjugation. Anorexia

lends itself particularly well to film, given its trademark physical manifestations, but also to people's most morbid fascinations. Circus-like in its spectacle, *To the Bone* exists in parallel with the age-old story of the neurotic woman and her staunch male savior, furthering the fetishization of female helplessness.

### *HISTORY OF ANOREXIC BODIES IN FILM*

*To the Bone* is not the first problematic representation of anorexia in film. Directors seem unable to wrench themselves away from the allure of body horror, and time and time again, fail to create movies that accurately represent the disease. Practically every eating disorder movie that has ever been made relies on a woman's underweight body to capture attention. Movies about eating disorders have only



been made since the 1980s, and of about 16 movies centered on characters with eating disorders made since, *The Perfect Body* (1997), *Kate's Secret* (1986), *Feed* (2017), and *The Karen Carpenter Story* (1989) were the only ones that did not sell themselves with visibly emaciated bodies in the promotional posters or DVD covers alone, not to mention in the actual content of the

films. The similarly titled art film *Superstar: The Karen Carpenter Story* (1989) gets a bit of a free pass for being conducted entirely as a puppet show with Barbie dolls, which arguably has problems of its own.

Promotional posters for the first movie ever made about eating disorders, *The Best Little Girl in the World* (1981), show a row of skeletal bodies from the neck down, naked but with falling-off white underwear. *Dying to Dance* (2001) also excludes the face - featuring only comically thin arms that appear to be missing elbows. Similarly, promotional posters for *Little Miss Perfect* (2017) show only a woman's upper spine, her vertebrae bulging out. When *Friendship Kills* (1996) contrasts a comically expanded reflection of the protagonist with her sunken face. The DVD cover of *Disfigured* (2008) sets up a similar contrast: The film's plot is built entirely off of the difference between the two characters' weights, and sets itself up well with the poster highlighting the two women's shapes against a bright white background. *Hunger Point* (2003), *Sharing the Secret* (2000), and *Thin* (2006) all show yet another lithe silhouette and angular face. *For the Love of Nancy* (1994) and *Starving in Suburbia* (2014) both show girls with prominent collar bones staring into the camera, their bony upper ribcage area the focal point of the shot. *To the Bone* (2017) has a similar visual, showing Ellen in a white tank top, standing on a scale, her bones poking out from her shoulders and chest. None of these patterns have varied significantly across the near 40 year timespan, indicating that issues with eating disorder representations in film have seen

little improvement.

The use of emaciated bodies in film results in twisted meanings and real harm to both actors and viewers. *Starving in Suburbia* (2014) was intended to criticize online pro-anorexia culture, but became a source of pro-ana content itself due to its inclusion of countless images of emaciated bodies. In *For the Love of Nancy* (1994), it appears that body doubles were used for especially revealing scenes despite the fact that the actress, Tracy Gold, already had an eating disorder during filming, suggesting that even a person with an eating disorder is not skinny enough to play a person with an eating disorder. In addition, of all 15 movies listed, only two focus on bulimia. However, bulimia is four to six times more common than anorexia (South Carolina Department of Mental Health, n.d.). None of the movies focus on binge eating disorder, which is three times more common than anorexia and bulimia combined (NEDA 2021). *To the Bone* provides a single bulimic character and a single character with binge eating disorder, both of whom are relegated to telling jokes on the sidelines of the movie. The consistent erasure of eating disorders other than anorexia or those experienced by larger-bodied people has reduced treatment options and created judgemental and exclusionary public attitudes.

Public intrigue about anorexia revolves solely around visible emaciation, thanks to media representations that have built a false image of eating disorders. Using emaciated anorexic bodies in advertising is indicative of lazy and exploitative filmmaking, a refusal to explore nuances,

and a rejection of readily available resources that warn against this practice. If progress in the identification and treatment of eating disorders is ever to occur, public impressions have to change. And for public perception to evolve, so must the stories that the media tells about eating disorders.

### **GRAPHIC PORTRAYALS OF MENTAL ILLNESS**

To the Bone opens with a blurry shot of people walking down a hallway, blooms of light pinching their distant, wiry bodies into nothingness, such that they almost disappear entirely. I remember watching that scene for the first time at age 14 with my eating disorder already well-established. I remember thinking how clever the movie was. When I rewatched the movie several years later, I was taken aback by the blatantly exploitative nature of this scene. Anorexia was reduced to a silhouette — to something made of light and shadow, something that could be cut out of paper and recognized in an instant. The opening scene isn't To The Bone's only crime. Lily Collins defended her weight loss for the movie by arguing that she wanted to get into the character of an anorexic. She referenced her weight loss in an interview for USA Today, stating that "I didn't want to get to the end of this experience and feel like I didn't access what I needed to portray Ellen" (Mallenbaum 2017). However, weight loss does not define anorexia and anorexia is not a character but rather an incredibly subjective experience. One that cannot be "accessed" by losing weight.

Collins's excessive weight loss posed

a direct physical and emotional danger to Collins herself and sent extremely toxic messages about weight loss as a central criteria for eating disorders. Despite the societal perception of eating disorders as a disease of excessive thinness, only 6% of eating disorder sufferers are clinically underweight (ANAD n.d.). Therefore, Collins's weight loss was absolutely unnecessary and her ill-advised attempt at method acting did nothing but deepen existing stereotypes.

By confining anorexia to only a certain body size and shape, Collins and To the Bone invalidates the struggles of those who may have similar symptoms but live in larger bodies. The underweight stereotype attached to anorexia has translated to dangerous biases in the medical field, diminishing the quality of treatment available to people who don't meet the social criteria for an eating disorder. The influence of weight bias is so great that an entirely separate diagnosis exists to identify people who meet all criteria for anorexia besides being underweight: atypical anorexia. Despite the fact that research has shown that medical complications of "atypical" and traditional anorexia are nearly identical and require the same interventions, the two diagnoses are still held separate (Conason 2018).

There are multiple reasons why a person engaging in the exact same restrictive eating behaviors as an underweight person may not be underweight including initial body weight and individual metabolic factors. For example, while some people's bodies respond to energy restriction by

losing weight, other bodies respond by compromising the function of organ systems to reduce energy consumption. The severity of malnutrition that a person experiences is rarely reflected in their body weight. The deadly complications that anorexia can cause are possible at any size. The distinct iconography of anorexia in To The Bone is incredibly destructive to those suffering from eating disorders and those in recovery, both in public perception and in access to proper medical care.

Disturbingly, Collins' extreme weight loss still wasn't enough. Filmmakers CGI'd her body to appear even more "anorexic." Her bones are tugged out from beneath her skin with the outline of her skull visible around her eyes. She spends the entirety of the movie in heavy white makeup and purple in the hollows of her eyes, never departing from the caricature of anorexia the movie inhabits. Collins even revealed that she was fitted with cheekbone prosthetics (Mallenbaum 2017). The issue with this should be obvious. Eating disorders don't have the power of "movie magic." These images may be impressive to look at, but they are incredibly exploitative. Anorexics don't exist to shock people. They don't exist to be impressive or visually fascinating. Movies about anorexia shouldn't exist for those purposes either.

Due to its irresponsible portrayal of underweight bodies, To the Bone was vilified online by the vast majority of healthcare professionals and eating disorder recovery organizations with one notable exception, Project HEAL. Project HEAL is a US-based eating disorder charity with chapters all

across the country that spoke in support of the film. Despite endorsing To the Bone, Project HEAL states in an FAQ page about To the Bone that they "in no way intend to endorse the idea that people with anorexia nervosa can lose weight safely." Project HEAL continues, saying that "There is strong research showing that...losing weight can make people who have struggled with anorexia nervosa much more prone to a relapse," and that "the weight loss aspect is not something that Project HEAL supports." Project HEAL makes the error that Lily Collins's weight loss and the cinematography used to enhance it can be separated from the film itself. Unfortunately, Collins' visible emaciation dominates the plot of the movie, not only endangering herself but also thousands of viewers. Project HEAL defended their support of To the Bone on the grounds that it was the first major motion picture made about eating disorders, and therefore an important step in destigmatizing these diseases (Project HEAL 2017). However, in the case of eating disorders, graphic and inaccurate representation is worse than no representation.

Beat Eating Disorders, the UK's primary eating disorder charity, released guidelines for how to responsibly portray eating disorders in media in 2011, long before the release of To the Bone. Among these guidelines, Beat recommends that media portrayals not include pictures of emaciated bodies. Beat specifies that "ribcages, concave stomachs, collar bones, sternums and spines" are especially triggering, along with "tops of arms that are shown as the same

circumference as wrists, or thighs the size of knees.” To the Bone appears to have taken special care to include every one of these images, and more. At one point Ellen is even shown lying fully naked in the dirt. She is shown “body checking” multiple times (measuring or posing her body to highlight her thinness), and shown in very little clothing in multiple scenes.

Filmmakers often cloak their graphic representations of mental illness by saying that they want to be truthful or avoid glamorizing a particular disease. But graphic depictions of mental illness have been proven to be unhelpful and warned against by research and countless professionals. The “authenticity” of *To the Bone* can be easily disproved empirically, given that multiple aspects of the film such as the structure of Ellen’s treatment center show no attention to fact. Marti Noxon, the director of *To the Bone*, prioritized shock factor over due diligence. By completely defying guidelines released by Beat and the advice of professionals, Noxon demonstrates an arrogant, reckless approach to the film’s sensitive subject matter; as well as an inability to create something truly meaningful. A movie about anorexia that draws its power from the thinness of its main character has failed to tell a genuine, impactful story.

### ***TO THE BONE’S MISREPRESENTATION OF EATING DISORDER TREATMENT***

Noxon claimed in an interview with *Cosmopolitan* that she wanted the film to be “authentic.” But to an experienced eye, *To the Bone*’s depiction of eating disorder treat-

ment is governed by factual inaccuracies. Despite the severity of Ellen’s eating disorder, she finds herself in extremely lenient environments, completely contradicting the reality of eating disorder treatment. When she arrives at the residential treatment center she will be staying at, they give her a tour and explain that she can eat what she wants and do what she wants, that she will not be supervised, and that they’d just like her to not throw up in the plants. She is allowed to go outside at will, go to restaurants alone, and freely interact with her peers. I have been to residential treatment many times, starting at age fourteen. The rule-books I was forced to read on my first day were inches thick. Strangers stood in the bathroom stall with me, watched me shower, checked my mouth after meals, did skin exams every morning, shined a flashlight in my face every fifteen minutes at night, measured out my exact ounces of water, and sat me at a table in the corner if I didn’t finish a meal. I was drugged, intubated, and at one point tied to a chair. Needless to say, I didn’t have the flirtatious, carefree experience that *To the Bone* advertises.

*To the Bone* is an anorexic’s fantasy world. In reality, such a lack of structure in a treatment center would be impossible, given that people with eating disorders commonly go to great lengths to avoid necessary weight gain or to continue with eating disorder behaviors while in treatment. Treatment centers can not operate on the honor system. By presenting such an unrealistic structure, *To the Bone* minimizes the severity of eating disorders in general. People

really do throw up in the plants, and worse. The movie ignores how ugly, dirty, sneaky, dishonest, and extreme eating disorders can get for the purpose of cinematic digestibility and plot, which given the impact this movie has on the already limited body of information, is catastrophic to people’s perceptions.

Treatment centers are nearly intolerable, much more so than *To the Bone* makes them out to be. Film representations of treatment centers that don’t portray this truth risk giving young people with eating disorders a distorted idea of what it’s like to be in inpatient treatment. Consequently, they may be less likely to make the effort to recover at home, and end up miserable in residential treatment. While in my case I believe I would have been sent to residential care regardless, I wish that I had been properly informed by the media that claimed it would educate me. But, unfortunately, the structure of Ellen’s treatment center is just one of many instances where *To the Bone* neglects factual information for the sake of entertainment.

### ***GENDER ROLES AND EATING DISORDERS***

Hadley Freeman, a fellow anorexia survivor, points out in her article for *The Guardian* that *To the Bone* mimics traditional gender roles to a pornographic degree, despite taking place in an eating disorder treatment setting. More specifically, Freeman argues that *To the Bone* embodies outdated tropes of male rescue and female hysteria. She writes, “[Ellen] and her fellow anorexia patients are beautifully styled in the universally recognised signifiers of cra-

zy-but-sexy young women.” Their doctor “clearly enjoys his power over his mainly female patients.” In these passages, Freeman is suggesting that the gendered elements of *To the Bone* uncomfortably exploit anorexia in order to gratify a perverse desire for female subjugation. Freeman acknowledges that it’s difficult to make a movie about something with such strong visual associations as anorexia without it becoming exploitative, especially “if a part of you is turned on by skinny, self-destructive women.” Given that *To the Bone* is far from the first of its kind in its fetishization of artfully damaged women, it appears that many people are attracted to these traits.

Countless elements in the film attach masculine aspects to intelligence, confidence, and superiority. Feminine aspects are attached to instability and emotional upheaval. Similarly, contrasts in size, power, and emotional stability between male and female characters carry themes of female inferiority throughout the film. In particular, the juxtaposition of artificially thin female patients with a buff, self-important male doctor. For example, there is a clear power imbalance in the scene where Ellen first meets with her doctor. Ellen is weak, small, and seated. She is barely clothed in an untied hospital gown. Her doctor, more than twice her size, stands upright and looks down at her in his dress shirt and belted slacks. This scene should sound familiar even to people who haven’t seen the movie: a man and woman, the woman half naked and exposed, the man clothed and in complete control. This is one of many instances in this film where men are placed in posi-



tions of power, the contrast heightened by the women's anorexic fragility.

While it is difficult to separate society's ideas about anorexia from the disease itself, I maintain that exploiting what are believed to be distinctive physical characteristics of anorexia to create sexually underscored scenes of dominance and submission is irresponsible and obscene. Furthermore, it serves as another great disservice to those suffering from anorexia: Many women who develop eating disorders are victims of trauma that makes them afraid of being perceived by others in a sexual way. Hence, many exhibit an unconscious desire to lose the fat stores that form their secondary sexual characteristics. For example, a woman's butt, breasts, and hips are traits present in sexually mature women and not young children. These body parts are composed of fat deposits that can be minimized through starvation. Emaciated and anorexic bodies have historically fulfilled deviant, pedophilic desires for sexually immature, adolescent-appearing bodies in pornography. By setting up gender-based power dynamics and sexual elements in the context of anorexia, *To the Bone* ignores the dark, perverted undercurrents those scenes involve. The film's use of an anorexic body as a pornographic prop is insulting and naive. Therefore, I conclude that Freeman's theory about the gender-based elements of *To the Bone* is central to the film's popularity and destructive power.

### *TO THE BONE, A FAIRYTALE*

As if Ellen's character wasn't problematic enough, she is played by Lily Collins, a popular young actress. She meets all of the outdated criteria for anorexia: thin, young, and white. Collins has been in multiple movies targeted at preteen girls, making her an obvious role model for thousands. It's no secret that young girls look up to celebrities, whether they are playing female superheroes on the big screen or walking in the Victoria's Secret fashion show. So why do we believe there won't be consequences when we cast a celebrity in the role of an anorexic? These casting choices can cause young girls to conflate anorexia with beauty, fame, importance, recognition, and admiration; an incredibly dangerous association. Anorexia itself is already glorified. Therefore, creating an anorexic character played by an already revered actress is dangerous. One could make the argument that actors are cast in controversial roles all the time, such as villains or antiheroes, and we don't expect children to emulate them. But, unfortunately, while Lily Collins' primary audience of young girls doesn't have a predisposition to becoming murderers or Disney villains, they do have an extreme risk of developing eating disorders.

The problematic casting choices don't end with Lily Collins. Keanu Reeves, a well known actor in action movies such as *The Matrix* and *John Wick*, is cast as Ellen's doctor, creating an uncomfortable "rescuer" dynamic. The issue with this dynamic extends even beyond misogynistic symbolism. The age-old trope of the knight and the damsel

in distress is perverted to an extreme in this iteration: the fragile anorexic and her hunky doctor. She perches on the edge of the hospital bed in his office. He peels away her hospital gown. He gently reveals her spine, blackened with bruises. He sees that she is hurting. Too many young girls use self-destructive behaviors as a way to express pain or trauma when words fail. Using this behavior as a way to ask for help when they can't bear to speak. Creating a "rescuer" dynamic between Ellen and her doctor sends a covert message that dangerous behaviors are an effective way to get support from others or to have your pain acknowledged – that if you just get sick-looking enough, a strong man will notice you're hurting without you even having to say anything.

The need for care and validation is ubiquitous. For adolescents who are often in tumultuous emotional states, it is essential to establish healthy forms of communication and to encourage reaching out for help verbally, rather than sending the message that acting out dangerously will get them swooped up by a superhero and carried to safety. Because the sad truth is that for a lot of girls, the "hero" comes too late or not at all. In the case of a movie with a sensitive focus and therefore a greater capacity for harm, such as *To the Bone*, casting directors must consider more factors than whether the actors can play the part well: it's essential to consider their context and history in order to mitigate the film's negative impact on the audience.

### *CONCLUSION*

Most of the time, eating disorders are invisible and go untreated because they don't meet distorted expectations. They are a dull, painful, and lonely place to be. Unfortunately, Netflix didn't think that would make an entertaining movie. *To the Bone* claims authenticity, but it's far from the truth. It values commercial benefit over social responsibility. It refuses to diverge from the blueprint of the acknowledgedly unhelpful eating disorder movies that came before it, and reinforces the same gender roles that shape eating disorder development and beauty standards. It wasn't successful because it was a good movie, it was successful because it was irresponsible. It was lucrative because it capitalized on a tragic illness for visual intrigue. *To the Bone* and other films' narrow portrayals of people with eating disorders create a culture of shame and misinformation, making it more difficult for people who don't fit the mold to access proper, specialized treatment.

Marti Noxon had the opportunity to make a truly brave and conscientious movie. She could have shown the pain of eating disorders more creatively rather than relying on Ellen's thinness to say it for her. She could have focused on a character that did not match every existing stereotype about eating disorders. She could have shown Ellen's actual recovery rather than ending the movie when it had barely begun. She could have taken the advice of Beat and other eating disorder charities instead of exploiting emaciated bodies to titillate her audience. She could have acted responsi-

bly with the power she held. But she didn't. So I'd suggest not watching *To the Bone* at all as the message the film endorses holds no value in the conversations surrounding eating disorders.

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