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DISTINCTIONS

**Journal of the Kingsborough Community College Honors Program
The City University of New York**

Distinctions, the journal of the Honors Program of Kingsborough Community College of the City University of New York, welcomes scholarly articles and creative work that explore important issues in all aspects of humanistic endeavor, not confined to a specific academic discipline. Our editorial staff is sympathetic to a broad range of theoretical and critical approaches, however, the views expressed in articles are solely those of the authors.

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SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

All manuscripts should be submitted electronically by the student or mentor to robert.cowan@kbcc.cuny.edu as Microsoft Word attachments and include a working e-mail address and telephone number for the student. Submissions should be in 12-point font and double-spaced throughout in a legible typeface like Times New Roman or Arial. While there are no length restrictions, we prefer articles that are 3,000-5,000 words and do accept articles that include notes, diagrams, and illustrations. Articles should include a list of Works Cited and be properly referenced according to the guidelines of the Modern Language Association, American Psychological Association, or other citation system appropriate to the discipline for which they were written. Submissions are accepted from September through May.

EDITOR'S COLUMN

Fine Distinctions

When Associate Dean of Academic Affairs Reza Fakhari approached me in mid-September about taking the editorial helm of the Kingsborough Honors Program's journal, I was enthusiastic about the opportunity. I was also, however, trepidacious about the short turn-around time that we would have to get out the Fall issue. At least, I was until I was introduced to the individuals who compose the *Distinctions* staff – Jordan Hall, Wesley Lynch, Rick Armstrong, and Doug Singsen. In a mere six weeks, this dynamic group has put together this exciting seventh issue of the journal and I am very pleased to have had the opportunity to work with them and to begin taking *Distinctions* in new directions.

This issue includes articles on topics as diverse as U.S. immigration policy, mathematics as a stress-reducer, attempts to deal with trauma in Afghanistan, genital reconstruction, the legacy of the Bush administration, and gerontological pharmacology. We are also pleased to offer some new features: Xiaoting Lau's beautiful and funny illustrated book published here for the first time and materials from the Kibbee Library's archives about the college. These are pieces filled with perspicacious social commentary and articulate proposals for social amelioration. I believe that they are indicative of this particular historical moment, which, despite so much bad news on matters like the global economy, is one of great optimism as President Peruggi remarked in her post-election message to the college. It seems fitting that the publication of this issue should be coincident with the election of our new president and a shift at the helm of our own country.

At a conference last month in St. Paul, Minnesota I was telling colleagues from institutions in Texas, New Hampshire, Florida, and Ohio with comparatively homogenous student bodies that this is a typical CUNY semester for me: I have students who range in age from 17 to their 60s, and who are from China, Ghana, Guyana, Israel, Jamaica, Liberia, Tibet, and Uzbekistan, to name only a few of their places of origin. While I take such diversity for granted, these professors were awestruck and jealous. The rest of the United States is only becoming more like New York in its global interconnectedness and the subtle distinctions in the pages of this journal are made by the students who are deeply concerned about the present state and future of our planet. As we as a country pause to consider our new course, I hope that these students' arguments and reflections will be of use to you in your own intellectual, political, and spiritual endeavors.

Robert Cowan
Assistant Professor, Department of English

Mathematics and Stress Reduction¹

“It’s not stress that kills us; it is our reaction to it.”

– Hans Selye

What is Stress?

Stress is when you are worried about getting laid off from your job, or worried about having enough money to pay your bills, or worried about your mother when the doctor says she may need an operation. In fact, to most of us, stress is synonymous with worry. Your body, however, has a much broader definition of stress. It does not matter whether a change is good or bad, it is still stress. When you find your dream apartment and get ready to move, that is stress. If you break your leg, that is stress. Good or bad, if it is a change in your life, it is stress for your body.

The two different forms of stress are called “eustress,” or positive stress, and “distress,” which is negative stress. Eustress is the rush of adrenaline a person feels when he or she is excited or anxious, for example winning a basketball game or getting an A on a math test. Distress, on the other hand, is a feeling of fear or nervousness a person might get before exam or presentation. Our bodies are designed to react to both types of stress. Eustress helps keep us alert, motivates us to face challenges, and drives us to solve problems. These low levels of stress are manageable, necessary, and part of normal stimulation. The goal of stress management is to bring your mind and body back into balance, or homeostasis. By learning healthier ways to cope, and changing the way you deal with stress, you can reduce its hold on your life and effect on your body.

Coping with Stress

Coping with stress is when people recognize stress and try to get rid of it in some way. There are a lot of ways to cope with a stressor and people will use different ones depending on their personality and situation. As stress increases, the ways of coping with it become more important. Some people seek quick relief by self-medicating with alcohol, cigarettes, food, or medication. However, there are other avenues of relief that might prove just as useful but less harmful. Some of these are:

- *Like yourself* : recognize your needs and forgive your errors.

¹ Written under the mentorship of Professor Gerald Sachs for Health and Physical Education 12.

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- *Work on only one project at a time:* set priorities, being careful not to set expectations too high.
- *Learn to accept what you cannot change.*
- *Talk about troubles:* confide in a special friend or a trained professional. Another person may help you to see your problem in a new light.
- *Learn how to relax:* take time to do something you really enjoy or learn the art of loafing.
- *Work off tensions:* try a physical activity like walking, playing a game of tennis, gardening, or playing your favorite musical instrument.
- *Treat yourself to sufficient sleep:* know how many hours you need. Sufficient sleep will help to give you a refreshed, energetic outlook on life.

Strategies of Stress Management

Stress management is an important part of achieving optimal health and success: students who are anxious do not learn. Managing stress is not easy, but being aware of stress, will help you to get started on stress relief and reduction. Because of the health risks that are involved with stress, a person should know how to handle the effects of stress (Figure 1).

Because stress is different for each of us, no stress reduction strategy is a panacea. There is certainly no shortage of stress relievers. Jogging and other aerobic exercises, different types of meditation, prayer, yoga and tai chi are great for many people. In addition to the above, various progressive muscular relaxation exercises, autogenic training, deep breathing, massage therapies, visual imagery, and self hypnosis practices are popular. There are also acupuncture, acupressure, biofeedback, Reiki, and other bodywork and postural techniques. Some people find that music, hobbies, volunteer work, journaling, laughter, playing with pets, taking short breaks, or shopping help them to relax. Others find relief for their stress-related symptoms from aromatherapy, nutritional supplements (chamomile, spearmint), or even sitting under a pyramid. There are also prescription tranquilizers, sedatives, hypnotics, anti-depressants and beta-blockers for specific complaints. A variety of electromagnetic stimulation devices have also been found to be effective and safe for anxiety, insomnia, and drug-resistant depression. Strong emotional support from group therapy, family, or friends is another powerful stress-buster. In addition to all these strategies, I dare to include a new approach: mathematics, a non-traditional healthy stress-reducer.

What is Mathematics and what are the Skills Needed to Maneuver It?

Most of us do not experience calm when we think of math. This happens because, as children, we were asked to memorize specific facts. These facts build on each other and the child is led step-by-step to remember increasingly specific skills. This disciplined knowledge-building experience is a key enabler. It develops the memorizing and organizing skills of the mind and helps to prepare the child for more advanced math

learning. It also helps to prepare the child to eventually apply this knowledge to his or her professional and personal lives. But once you find the needed skills to manage mathematics, it reduces stress by providing an arena of intellectual comfort.

Mathematics is not a spectator sport. You cannot be just an observer when you are doing mathematics. I have never learned much mathematics by listening to someone talk about it. I have always immersed myself in problem-solving and exploration. You cannot expect to be good at math, and get pleasure from ‘playing’ with it if you are not doing lots of math. In fact, you need to be part of it, not an outsider.

Fear of Math in America

First of all, I believe that students fear mathematics because everybody around them says math is difficult. People tell them how difficult it is to pass math exams, how much work they have to do for this subject, and how poor they are in mathematics. The environment around them makes it more difficult and students develop a mindset that math is difficult. In fact, you need to change your attitude towards doing mathematics because your reaction to a stressor is what counts. As Epictetus observed, “People are disturbed, not by events, but by their view of those events.”

Math anxiety is also due to poor experiences that typically lead to it. When one tries to memorize procedures, rules, and routines without much understanding, the math is quickly forgotten and panic soon sets in. You do not have to think of math as memorizing all the procedures – what if you forget a few? Therefore, with this type of strategy, a good memory will help, but what if you do not have a good memory? Understanding the process is critical. Once students realize they can do the math, the whole notion of math anxiety can be overcome.

Furthermore, getting the right answer is not the point. Unfortunately, the American public school system is obsessed with there being a right answer. This happens especially because students have to pass multiple-choice exams, in which it does not matter how one solves the exercises. No joy comes from getting the right answer if a depth of understanding does not come with it. I think we would all be much happier if we understood how to solve a particular problem, even if we made a mistake along the way. Once we have solid understanding we can then work on increasing our focus, concentration, and problem-solving habits to minimize the number of detail mistakes we make.

The best way to overcome fear is to face it. You have to sit down with your book and start off with some easy questions. You have to practice and try to understand math, and things will become easier. Once you have done problems successfully, your confidence will improve and you would gradually start appreciating the subject. This effort will reward you with doors opening in your mind, and a new understanding of your world because mathematics also involves imagination, discovery, and invention.

The Use of Mathematics to Reduce or Manage Math Anxiety

Everyone who has learned to think can learn mathematics and be ready for life. By using mathematics, students think analytically in the classroom as well as in their daily lives. You do not have to be a genius to do math. You probably know more math than you think you do, and you must give yourself credit for this knowledge. For example, cave men, without knowing any math, used calculus when they threw a spear at a running rabbit. The more you work at it, the more skilled you become. In fact, making math relevant to students will improve their attitude toward it and make them better prepared for life.

Recreational math problems are more educational because they make students think differently. Math puzzles, games, tricks, and magic squares stimulate and challenge your right brain. As we know the right part of the brain functions in a non-verbal manner and excels in visual, spatial, perceptual, and intuitive information. Furthermore, the right brain looks at the whole picture and quickly seeks to determine the spatial relationships of all the parts as they relate to the whole. For example, if you give seven apples to a little child he will discover the sense of addition, subtraction, or the role of zero. In this type of game, the child plays with mathematical operations. It helps him to develop number sense and logical thinking. If you solve a magic square this will help sharpen your mathematical skills and reduce your stress while playing with math. Consequently, positive experiences with math can stimulate brain growth throughout our lives, and can keep our minds away from our daily problems thus helping people control the stress they have already experienced.

Mathematics: Healthy Stress-Reducer

My goal here is to show that math can be used to reduce stress – by playing with mathematical games or puzzles, doing your math homework, or searching for mathematical shapes or patterns in the nature. This approach has been applied not only to myself but also to everyone who reads this paper because mathematics is the underlying structure of the world, which we see in patterns, shapes, quantities, and estimations. We use the concepts of numbers and quantities when we bake cakes or decorate a room. We see patterns in art and music. Businesses need to make intelligent estimates of how much something is going to cost, how many people need their products, and how fast they are going to sell.

Everyone is aware that children love to play, like to experiment, and are curious about the world around them. They have millions of questions and the role of mathematics is to help them to find their answers. To remove a child's math fear allows him to play with it, to exercise his brain in different ways, and have fun because mathematical games can help the little student become a mathematics admirer. With games of addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division, the students will actually enjoy themselves while learning to compute numbers quickly. So, playing games with mathematics and numbers could be not only an instructive approach in learning mathematics, but also a healthy stress reducer.

As an example, the game of tic-tac-toe (Figure 2) is solvable as a draw for both players with perfect play. Tic-tac-toe, also called noughts and crosses, hugs and kisses, and many other names, is a pencil-and-paper game for two players, O and X, who take

turns marking the spaces in a 3x3 grid. The player who succeeds in placing three respective marks in a horizontal, vertical, or diagonal row wins the game. The simplicity of tic-tac-toe makes it ideal as a tool for teaching the concepts of combinatorial game theory and the branch of artificial intelligence that deals with the searching of game trees. Hence, tic-tac-toe is most often played by very young children. When they have discovered an unbeatable strategy, they move on to more sophisticated games such as dots and boxes. Despite its apparent simplicity, dots and boxes requires some complex mathematics to determine the number of possible games. However, some games end before the 9th move, and many are duplicate games. Therefore, by playing this game you exercise your brain finding various strategies of playing the next move and have your mind relaxed in the same time. From my recollections, tic-tac-toe was not only an enjoyable game that involved mathematics, but one that helped me to become more comfortable with mathematics.

Various games with numbers, geometrical puzzles, network problems and combinatorial problems are among the best known types of puzzles. When I do math puzzles, I enter into a world of managed stress, one in which real life difficulties are forgotten. Because many people play them, it shows that mathematics does not have to be intimidating. One game that I have played and gotten pleasure from it many times is Sudoku, a logic-based number placement puzzle (Figure 3). By playing this kind of game you redirect your mind from your everyday problems, and the stress goes away.

Math helps us relate to our world. Who does not feel good when confronting beauty? Our ancestors sought to capture beauty through analysis. They found beauty in both nature and man using math. There are many well-known ‘formulas of beauty’ such as certain geometrical shapes: square, circle, isosceles triangle, and pyramid. The Fibonacci numbers, for example, are Nature's numbering system (Figure 4). They appear everywhere in nature, from the leaf arrangement in plants, to the pattern of the florets of a flower, or the scales of a pinecone or a pineapple. Is it possible to compare the beauty of a sculpture, a temple, a picture, a symphony, or a poem? The Fibonacci numbers are applicable to the growth of every living thing, including a single cell, a grain of wheat, a hive of bees, and even all of mankind, and, therefore, searching for mathematical shapes or patterns in nature gives us the chance to forget the stress of our everyday lives.

The Golden Ratio is associated with aesthetics, since it provides a wonderful example of an attempt to mingle mathematics with the arts. As many know in mathematics and arts, two quantities are in the golden ratio if the ratio between the sum of those quantities and the larger one is the same as the ratio between the larger one and the smaller. The figure of a golden section illustrates the geometric relationship that defines this constant, expressed algebraically by:

$$\frac{a+b}{a} = \frac{a}{b} = \varphi .$$

Many painting books, for example, pointed out that it is better to position objects to one side or ‘about one-third’ of the way across, and to use lines which divide the picture into thirds. This seems to make the picture design more pleasing to the eye and relies again on the idea of the golden section being ‘ideal’. Also the spiral drawn in the squares is seen in the shape of shells of snails and sea shells and, as we see later, in the arrangement of seeds on flowering plants, too. Thus, mathematics is found in nature in many ways:

Fibonacci and the original problem about rabbits is where the series first appears. The family trees of cows and bees, the golden ratio and the Fibonacci series, the Fibonacci Spiral and sea shell shapes, branching plants, flower petal and seeds, leaves and petal arrangements, on pineapples and in apples, pine cones and leaf arrangements, relaxes our brains because of their beauty, perfection, and geometric vision. The really amazing thing here is that this mathematical sequence is found everywhere in nature and seeing it reduces stress.

Mathematics can also help us understand art. As is well known, art is something that stimulates an individual's thoughts, emotions, beliefs, or ideas through the senses. Many times when we look at a piece of art, we get into a special mood. We are more relaxed and our minds are free of stress. But how many of us think about the connection between mathematics and art? This connection goes back thousands of years. Mathematics has been used in the design of Gothic cathedrals, rose windows, oriental rugs, and mosaics. Geometric forms were fundamental to the cubists and many abstract expressionists, and award-winning sculptors have used topology as the basis for their pieces. Mathematicians and artists continue to create stunning works in all media and to explore the visualization of mathematics – origami, computer-generated landscapes, fractals, and anamorphic art. As a result, the mathematics of art gives us a new world free of nervous tension, one in which we can be relaxed.

Mathematics and architecture have always enjoyed a close association with each other, not only in the sense that the latter is informed by the former, but also in that both share the search for order and beauty. In this case, mathematics is indispensable to the understanding of structural concepts and calculations. For example, Dutch artist M.C. Escher drew great inspiration from mathematical ideas working directly from structures in plane and projective geometry (Figure 5). In other words, Escher showed us that math reduces stress by drawing us into the world of imagination, the world of mathematics, and the world of our waking life. Thus, the visual ordering element as a means to achieve harmony with the universe gives us a way to leads our minds into a world without stress.

Solving our math homework helps us to decrease stress. "We all use math everyday," states an educational program that provides resources based on mathematics featured in episodes of a television show on CBS. Inspired by actual cases and experiences, "Numb3rs" depicts the confluence of police work and mathematics in solving crime. Every episode makes use of the power of math, and the math discussed on the show is valid. "Numb3rs" also brings math into relationships and everyday activities, and demonstrates that mathematics is more than formulas or equations. It is logic; it is rationality; it is using your mind to solve the biggest mysteries we know. For instance, differential equations become cool on "Numb3rs" along with other related mathematical topics. Many teachers also encourage their students to watch this show because it promotes the many uses of mathematics. It also supports math teaching in the same time, and as a consequence of this students are encouraged to do their math homework. Therefore, the result is a crime show in which math generally plays a fundamental role in solving the crime, and the watchers should realize how relevant math is to everyday activity, be aware of how math is enjoyable discipline, and understand that doing mathematics can reduce stress.

Another matter that reduces our stress is the mathematics involved in music. I think that the degree that you can understand the relationship between music and

mathematics is proportional to your understanding of both. Studying mathematics can also assist you in daily life as a musician. The important thing to realize is that numbers and math are not cold and lifeless, and that music, which is a tangible incarnation of numbers, reflects in its beauty and emotion some of the beauty and emotion in the world of mathematics. Playing the same melody on different instruments is math, as is playing a stringed instrument and changing the tuning. And when you find the best key to play a certain melody on a guitar, for example, there is a sensation that is known to math insiders as elegance. Mathematicians praise each other for the elegance of a proof, referring to the aesthetic beauty of it. Good musicians can often listen to a song, observe the musical structure, and play along with it, without really knowing it or rehearsing it, because they recognize patterns and familiar shapes. This type of thinking is very much like the way you think when you study mathematics. In fact, there are many things in music that are obviously math-related, and many musical notions can be also explained in numbers. Thus, studying the interesting patterns from music and math helps us to see the beauty of our humankind, and brings us in a different world, one in which we can relax.

Conclusion

When I tell people I am a math major the most common responses I hear are: “I hate math!,” “I am terrible at math,” “Why would you want to major in math?” The responses are understandable coming from people who have had bad experiences studying math, but whether they believe it or not, everyone has the capacity to understand mathematics and use it to their advantage in real-world situations. Every time I have bad times, I begin solving math problems in order to relieve my stress. Accordingly, I have spent many hours doing math, finding its patterns, and have never gotten tired of it.

Math can be a frightening discipline for many students, in many cases. But, before a student can advance to more complex concepts, he or she must master arithmetic. And I, as a future math professor, will have to motivate my students; find challenging, interactive, exciting, and effective methods of teaching; and be aware that mathematics can be an enjoyable subject. There is also beauty and wonder about mathematics that only insiders know. Words like ‘elegant’ and ‘beautiful’ are used constantly by mathematicians to describe paths of reasoning and proofs. And you need to be part of it in order to understand these things that help you overcome math anxiety.

Overall, mathematics will give you an alternative approach to manage your stress. Mathematics can be a healthy stress-reducer by identifying transferable math skills and mindset components like logical, analytical, paternal seeker, which can be applied to reduce stress. Instead of taking a pill to reduce your stress, you can solve some mathematical problems, or enjoy infinite other activities that involve math. For instance, as an elementary-school teacher, I have played many math games with my students. They were happy and eager to be involved in those assignments. They were playing and learning math without any anxiety. Today, as a student, I frequently manage daily stress by solving my homework from my math classes. Other times, I have played different math games or painted a landscape by combining the symmetries, colors, and shapes on the canvas. I also listen to music in order to handle stress. Mathematics and its related activities always help me relax and release the built-up tension in my body. They

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promote the feelings of well-being, help relieve emotional stress, and make me feel happier and healthier.

Figure 1

Physical or mental stresses may cause physical illness as well as mental or emotional problems. Here are the parts of the body most affected by stress:

The Effects of Stress

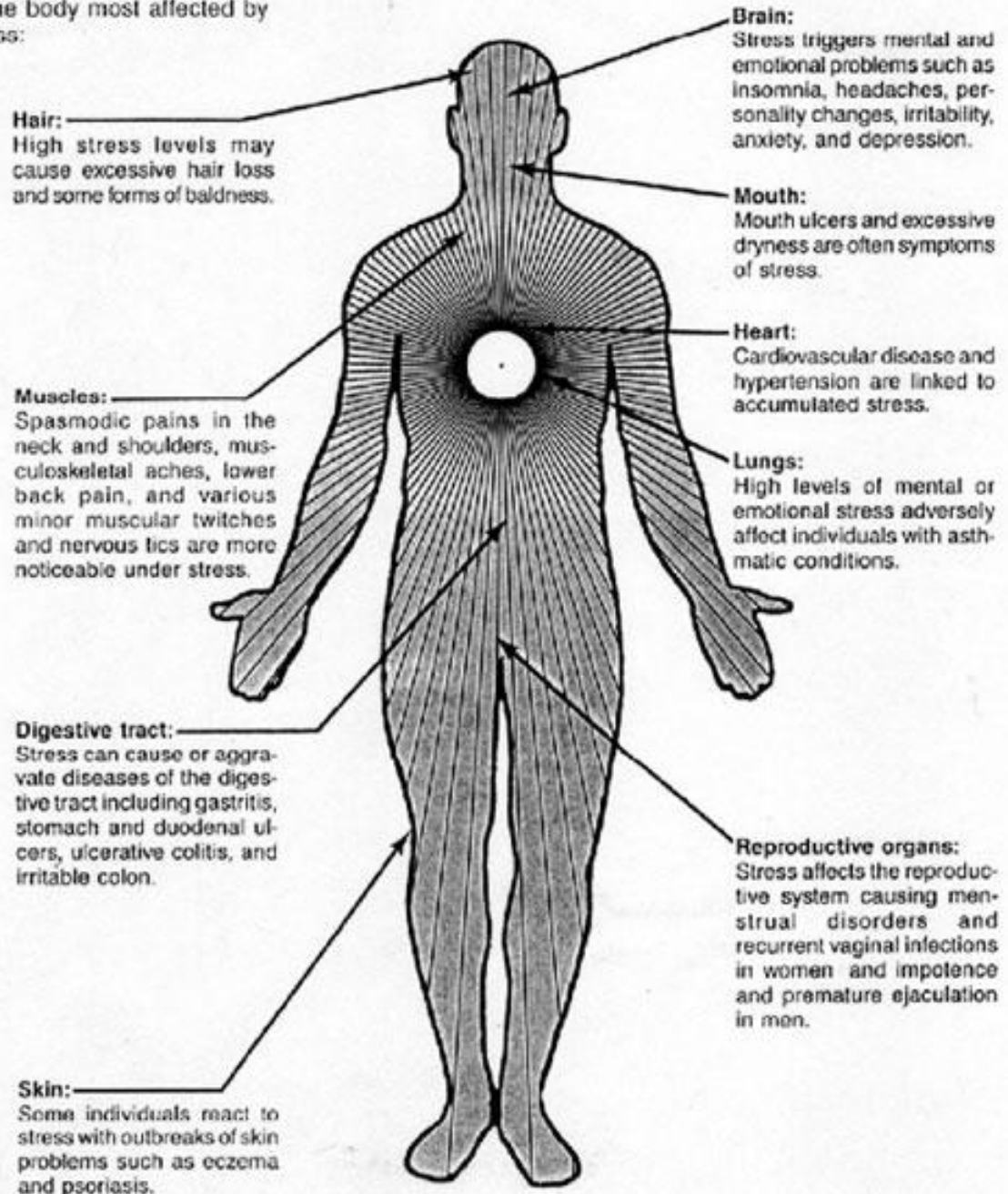


Figure 2
Tic-Tac-Toe



Figure 3

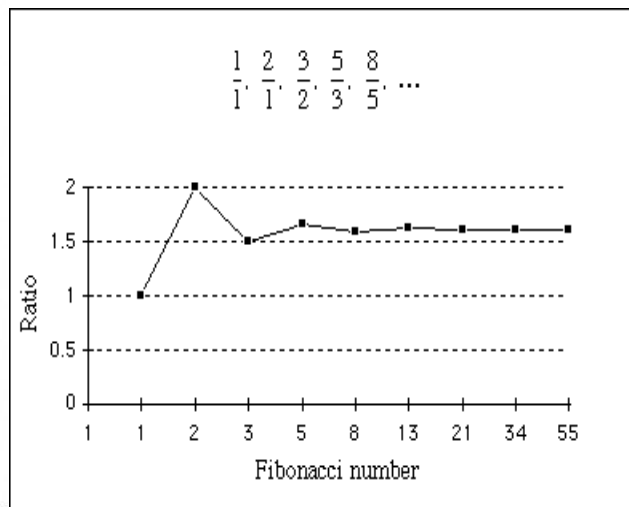
Sudoku

5	3			7				
6			1	9	5			
	9	8					6	
8				6				3
4			8		3			1
7				2				6
	6					2	8	
			4	1	9			5
				8			7	9

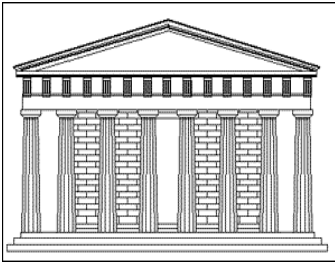
Figure 4
Fibonacci Numbers
a) Shell Spiral



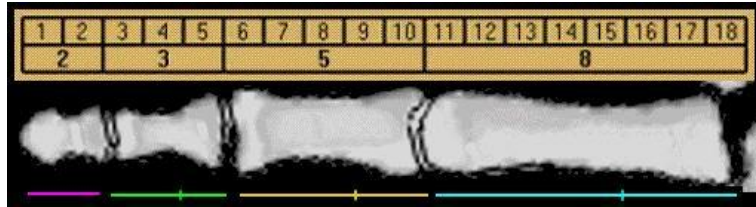
b) Fibonacci Ratio



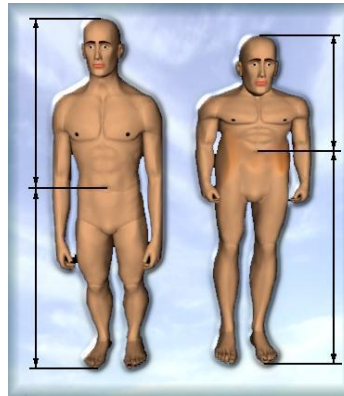
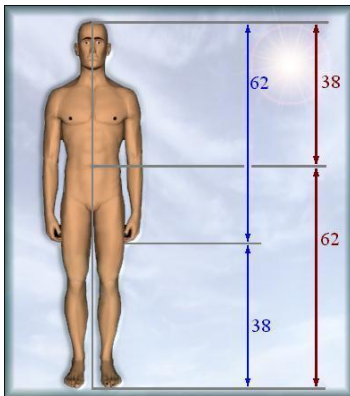
c) The Parthenon in Athens



d) Human index finger



e). Harmony (I) and disharmony (II) of human body



f). A tiling with squares whose sides are successive Fibonacci numbers in length

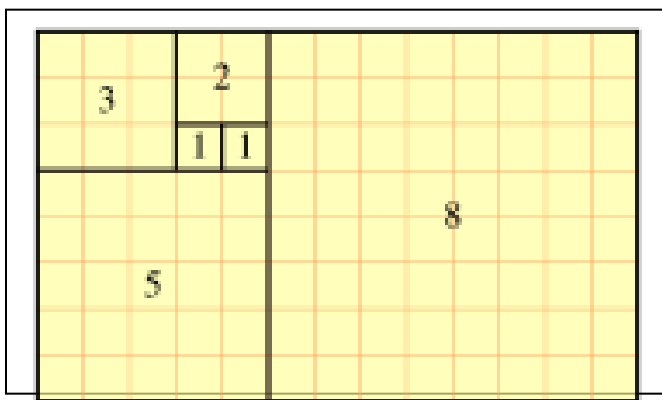
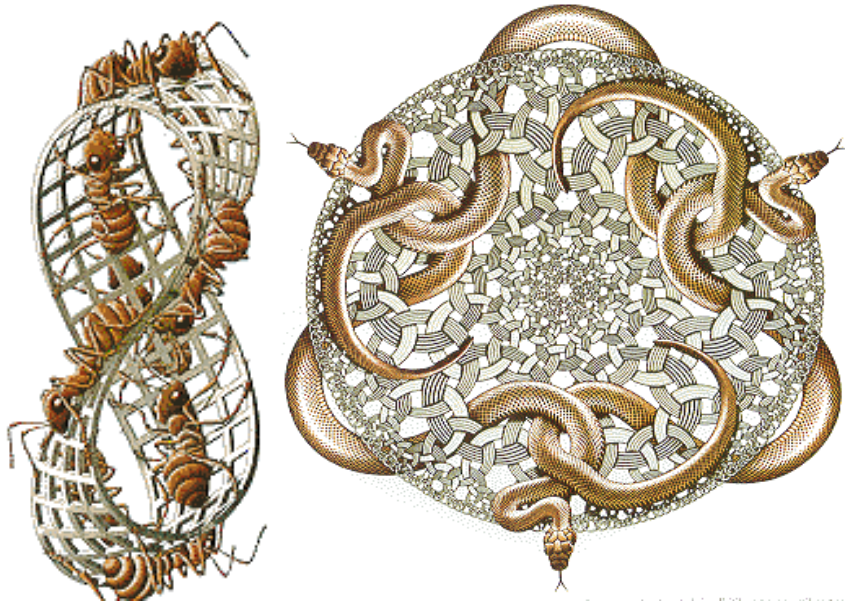
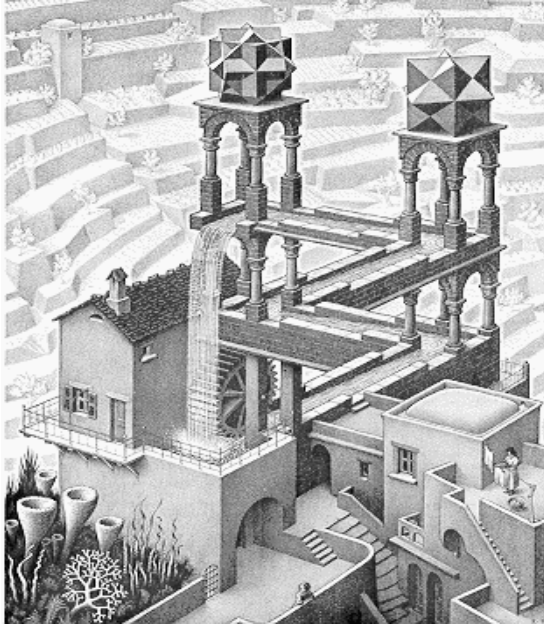


Figure 5
The Mathematical Art of M.C. Escher

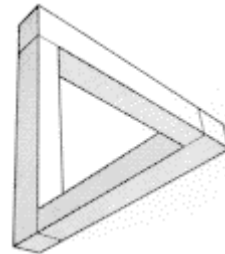


a). Möbius Strip

b). Snakes



c). Waterfall



d). Impossible Triangle

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GRACE SIMMONS

Pharmacokinetics: Implications for Management of Polypharmacy in the Geriatric Population¹

The geriatric population in America is facing a growing medical crisis. This crisis, termed “polypharmacy,” concerns the use of multiple drugs to treat multiple concurrent disorders in the same patient. This term is frequently used when describing the haphazard or indiscriminate prescription of many drugs to geriatric clients, without considering the implications of the aging process on the physiology of the elderly body or whether the medical problems being treated are caused by an over-use or over-prescribing of drugs themselves.

When approaching the discussion of polypharmacy in the geriatric population, we should first look at the root cause of the problem: errors in prescribing medications for elderly people. The first of these errors to be viewed is the prescribing of a drug for every complaint that an aged client may experience. It is a given that as we age, our bodies do not function to the same capacity. Common problems include aches and pains, cardiac and circulatory problems, and breathing difficulties related to changes in bone structures such as the rib cage and spine. This leads to an over-prescribing of medications that in and of themselves can cause new medical problems by way of adverse drug effects they may cause.

Another error is that many of the side effects brought about by these drugs are often misinterpreted or “brushed off” as being part of the aging process, when in fact they are side effects of the drug prescribed. One such side effect is hearing loss, an effect most often attributed to growing old, which may in fact be caused by “ototoxic” drugs such as Gentamicin (an antibiotic) or Lasix (a diuretic or water pill), along with many other drugs.

Geriatric clients tend to visit different doctors, each doctor unaware of the previous one, thus leading not only to the over-prescribing of medications, but the prescribing of medications that cross-react adversely or are contraindicated for use with other drugs. Doctors assume that the elderly clients become ill because they are not taking their medications properly, when in fact, they are taking them as prescribed but the amount prescribed is too much for their aging bodies.

I liken this prescribing “cascade” to the Mother Goose nursery rhyme “The House that Jack Built.”

¹ Written under the mentorship of Professor Barbara Gattullo for Nursing 45.

This is the house that Jack Built.
 This is the malt
 That lay in the house that Jack built.
 This is the rat,
 That ate the malt
 That lay in the house that Jack built.
 This is the cat,
 That killed the rat,
 That ate the malt
 That lay in the house that Jack built....

The following case study is an example of the prescribing cascade, or “the house that polypharmacy built”: A diuretic that decreases potassium levels is prescribed. Potassium supplements that then cause indigestion are given to replace the potassium lost because of the diuretic. Then a medication for the indigestion caused by the potassium supplements, is prescribed. We cause an enormous cascade of problems rather than stepping back and thinking, “Was that medication needed in the first place?”

Thus, a drug is prescribed to counteract a side effect of another drug and then that drug causes another side effect, which is treated by another drug, and so on and so forth. This prescribing cascade continues until polypharmacy builds its house and settles in. The medical professionals who care for aging adults can intercept the prescribing errors in the elderly, which lead to polypharmacy in the geriatric population. As such, it behooves the medical profession to step back and examine the geriatric client’s medical history and complaints more closely before prescribing any medications.

The element of pharmacokinetics in the geriatric patient is another important element to take into account when examining polypharmacy in the elderly. Pharmacokinetics (how the body processes a medication or drug once it has entered the body) has four components to consider: the absorption, distribution, metabolism, and excretion of the drug as it passes through the body. These components are important to consider when surveying polypharmacy in the geriatric population.

The rate of absorption (how the drug gets into the bloodstream once it enters the body) slows down in the elderly though the extent of absorption remains unchanged. Thus, the peak or highest serum concentration of a drug may be lower in an older adult and the time to reach target action is delayed because of slower absorption.

The distribution of a drug in an elderly client (how and where the medication goes once it enters the body) is affected by some physiological changes that occur in geriatric clients. Older adults have less body water and lean body mass and greater fat stores. As such, water-soluble drugs have a lower volume of distribution and reach peak levels of concentration quicker, making the elderly more prone to adverse effects and drug toxicity. An example of a common water-soluble drug used in aged clients is digoxin, an anti-arrythmic cardiac drug. In the elderly, fat-soluble drugs have an increased volume of distribution, and thus the drug will take longer to reach a steady state and longer to be eliminated as it accumulates in the fat stores. Drugs whose primary action occurs in the Central Nervous System, are of such a category. With CNS drugs, there is an increasing occurrence of adverse and toxic effects, which accumulate in elderly body-fat stores faster than they can be eliminated.

Metabolism (how the drugs are broken down to different components or inactivated by the body in preparation for excretion) is the third component of pharmacokinetics to be considered. The most common site where metabolism occurs is in the liver. With age, liver mass and hepatic blood flow decrease. The implications of the physiological changes include reduced clearance of drugs, leading to an accumulation of the drug components or its metabolites in the body. This poses another potential for a polypharmacy effect in the body related to the accumulation of drug components in the aged adult's body.

The final stage of pharmacokinetics, elimination, involves the kidneys. With age, there comes a decline in the glomerular filtration (filtering of waste and metabolite products through the kidney for elimination or excretion from the body). The functional unit of the kidneys, the nephrons, decrease in number, and the kidneys decrease in size leading to an overall decompensation of kidney function. This adds to the decreased ability of geriatric clients to eliminate drug metabolites, causing them to remain in the body, further complicating adverse polypharmacy effects in the elderly. We must also consider that many drugs, such as certain antibiotics, and non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs are nephrotoxic, causing kidney damage in the elderly.

Protein and albumin deficits occur with age. In the elderly, a higher proportion of the dosage of medications which use protein molecules as carriers, remain unbound (for lack of albumin) and pharmacologically active, thus serum peak/toxic levels are reached much quicker in the elderly.

There are thus many factors to take into consideration in the management of polypharmacy in the geriatric population. Understanding the uses and side effects of individual drugs, the precipitating factors of the patient's medical complaints, and the pharmacokinetics of the aged body are of the utmost importance in combating the prevalence of polypharmacy in the elderly. In a collaborative effort, the physician, nurse, pharmacist, patient, and his or her family should investigate matters surrounding the prescriptions of geriatric client more closely. Then, and only then, can we combat this detrimental cocktail of medications we call polypharmacy.

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EDITH ESTRELLA-RAMOS

Genital Reconstruction¹

The land of Botox, face-lifts, and myriad procedures ending in -plasty has added a new item to the surgical carte: vulvovaginal surgeries. The pursuit of perfection now includes the genital region for the superficially-addicted, giving them another part of the anatomy to deem abnormal and attempt to alter. A fairly new procedure that was originally intended to correct birth defects is now readily available to surgical junkies in search of another fix. There are women who need these kinds of surgeries for valid reasons, but in the United States of Aesthetics, bona fide needs turn into preposterous wants. Outside forces are also responsible for women feeling the need to change their appearance into something that society is willing to accept and this has now been extended to how their genitals look.

The vulvovaginal region has always been surrounded by controversy. In a sexually-liberated country it is absurd that we still hold dearly to gender-biased taboos. Through much censorship, television, one of the vulva's arch-enemies, limits the use of the word "vagina." While the use of the word "penis" is largely overlooked, even when doing a search online, typing in; "use of the word penis on television" versus "use of the word vagina on television" shows the disparity between the two. The former produces a list that about 70% of the time has nothing to do with the word penis. Yet, the latter gives us many instances in which people have been reprimanded for the use of the word "vagina." Even writers of popular shows have resorted to pet names when referring to the vagina. A new term that has been circulating is, "va-jay-jay." The writers of *Grey's Anatomy* wanted to find an alternative to the biological word for a part of the female anatomy. Due to the show's popularity and the fact that it is Oprah Winfrey's favorite show, *Grey's Anatomy* has popularized the pet name. This is not a recent phenomenon, Steven Pinker in *The New York Times* asserts, "There have been at least 1,200 terms for the vagina in the history of the English language." (Rosenbloom, 2007)

Television is not solely responsible for the suppression of the vaginal force. Schools have also taken action against the use of its proper name. Three students were suspended from their high school for using the word in an open mic session. They read an excerpt from, "The Vagina Monologues," in which the word was obviously mentioned. The principal of the school said, "The suspensions, which are being reviewed, stemmed from the girls' insubordination, not from their use of the word itself. He said the girls broke a promise not to include the word in their reading" (Springer, 2007). This statement has baffled me. Why was there a need for the girls to promise not to use the word in a room full of high school students and their parents?

¹ Written under the mentorship of Professor Jose Nanin for Health Education 52: Human Sexuality.

How can a part of the human body be noticeably absent from an excerpt of a female-empowering book? In terms of biology, this controversial word is responsible for the human race. It is the canal into the world and so many people seem to be frightened by it.

Like the fear of vaginas, surgeries used to be everyone's fear, serving as a last resort to remedy something unhealthy. Yet, surgery has now become a voluntary act that surgeons treat as a business transaction. They spend large amounts of money devising marketing strategies to attract customers to their doors. Using words such as "beautification" and "rejuvenation," plastic surgeons are playing on the insecurities some women may have when it comes to their vagina. The constant hunger for eternal beauty is fed by promises that even the genitals could use a pick-me-up. Women's self-esteem being toyed with at the expense of finding a way for a surgery to become popular and surgeons to cash in on the throng of women that go to their offices for help. Prestigious doctors resort to advertising in places in which it would not have been normal to see doctor's advertisements in the past – magazines targeted at strippers and porn actresses. Plastic surgeons seem to publicize their work amongst their target audience and now as their audience expands, plastic surgeons' advertisements can be found in many places.

Labiaplasty involves the reduction of the labia. Some women may experience an enlargement of either the *labia minora* or *majora* and in some cases, in both places simultaneously. Local anesthesia is used for the procedure and in a matter of a couple of hours, a condensed version of the previous vulva is sent home to heal. There are some women that are born with protruding lips that are easily irritable and may slip out through the sides of underwear or bathing suits. This would be an extremely embarrassing and painful situation and such reasons merit the surgery. There are women though, that have the absurd idea that they lack normalcy in their most private areas. We can only assume that an absurd idea can only come from an absurd place.

One woman confessed that, "The only women I could compare myself to was women in pornographic movies...nobody looked like me" (Navarro, 2004). After getting a labiaplasty done she says, "I look down and I say, that's the way it should be" (ibid.). Other women also say things like they felt "Insecure and ugly" (ibid.) before their surgeries and after they underwent the procedure they said things like, "I just feel normal" (ibid.). When seeking good genital role models, women are often fooled by the idea that the retouched photographs of pornographic stars are vaginas in their natural state. They may not be aware that labiaplasties and vaginoplasties are mostly popular among this group of women who supply the sex industry with altered vaginas.

Another form of genital surgery is vaginoplasty. This procedure intends to tighten the vaginal walls. This is beneficial for women who after giving multiple vaginal births, their vaginas may have become loose and never regain their pre-pregnancy state. These women seek to "rejuvenate" their bodies, attempting to erase their life-history. They wish to have a body rid of the imprints the years leave in a frivolous attempt to conform to societal values. The natural and beautiful process of childbirth is viewed as something so awful and tragic that any trace of it must be deleted. This surgery is also done by women who want to be able to have better orgasms or those diagnosed with the dysfunction anorgasmia, "a sexual difficulty involving the absence of orgasm in women" (UCSB, 2007). These women and those

who have just had children are advised to use alternative ways to treat their inability to orgasm.

Knowing about hymenoplasty can create two opposite reactions from those who are reading this. One may be confusion and the other empathy. This procedure restores the hymen to its pre-sexual state. One may be confused about why a woman that has a certain degree of sexual history seeks to restore a state equivalent to virginity. This procedure reinforces the notion of the hymen as the sole proof of a woman's virtue and the emphasis of a thin membrane that can be so easily ruptured by merely partaking in certain sports. In parts of the world where women are not liberated and these surgeries are available, this procedure only enforces traditions and taboos concerning the hymen. Empathy may be present when thinking about the unfortunate women that have been sexually molested and/or raped. The restoration of the hymen, while not restoring what was taken away, may help as psychological therapy and may make the woman feel as if she is a virgin again. This may in turn diminish the fear and shame felt by women that have gone through this experience – a band-aid covering a deeper wound.

Hoodectomy is the surgical procedure in which the clitoris is exposed by removing the hood. This is synonymous with the circumcision of the penis. Women whose clitorises are partially or completely covered by the hood may have difficulty reaching orgasm due to less stimulation to the area. This surgery carries the most risk at loss of sensation because of the proximity to the source of women's pleasure. Better stimulation is possible after the surgery. The opposite effect is also possible: over-stimulation. The clitoris may be at constant stimulation after the procedure and women can experience desensitization. There are many surgeons who take caution not to perform these surgeries because of this.

Most women that have these surgeries done seek unrealistic, picture-perfect genitalia. They look in the mirror and mistake a natural look for imperfection. Perfection comes at a price and women are willing to pay thousands of dollars to cookie-cut their way into false perfection. They are also willing to pay with something else: risk factors. As with any other surgery, genital surgeries also involve risks. There exist no real data on these new surgeries. There is no actual proof that they will actually enhance sexual pleasure. There are also the risks of a loss of sexual pleasure, scars, and bleeding. Women put their sexual lives at risk for the reward of looking "normal."

The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) warns strongly against cosmetic vaginal surgeries. Most of these surgeries have no medical validation; however, women are having them anyway. Women are not aware or may ignore the fact that everyone is different. "Many women don't realize that the appearance of external genitals varies significantly from woman to woman" (ACOG, 2007). Labias, clitorises, and vaginas all come in array of shapes, sizes, and colors. Two women are not alike. The ACOG is concerned with the increasing number of surgeries performed yearly. These surgeries are newly-discovered ground for plastic surgeons and very little is available. The ACOG suggests extensive evaluation for those who want vaginal surgery as a form of treatment for sexual dysfunction. They suggest seeking alternative, nonsurgical treatments for these women.

As time goes by, more information will be gathered on these surgeries and risks will eventually be lowered due to increasing technology and practice. The problem does not lie there, however. Why are women willing to consider these surgeries? We have let

ourselves be programmed into thinking that we are less than perfect, in need of tweaking certain glitches. We have been reduced to pseudo-Frankensteins who can easily alter errors made in the course of genetic processes. So many empowering feminist movements later, we are still at the mercy of a male-centered society. It seems to me that these surgeries are counter-productive to the achievements of the bra-burning days when women pioneered the way so that we may be equal to men. Their efforts are left on the back burner by the women who choose to have these surgeries, making way for chauvinistic observations of the female anatomy in its natural form.

I'm left wondering whether women are strong enough to rise above the phallogocentric world we live in and its sexist ideologies. In the time period when a woman can run for the presidency, how do we still hold on to such Neanderthal perspectives? The most important question is: are we not doing this to ourselves? Every day women allow themselves to be objectified. If there were no women saying "yes" to playing the part of the horny housewife in a pornographic movie, would televised moans be heard? If there were no young women agreeing to be the stars in hip-hop videos, would that be the end of the nearly-naked ass-shaking breasts-jiggling role models? Women have all the power to say "no" to playing the sexual role assigned to them. If we united and refused to take part in this, then we could retrieve our abused self-esteem and self-worth and learn to love our special vulvas such as God gave them to us.

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JIA LIN LAI

Gender-related Attitudes Toward Academic Achievement in Community-College Students¹

Abstract

The question of whether males have experienced significant declines in academic engagement in higher education has been the source of much controversy in recent years. Proponents of this view have pointed to disparities between males and females in enrollment rates, grade point averages (GPAs), and graduation rates. Recent studies have documented that the disparity on these measures is carried largely by lower income and minority students, suggesting that these differences may be especially evident in community colleges, whose enrollments draw heavily from these populations. This paper reports on an attempt to detect attitudinal differences between male and female students regarding academic activities that may underpin observed differences in performance and engagement.

Introduction

Ongoing attention has been paid to a general decline in male academic achievement across all levels of education, a decline that is more apparent in cities and at community colleges. Due to the decline, school officials began making claims about a crisis known as the “Boy Crisis,” which implies that men are falling behind women academically. The cause for concern began with school records showing a general enrollment pattern of more females than males. Lower GPAs and graduation rates for males compared with females are also causes for concern. As a result, these factors make the crisis seem a logical one. However, extensive research and historical data such as SAT scores and national assessment tests showed that boys have generally scored higher than girls in the math and science sections. Girls generally scored higher in sections like reading and writing (Lewin, 2006). These statistics do not show that men are doing worse than their female colleagues. In fact, sources say that just because women are climbing up the latter of success doesn’t mean that men are necessarily falling behind. According to Tom Mortenson, a senior scholar at Washington’s Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity,

¹ Written under the mentorship of Professor William Winter for Psychology 11.

the male academic achievements have neither declined nor improved, but remained rather constant since the 1970s, when the academic achievement research began (ibid.).

According to the American Council on Education and other groups, “while girls have for years graduated from high school and college at a higher rate than boys, the largest disparities in educational achievement are not between boys and girls, but between those of different races, ethnicities and income levels” (Lewin, 2008). Community-college records like those of Kingsborough, display a 60%-40% ratio favoring females in terms of enrollment, classroom attendance, and graduation over a ten-year period. The majority of the students here are from different ethnic backgrounds and come from middle to low-income families. Other schools, such as Elon University in North Carolina, Clark University in Massachusetts, as well as a number of other schools nationwide, have also reported a significant difference between female and male enrollments (Wilson, 2007).

Despite the findings that men are not necessarily falling behind females in academic achievement, the 60-40 disparity in college enrollments is still causing concern for administrators and faculty. Investigations of male attitudes towards academic achievement would be able to show the cause for the gender disparity issue with college enrollments. Perhaps males are showing disaffection for college because they feel that college and scholarly activities are more of a feminine activity. They may also feel that it is not “cool” or that it would conflict with their sense of masculinity if a college education is pursued. For some, pursuing a college education may even be a sign of betrayal to one’s roots. Whatever the case may be, these, and perhaps other negative feelings toward higher education, may be factors that account for the fact that male enrollments are significantly lower than those of females.

Methods

To find out whether or not males really are ambivalent about academic achievement, a research study and its data analysis would provide an explanation of the gender gap at urban community colleges. With the approval of Kingsborough Community College’s Institutional Review Board, the research about males’ general attitude towards college activities began with the distribution of surveys and later on with data analysis of students’ responses. Over 300 surveys, comprised of 42 questions, were distributed to students of both genders in Kingsborough’s culturally diverse classrooms. In these surveys, students were asked to rate each question from a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being strongly in agreement. After all surveys were completed, the answers were then input to the computer for statistical review. The compiled results derived from both genders were then compared in an attempt to establish whether or not there were any significant differences in behavior or attitude towards college activities.

Results

With the given 60%-40% of female to male enrollments, there was a disproportionate response figure of nearly twice as many female participants as males. Even so, contrary

to the original expectations of males feeling disaffection with college life, the results seem to be pointing in the opposite direction, and quite an optimistic one at that. It seems that the male students here at Kingsborough are not showing any signs of negative perceptions or attitudes toward college or college-related activities. In fact, the overall GPAs of the male students who took the surveys were about the same as the female students with perhaps a slight one-point difference. When asked whether or not they feel college is important, or that obtaining a college degree is important, both males and females gave astoundingly high endorsements for it with a 99% rating. They also very strongly believe that college is the key to their future success. Questions concerning reading and how much one enjoys the activity, 56% of males responded that they enjoy reading as well as with reading college-related materials. For the questions pertaining to how “cool” does one feel about college, the males gave the coolness rating with an 88% endorsement. In fact, 59% of the males who participated felt that college is a rather masculine activity. Surprisingly, there were low endorsements for the question pertaining to betraying one’s roots by going to college. Only 10% of males and 4% of females felt that they are.

The phrase “Be cool. Stay in school.” was created in the 1990s to encourage middle-school students to achieve a higher education rather than dropping out and obtaining a job with little or no possible upward mobility. As most of us know, obtaining a higher education and broadening our knowledge should be top priority and is an essential part of our career development and advancement. As far as Kingsborough’s male students are concerned, the survey suggests that they feel quite optimistic about higher education, albeit with a 60-40 enrollment gap. The reasons for the gap are numerous. It could simply be that some males are the primary breadwinner in their households, which unfortunately edges out education as the top priority. It could also be that some males opt for sports or for learning things through natural, hands-on experiences. There are numerous variables that can play into a person’s – male or female – decision when it comes to college enrollment. But the fact is that men are certainly not doing worse than women, and they certainly do not feel any sort of discontentment while attending and living the college life.

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MARINE AVANESYAN

U.S. Immigration and Armenian Identity¹

At the end of the 20th century, national and political problems in large and small countries caused major crises in the economies of the world. The United States of America has always been, and continues to be, a place of refuge for those seeking social justice, religious freedom, and economic opportunity. As of 2006, the United States accepted more legal immigrants as permanent residents than the rest of the world combined.² There are now more than 30 million immigrants living in the country. In 2002 (the year of my arrival to the USA) the Current Population Survey (CPS) showed 32.45 million immigrants.³

America was always a promised land for other nations because of its constitutional freedom and democracy, a haven which has attracted Armenians, among others, for more than a century. The people of Armenia have faced countless challenges. Armenia has been invaded and conquered for centuries. With a history that dates back over 2,500 years, the Armenians have had to struggle constantly in order to maintain their traditions, their land, and their identity. In A.D. 301, Armenia became the first nation in the world to adopt Christianity as its official religion. Later, for centuries, Armenia was a Christian nation in an area dominated by Islam. The darkest episode in all of Armenian history began in 1915, when the Ottoman Empire initiated a policy of genocide that continued until 1922. In this holocaust, more than a million Armenians lost their lives. The survivors were scattered all over the world escaping the horrors of genocide. Today, more than 60 countries host Armenian communities. According to the 1998 Armenian Census of Population Statistical Yearbook, there are approximately eight million Armenians in the world today. Over half of the world's Armenian population lives outside of Armenia, and the largest and most influential group is in the United States.⁴

The second wave of Armenians to the United States came at the end of World War II as a consequence of social, political, and economic oppression in Europe. The third wave came after the Soviet Union collapsed in 1990. Mass emigration increased due to the outcome of the blockade of Armenia by Azerbaijan and Turkey, because of territorial problems with Nagorno-Karabach. Since the breakup of the Soviet Union, Armenia has emerged as an independent country, the source of great symbolic pride and affection for Armenians everywhere, but also a nation racked by severe unemployment, shortages of supplies, and warfare with neighboring peoples. Those who had the financial

¹ Written under the mentorship of Professor Elinor Bader for English 24.

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Immigration_to_the_United_States

³ <http://www.cis.org/articles/2005/back805.html>

⁴ www.armeniaemb.org/DiscoverArmenia/Diaspora/Index.htm

resources immigrated to the United States; the rest went to Russia or stayed in Armenia. America opened her doors and welcomed those who legally entered the country, not only Armenians from the former Soviet Union, but also Armenians from around the world. Recent immigration has been large also from the Middle East, because of the civil war in Lebanon and the fundamentalist Islamic influence in Iran. The largest Armenian diaspora is in the United States. California is the state with the largest Armenian population. One of the neighborhoods in Los Angeles is named Little Armenia.⁵

The educated professionals of the first immigrant generation were generally successful in their adjustment to the economic life of their adopted country. They arrived with a number of advantages, such as skills or backgrounds in business. Recent immigration is more heterogeneous in both interests and background, for it includes Armenians from Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Egypt, and the former Soviet Union. Iranian Armenians are able to bring considerable financial resources with them. Opening a small business is an option for them, regardless of their education and language skills. In contrast, the self-employment rate of Soviet Armenians is much lower, probably because they were not permitted to take much money with them when they left the country and because entrepreneurship was strongly discouraged during the Soviet period. Many Soviet Armenians are well educated professionals from high-status occupations in their home countries.⁶ A better job or higher income is a powerful motivating force for those who want to reach a similar position in the United States. They realize that the cultural assimilation and the language are the most important aspects in the process of immigrants' adjustment to American culture. Most educated Armenians go to school, taking English classes, planning to improve their skills and get jobs. On the contrary, to the degree that one feels uncertain of his acceptance by the new society, his adjustment to that society will be more difficult. New immigrants definitely need some time for the adaptation and socialization process, because of differences in culture, traditions, the language barrier, and the economic and political systems.

Annually about 1,000 Armenians win Green Cards.⁷ Destiny sometimes plays games with us. In 2000, I hit the lottery and became one of those lucky winners of a Green Card. This meant that I could leave Armenia, come to America, and become a permanent resident of the U.S.A. Wow! What an alluring prospect! I had never been abroad. I had traveled, but never outside of the former U.S.S.R. I decided to come to New York because I had relatives and friends here. The truth is that everyone wants to see New York City even if just once in their lifetime. In other words, the idea that I would have the opportunity to live in New York was fascinating. It was 4PM on September 3, 2002 when I arrived at JFK Airport, having mixed feelings of excitement and sadness. I was on the opposite side of the globe, over the Atlantic Ocean that I had seen before only on the map. It is a strange feeling when crossing continents. Everything, including the sky, seemed unreal to me. In addition, the crowd on the plane was unusual and I found it fascinating. I had never seen such a diversity of people in Armenia, for the Armenian population consists of 98% Armenians. On the other hand, the fact that I could not afford

⁵ www.armeniaemb.org, *ibid.*

⁶ www.armeniaemb.org, *ibid.*

⁷ Bibicheff, Alexander, *Which Way USA*, Bibicheff & Associates, LPP, 2005

to fly back and forth to Yerevan, the capital of Armenia, where I was born and spent more than forty years of my life, was bothering me. I realized that I was going to miss my friends and relatives, my apartment and my city. But I did not want to think about it and pushed any nostalgic thoughts out of my mind. I tried to cheer myself up by thinking of new perspectives that would open up for me in New York – the Capital of the World.

I recall my first visit to midtown Manhattan. For me it was similar to those commercials, New York City “before and after” midtown. I got the impression that I was in one of my dreams or in a fairy tale. Since I liked it so much, every once in a while I indulge myself by going to midtown. I walk toward glamorous Times Square with a million colorful lights and then I turn left toward Fifth Avenue with its incredible skyscrapers. If I compare Moscow with Manhattan they would have a lot in common. They both are major cities with high buildings and millions of people. The difference is that in Moscow you feel like an ant among those high buildings because avenues and streets are very wide. In contrast, Manhattan’s avenues are not that wide and the streets are narrow. It seems tightly packed and solid. I think that is why Manhattan is so cozy and you feel at home, no matter where you came from.

Another remarkable place for me is the Greenwich Village. It has charisma, something unique that attracts me. I like its special atmosphere and funky crowd. You feel relaxed and comfortable walking in the Village. There are mostly young couples that go club-hopping just to listen to the music. I have a friend Anna, who likes to go to her favorite club, “Groove,” on the corner of MacDougal and Bleecker Streets. Once she invited me to the club. I had not gone to any nightclubs before. I have only seen them in American movies. I was anxious about having my first experience at a nightclub. The place was jam-packed. We couldn’t hear each other because the music was very loud. I felt like I was a character in a movie. I thought to myself, “I grew up listening to Rolling Stones, Deep Purple, Led Zeppelin and Earth, Wind and Fire. And now I am in a city, where I can easily obtain a ticket to the concert and see them live.” We had a great time. We took a cab, and on the way home Anna shared her life story.

She was born in Armenia into an artistic family. Despite her childhood trauma and hardships – she lost her father at very young age, she managed to graduate from the public school, specializing in English and Music, with high grades. Later on she successfully graduated from the Yerevan State University majoring in Education and Literature. She left the Soviet Union in 1991 and arrived in New York City, where she was invited to teach in a Summer Camp for the Armenian Church. Since 1993, she has worked as a music teacher in New York City public schools and become a member of the United Federation of Teachers. Anna devoted almost ten years to teaching elementary school children using innovative methods, directing puppet shows, musicals and conducting choruses. The last six years she has worked at the pre-school, ten blocks away from the 9/11 disaster site. She was in a kindergarten classroom with the children reading a fairy tale when they heard the terrifying sound, which was the second airplane crashing into the building. They all jumped to the window and saw the burning fire on both towers. Although, at that moment, she was scared and wanted to escape, her role as a teacher with a sense of responsibility and an enormous love for the children obligated her to stay with them. When Anna finally left the building she witnessed the terrified crowd, all covered in dust, running away. She witnessed the same scene from her Woodside

apartment's window, which was facing the city. Instead of the two highest buildings, there was smoke that later changed into two luminous lights. She wished to have trees facing her window instead of the so much dreamed New York skyscraper view. Every morning, for quite a while, she kept waking up and checking from her window to see if the United Nations and Empire State buildings were still there. The tragic event affected her health. She was afraid of taking airplanes; they became only weapons in her mind. She became very sensitive to noise and wore earplugs in the subway. She did not feel like talking to anyone. Her health gradually deteriorated. She was not able to work. Anna was diagnosed with chronic post-traumatic stress disorder, and applied for disability. "I am glad I was able to heal many traumatized children of the neighborhood by teaching them beautiful songs," she sighed. She looked upset. I was sorry for my friend, for all Americans, for the almost 3,000 victims that were killed on September 11, 2001, and for their families, and also for the Twin Towers that symbolized New York City on posters and business logos. Unfortunately, I could never visualize the Twin Towers standing high in the sky because I came to the United States a year later.

The view of New York City, however is still amazing. I won't miss a chance to see it. It looks fantastic. If I am on the Q or B trains, I purposely take a seat by the window to enjoy my favorite view, and watch the beautiful bridges belted with thousands of blinking lights, like Christmas trees. I can't get enough of it. I can't help it, and always wonder why the rest of the people in the car don't look out of the window?

It has been almost five years since I came to New York. I live in a city with infinite opportunities, the city that never sleeps. It is incredibly beautiful. Every time I see the T-shirts or the souvenirs with the "I LOVE NY" sign on them, I repeat to myself, "I love it, too."

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DONALD ACOSTA

Silent Nights with Crescent Moons: The Secrecy and Scars Left Behind by War and Tyranny in Afghanistan¹

Are the events during the Taliban reign in the fictional novel *The Kite Runner* similar to the real, everyday suffering the Afghan people have endured? Were women oppressed, civil rights abused, or children abducted? Had the Afghans' suffering really been as bad as the author, Khaled Hosseini, would have his readers believe it was; and if so, then why are there so few primary sources on the topic in greater detail? These are the questions that *The Kite Runner* inspires, and I hope to answer them despite the few sources available.

I will begin with Cathy Newman. She is a writer for *National Geographic* who was writing about a photographer named Steve McCurry who was at an Afghan camp and had taken a picture of a young girl who had powerful green eyes, which in Newman's words seemed "haunted and haunting." Newman goes on to say, "and in them you can read the tragedy of a land drained by war." This young girl has grown up, and seventeen years later was found by the photographer. We finally learn that her name is Sharbat Gula. Sharbat, according to Newman, had suffered through the death of both parents, Soviet invasion, loss of home, living in caves for refuge, all with a total loss of property and privacy. During the mid-nineties she lived in a village that was devoid of "School[s], clinic[s], roads, or running water." Life in Afghanistan is so very hard for its citizens – especially for women. Most are not allowed to work, or to go outside in public without a male escort; even former professors and doctors have to beg on the streets for Afghani money or even table scraps. As we can see from Cathy Newman's observation, the people of Afghanistan have seen nothing but heartache and pain for the past twenty-five years or so.

In contrast to the world to which Khaled Hosseini's protagonist of *The Kite Runner*, Amir, returned, we see distinguished scholars begging in the street. These people – having once been pillars of their communities, the "architects" of young minds, and thus being the builders of the future – were now being subdued under the weight of the beast-like regime called the Taliban, much like the rubble around them had been. In *The Kite Runner*, one such scholar and professor had recognized Amir by the physical features he had in common with his mother, who was also a professor. We could only imagine what would've become of her had she lived to see the terrible tragedies of those tyrannical days and had not escaped in time to avoid it. She probably would've been right

¹ Written under the mentorship of Professor Linda Holman for English 12.

next to that beggar, wondering how she could've gone from an educated woman and educator, to a beggar forced to wear a burka. Her son Amir, by whom she survives, returns to their homeland and can barely recognize his war-torn country, a country where now even the hardest working man cannot afford to feed and protect his wife (who was not allowed by the Taliban to work) or to feed his children, widowed sisters, and his elders. For Amir, and Hosseini, to know that children are begging in the streets, people literally starving to death, and widows lining themselves up and down the street panhandling (some of these women having no choice but to turn to prostitution, which goes against everything these women believe in), and more pain – I suspect it is so much more than could fit in all the books in all the libraries of the world, let alone Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*. But few people have actually documented their experiences in those perilous times in Afghanistan.

My search to understand how Afghanis coped with war was like putting myself in a quagmire, because no one in Afghanistan would have called whatever it is that got these people through these perilous times “coping methods,” but rather “survival.” I was stubborn, however, not unlike many others who may seek the same information, and didn't want to give in to the fact that there is a code of silence within, not necessarily among, these people called Afghanis. It is apparently part of the culture among men and women alike to go to prayer (similar to Christian confession to God) or believe it is because of some divine fate that this suffering happened, and that it will ultimately work out to some *greater good* in the end. But, showing how they go on *after* surviving the wars, tyranny, and poverty can reveal to us the long-standing emotional scars they will carry with them – possibly long into their dying days. But until then, many of them will continue to believe they survived by divine intervention. When Sharbat Gula was asked why she thinks she survived, her response was that “It was the will of God.” Without sounding too cynical, I find it interesting that Cathy Newman and the photographer Steve McCurry could not get more *detail* from Sharbat Gula about her troubled life (although I am fully certain that they tried – after all they went out into the region looking for her after seventeen years!). Perhaps Gula didn't go deep into the fine details of her experience because she probably will take them to her God in prayer – in other words, she may find that talking about it may cause her to want to ask *why*, and maybe she's leaving it up to her God and her faith to make sense of this.

I could be reading too much into this, but I must confess that I find it peculiar that she apparently chose not to fully open-up when asked to tell her story, basically to cry on the shoulders of the collective audience of readers, and yet she gave the impression that she was withholding the most intimate details about her painful ordeals, as if she were saving the story (confession) for one she deems more worthy. I, for one, am not very religious, but I can sense from the article that Sharbat is still a *firm believer* in Islam, and didn't let the Taliban's hypocrisy and misrepresentation of it cause her to falter in her faith. Or, maybe her faith was *her* way of coping. *Maybe*. But, in my personal opinion, this form of “silence” is what makes it hardest to find out for sure how they coped. For the rest of us who have never stepped in their shoes, we can only imagine the horrors.

The people of Afghanistan thought their fears were behind them when the Soviet-Afghan war came to an end, but the Soviets started backing out of Afghan territory and the Taliban regime stepped in. Very soon, the citizens learned that the Taliban was not just policing the crime waves of a war-torn nation, but would later be policing people in

every aspect of their lives: from what to wear, to property rights (or nullification of such), to the right to work or have a fair court hearing when being falsely accused of an offense. The people of Afghanistan, Pushtun, and Hazara and every one in-between went from welcoming the Taliban to living in absolute fear of them. When the honeymoon phase ended, so did civil liberties for every living person in Afghanistan. Although the Taliban claimed to the United Nations that it's strict laws were for the security of the Afghani people, the people themselves had been dying and being cast in prison in rapid numbers. Security? The people would more than likely call it "tyranny."

William Malley, is the author of *The Afghanistan Wars* and is a professor of politics at the University of New South Wales. He makes note that the Afghans *did* sincerely welcome the Taliban as providers of "security," although how many is impossible to ascertain" (Malley 233). "In 1997 in Kabul, I often heard Afghans whisper the word *wahshat* ('terror')..."(ibid. 234). In *The Kite Runner*, a man named Rahim Khan went from a life in which he was free to visit his friends, enjoy watching the local soccer games, and watch the children play in kite-running tournaments. He confessed to believing that the Taliban would bring about a good change, as opposed to the war ravaged state of chaos it was left in – one of lasting peace that could return to him the life he loved and the friends who had been left because of the Soviet invasion. But his civil liberties never returned to him, and soon he found it to be too frightening to even leave home. Luckily for him, he did make it out of the region, but millions of others, including Amir's nephew, were stuck out there with little hope for change. These were times of absolute terror.

"It was based on fear, not the rule of law," Malley observes (ibid. 233). It can be further elaborated when we look at another quote from Malley showing the fact that on September 1997, "The Taliban official Sher Muhammad Abbas Stanekzai admitted that it 'is a fact our rules are obeyed by fear'"(ibid. 234). What can be learned from Malley's book is that the Taliban had no real concept of finances. Although money was being produced from drugs and smuggling (by the Taliban), they could not get a handle on Afghan currency, and thus the economy fell.

Concerning women's rights and the Taliban, Malley shows that the Taliban believed that:

Their obligation as men and as Muslims was to protect women's 'honor.' Their solution was to confine women in the home, where they would be surrounded only by children, other women, and men who by virtue of being relatives could be expected to treat them honorably (ibid. 237).

The Taliban had no regard for privacy. They would seize any home they wanted. This parallels the experience of Amir's half brother Hassan in *The Kite Runner*, who died by the hands of Taliban men who tried to take Amir's old home in Kabul. Hassan refused to let them, so they just shot him and his wife, leaving their son an orphan – all for a house that they felt *entitled* to invade (Hosseini 219). The Taliban would also kidnap women. These women would often be sold into slavery, forced into marriage with Taliban members, or be raped or held in sexual captivity.

As if seeing the horrors of Afghanistan flashing before his very eyes, Hosseini, starting from chapter 15, describes exactly how horrific it was to be in Afghanistan. I

thought he was being dramatic for the sake of building an interesting novel, but I am now shamed to see that not only did he *not* over-exaggerate his people's struggles for the sake of a work of fiction, but that he also was trying to bring the image of the sheer terror to "life," so the reader could know how horrifying life was for Afghanis during the Taliban rule. In Hosseini's novel, we learn of the fate of Hassan, who was killed for being a Hazara, because he had the *audacity* to defy the Taliban. His wife too was killed, and their son, Sohrab, after hiding out in an orphanage, eventually ends up in the hands of a child-molesting monster of a man who was in the Taliban. Hassan's case was not tried in a fair court. The Taliban's reasoning was that as a Hazara, he had no business living *inside* the home of a Pushtun, let alone having the "*impudence*" (emphasis added) to tell the Taliban tyrants that they had no right to seize Amir's home.

In actuality, Hosseini's description of the suffering of the post Soviet-Afghan war times in Afghanistan which led to the Taliban takeover is a very accurate one. We can see that it is accurate when we look in William Malley's book *The Afghanistan Wars*. Malley excerpts another source, Robert Colville of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), and relays Mr. Colville's testimony (pertaining to the treatment of the Hazaras):

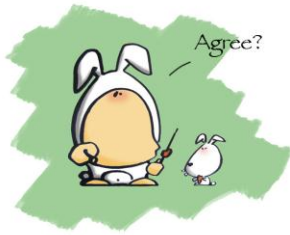
Some were shot in the streets. Many were executed in their own homes, after areas of the town known to be inhabited by their ethnic group had been systematically sealed off and searched. Some were boiled or asphyxiated to death...In at least one hospital, as many as 30 patients were shot as they lay helplessly in their beds...The bodies of many victims were left on the streets or in their houses as a stark warning to the city's remaining inhabitants. (Cited in Malley 239-240).

Ann Jones, writer of the book, *Kabul in Winter*, is a woman, who in her acknowledgements page, claims to have originally gone to Afghanistan not to "write a book," but to help as a humanitarian. Her experiences in Kabul, post-Taliban, took her from the streets, to the prisons, and to the newly emerging schools for women in the country. Jones was told by her Afghan friend (while still in Afghanistan) about how many people have lost legs, been crippled, and even died because of randomly placed mines. This friend, Sharif, tells her in imperfect English that: "In Taliban time, was no cars, no taxis. Nothing in the streets. Now, many, many cars" (Jones 37). Now, as one can see in *The Kite Runner*'s portrayal of the "Taliban time," the protagonist, Amir, *did* drive around with Farid, a man helping Amir to find his young, orphaned nephew. But, although there were cars on the road, they were scarce, and landmines were plentiful. In Hosseini's novel, Ali (a close friend to Amir and the father of Hassan) dies stepping on land mine (Hosseini 206). He is walking about and his life is unexpectedly snuffed-out by a weapon of absolute stealth, placed in an area in which most people probably assumed was safe – obviously not the kind of place most people would call a battleground. Jones also notes that militant forces "Ran amok in neighborhoods of the Hazara minority, raping, mutilating, and murdering without mercy," and that "according to the [International Committee of the Red Cross], about 20,000 people were killed between April 1992 and December 1994..." (Jones 26). She also notes that "other sources put the death toll at 50,000 and claim as many as 150,000 wounded" (ibid.).

After reading *The Kite Runner*, I wondered if the Taliban, who claimed to want to bring peace to Afghanistan and protect women and children, really *did* abduct children and molest them like *The Kite Runner*'s Assef, a Taliban member whose immediate militant entourage allowed him to kidnap children and molest them – something I am sure would be against the Afghan and Qu'ranic law. We see in *Kabul in Winter* that that was a practice that indeed happened frequently with the Taliban (ibid. 48). Jones states: "Stories of rape and sodomy of abducted girls and boys were common as well," and "...they rescued a 'dancing boy' from the clutches of two rival warlords...the abduction and multiple rapes of two teenage girls" (ibid.). Again, there is another connection to *The Kite Runner* with the real events of Afghanistan during the Taliban reign. The nephew Amir was looking for – his name being Sohrab – was abducted at an orphanage where Assef (and possibly other Taliban men) would come to for the sole purpose of molesting them. When Amir first laid his eyes on Sohrab, the boy had been wearing mascara, possibly blush, bells on his feet, and some sort of outfit used for dancing. The Taliban man, Assef, had the boy put on a little dance, and afterwards, he brushed his lips against Sohrab's ears, which would lead the reader to believe that Assef molested Sohrab, like he did to Sohrab's father Hassan when he was young. The contrast in the events to Ann Jones' non-fiction is another argument *for* the case that Hosseini's description of the hypocrisies and brutalities of the Taliban are genuine. From the look of things, considering the fact that Hosseini himself was in America during that most horrific timeline, he was still well informed and quite accurate in his knowledge of the suffering of his people, despite the Taliban's hold on the media there. I conclude that Hosseini's portrayal of a post Soviet-invaded Afghanistan was very accurate, causing one to wonder how he knew these things and if he collected the real life stories of others to build the backdrop for his novel.

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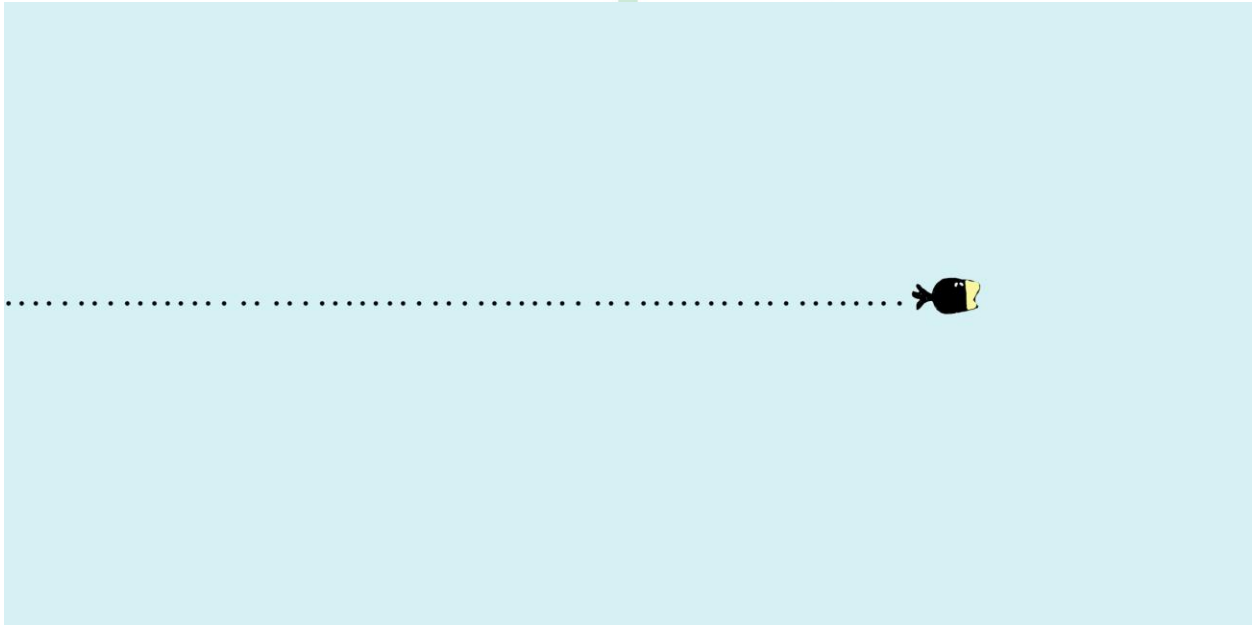
This isn't about me... It's about you

THIS ISN'T ABOUT ME
IT'S ABOUT YOU

XIAO MING LAU



X I A O M I N G L A U





It's about...

- Government 5-10
- Personal life 11-15
- School system 16
- Society 17-29

POLICIANS' SIDE JOBS

Attention! This is the first time we politicians' side jobs are being revealed.



5



I charm not only snakes...



6

I won't put you to sleep...
You just need to buy my word.



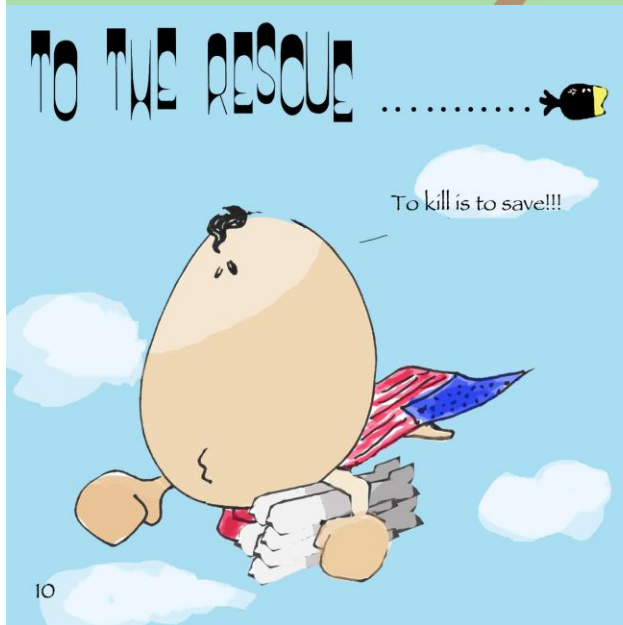
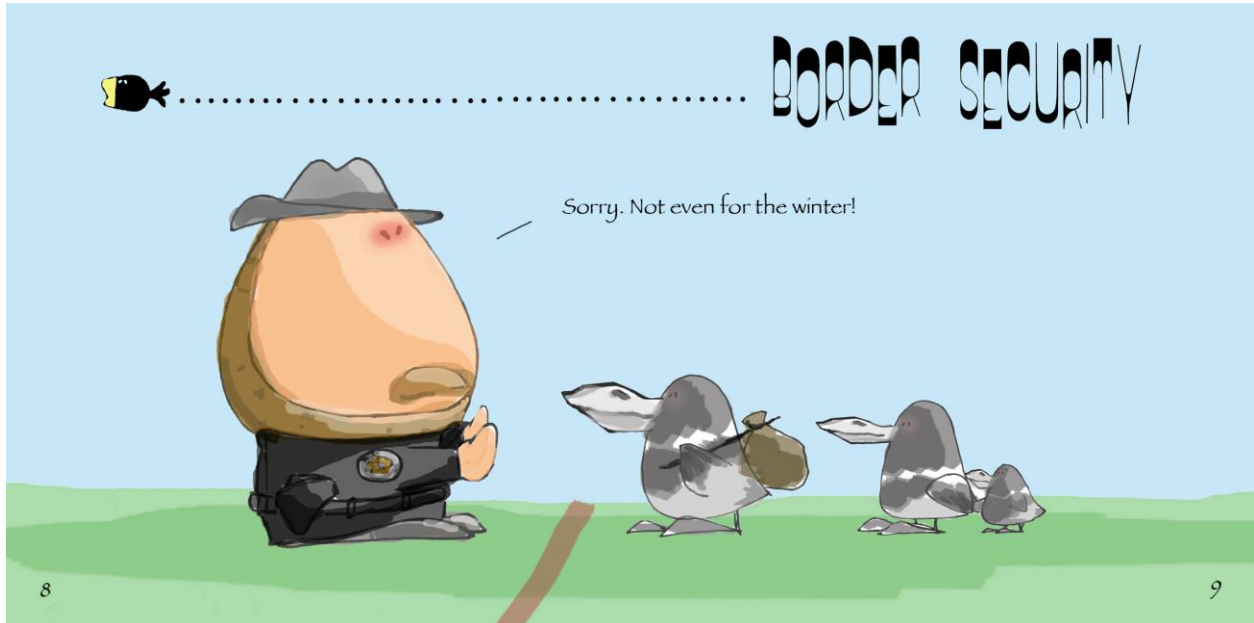
I just love acting.

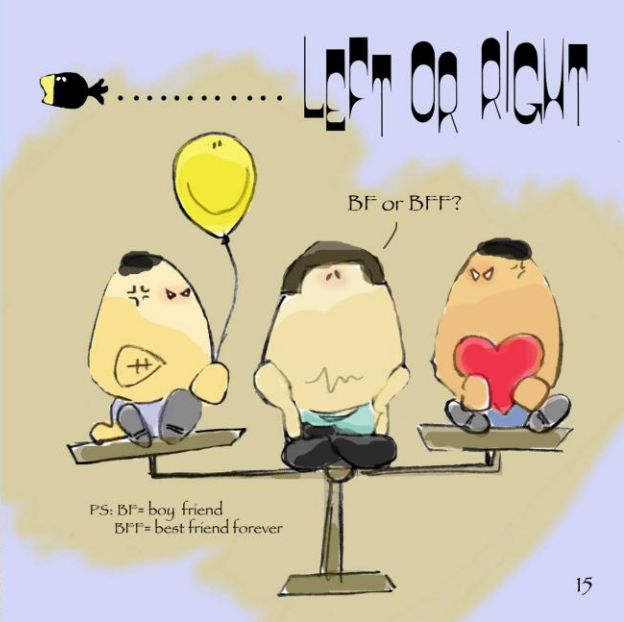
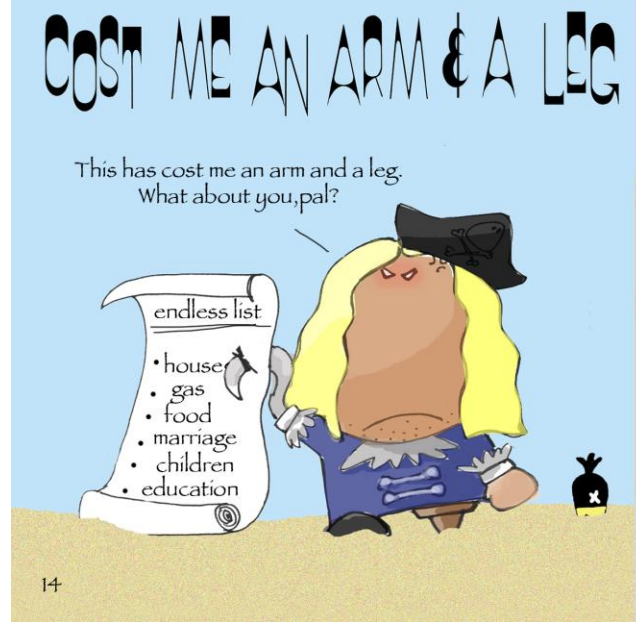
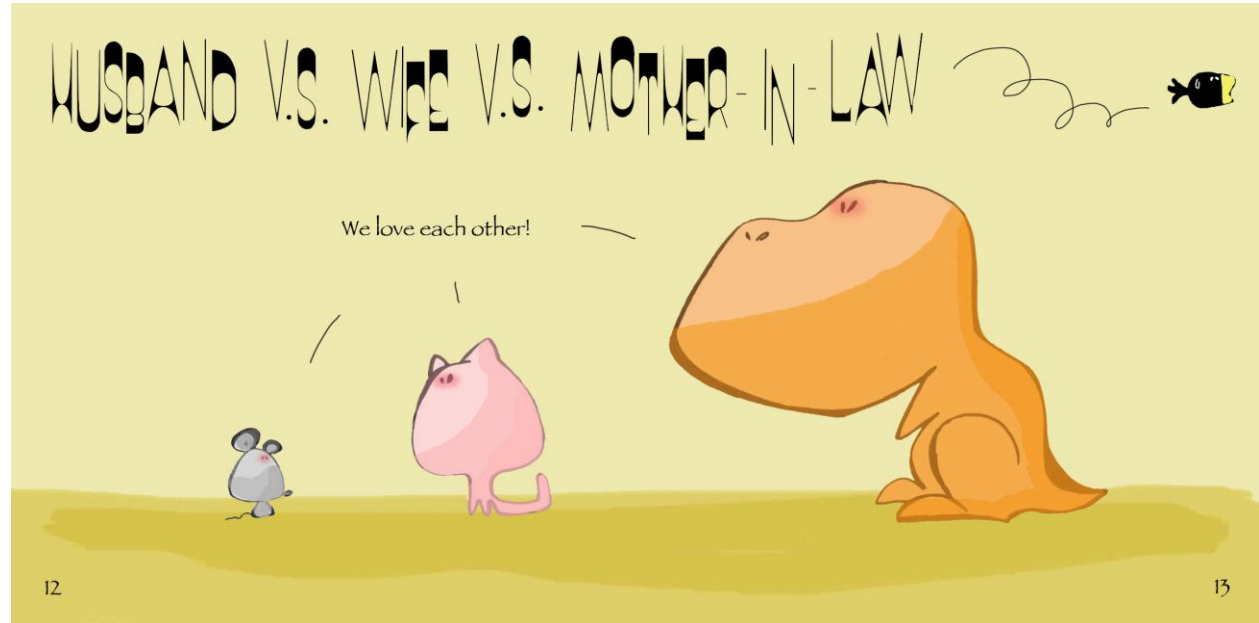


Need I say more?
I do tricks!

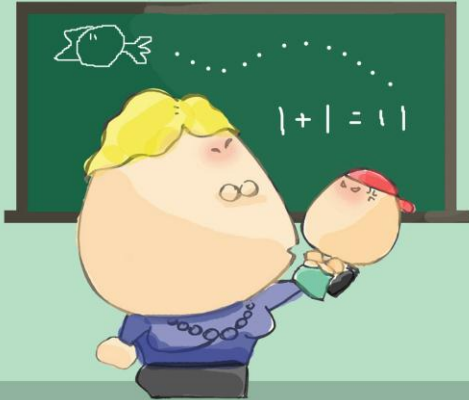


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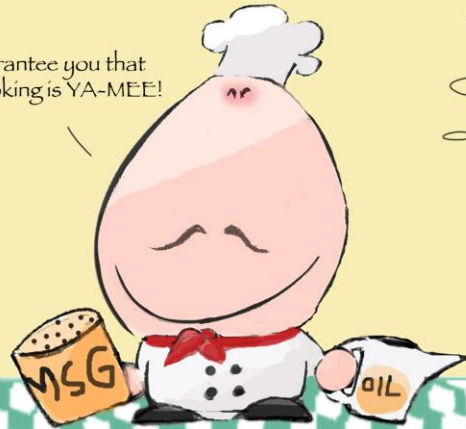
PROFESSOR AND STUDENT



I'm always wondering...
16 What if the professor were to tell us that 1+1=11?

CHIEF'S SECRET RECIPE

I guarantee you that
my cooking is YA-MEE!



17

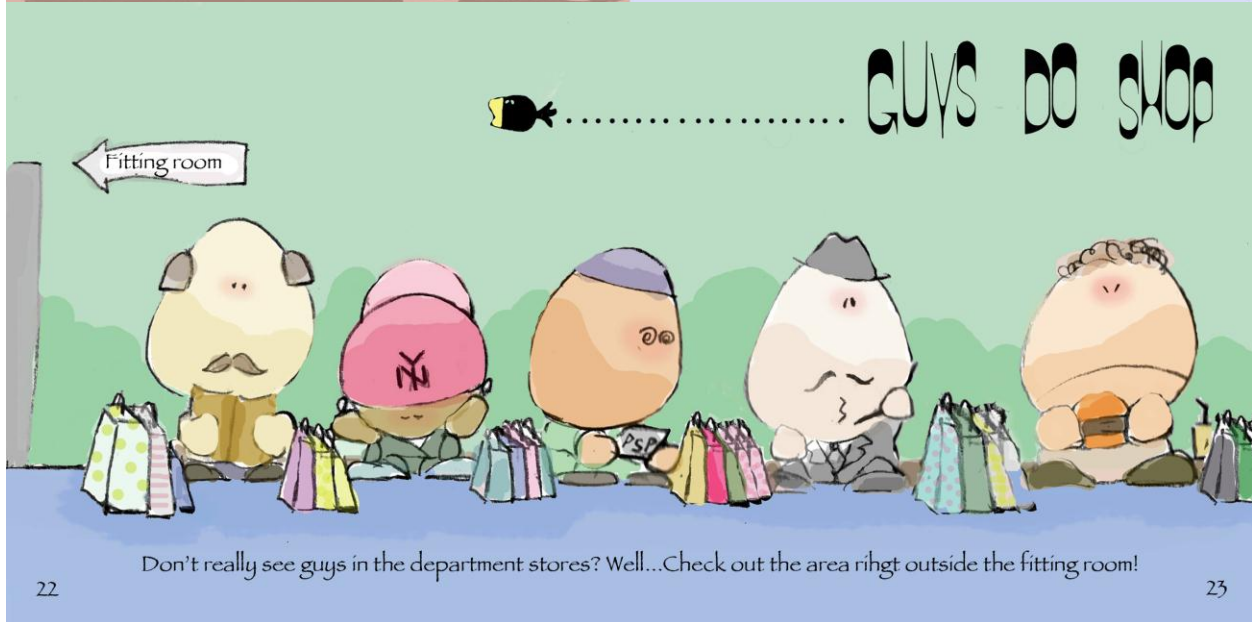
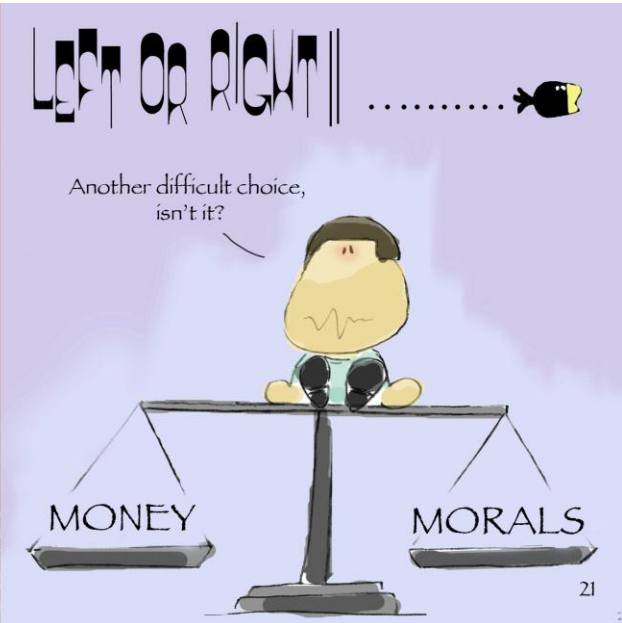
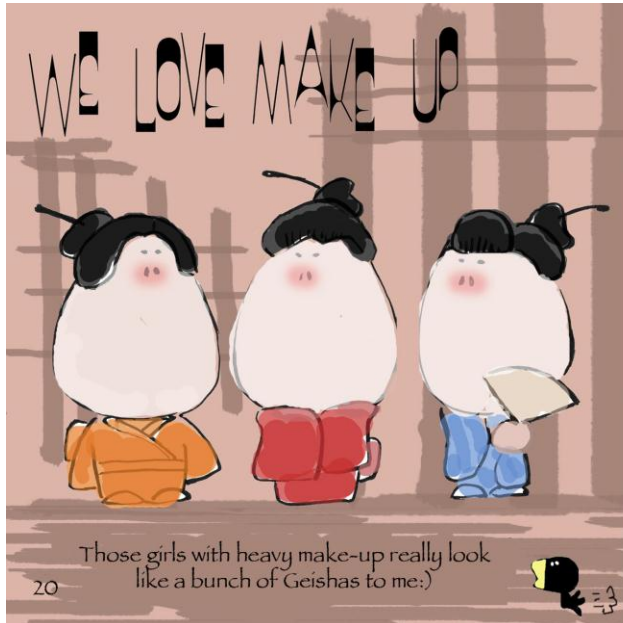


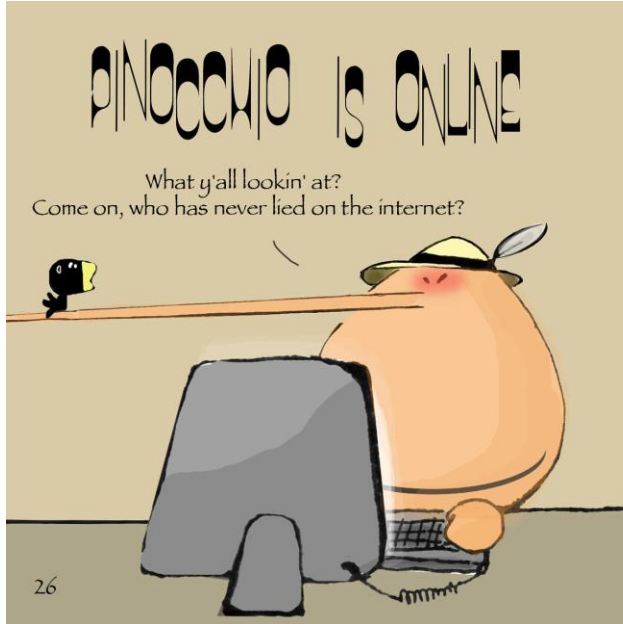
ROAD RAGE

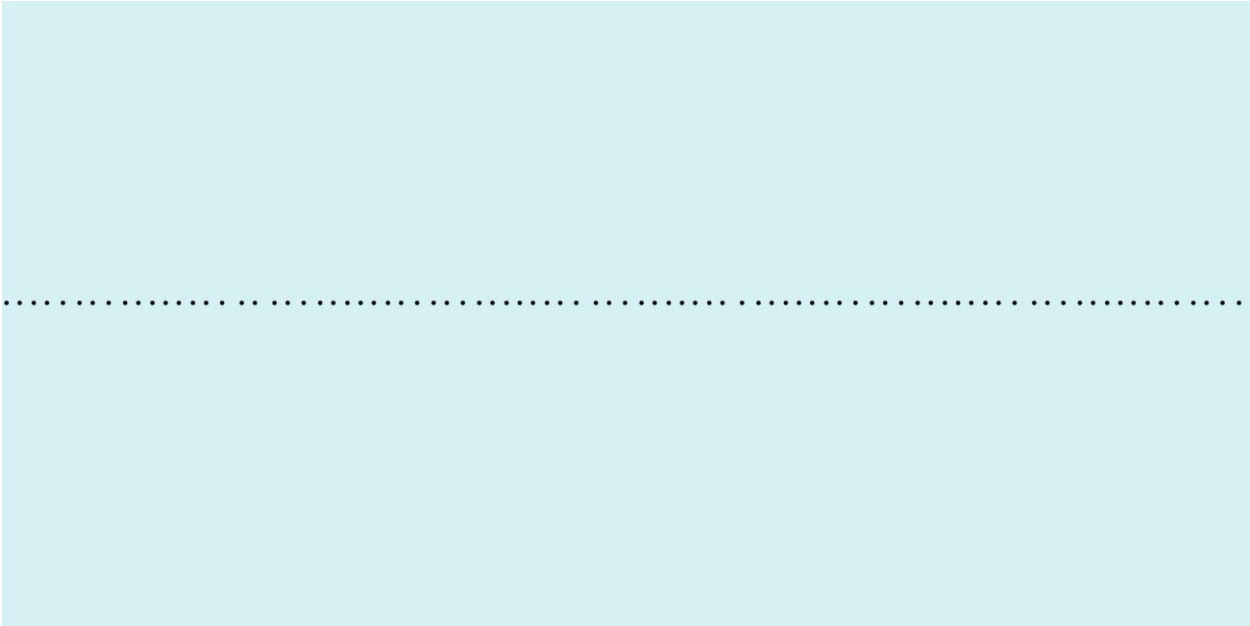


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19







JORDAN HALL

The Reclamation of Patriotism: Reflections on 9/11 and the Bush Presidency¹

For the millennial generation, American history has seemingly been divided into two categories: *before* and *after* September 11, 2001. Our perception that this division is not merely symbolic has been reinforced in messages impressed upon us by the Bush administration, political pundits, and the media in general—all of whom frequently invoke phrases such as “post-9/11 world,” leaving us with the feeling that the attacks of 9/11 markedly changed our everyday reality.

In truth, however, while September 11th was indeed a turning point for our country, it was not our reality itself that changed that day so much as our understanding of that reality which was dramatically altered, for we were jarred into recognizing the indisputable fact of global interconnectedness, and the myriad implications thereof.² No longer could we afford the luxury of believing—or pretending to believe—that our American existence is a sheltered one, independent of the outside world.

What is most puzzling, however, is not the length of time that it took Americans to finally reach this realization, nor is it the extraordinary circumstances that were required to bring about its materialization in our national consciousness. Rather, what remains a mystery is the apparent disconnection between this recognition on our part and our subsequent actions on the world stage over the years that followed. For while one would justifiably assume that the acknowledgment of decreased demarcation between nations—literally and metaphysically—would serve as a catalyst for a more cooperative foreign policy (characterized by multilateralism above all else), the manner in which America proceeded in its dealings with other nations and international institutions after 9/11 followed a different course entirely. As President Bush began to fully delineate what our foreign policy would look like under his guidance, the transparency of unilateral inclinations seemed evident. Although he would draw frequent correlations between the

¹ This paper, completed on October 31, 2008, is based on remarks I gave at “The Kingsborough September 11th Memorial Concert and Ceremony” on September 11, 2008. I would like to thank Professor Rick Repetti and Dean Reza Fakhari for the many personal discussions that have contributed to the ideas contained here.

² In case there was any doubt previously, the recent financial crisis that has struck markets worldwide has served as a portrait of the global dynamics embedded in national affairs.

impact of globalization and the necessity of cooperating on an international scale,³ it would appear that Bush failed to fully grasp the weight of his own arguments in this regard, as he apparently deemed a multilateral approach to international conflicts as merely *optional* rather than *necessary*.

Reinforcing this inevitable conclusion is the phrasing used in the National Security Strategy of 2002, in which Bush articulated his view that “In exercising our leadership, we will respect the values, judgment, and interests of our friends and partners. Still, we will be prepared to act apart when our interests and unique responsibilities require,”⁴ claiming elsewhere that “While the United States will constantly strive to enlist the support of the international community, *we will not hesitate to act alone*, if necessary, to exercise our right of self-defense by acting preemptively” (“National Security Strategy,” emphasis added). And hesitate we did not. Within a year we were “acting preemptively” in Iraq and all but “acting alone” in the assessment of many.⁵

Of course, such sentiments reflected in press briefings at the White House and in presidential speeches across the country were echoed by a large portion of the US population at that time—and perhaps not surprisingly, as we were a wounded nation on the defensive, reeling from the traumatic realization of vulnerability. Our sudden and dramatic societal unification was characteristic of a nation that perceived an external threat to its welfare, and our response in the days and months that followed September 11th is forever etched in the minds of all Americans; while the images of America that were being shown around the world were of ashes settling at ground zero, another portrait of our country was also coming into focus: the proud display of red, white, and blue all across our nation and an unrivaled manifestation of patriotism—the likes of which many of us had never before seen. American flags rising up throughout the country filled the void of the forever-altered landscape of a skyline that was seen by many as a symbol of America’s greatness.

Taking such dramatic patriotic manifestations into account and the aggressive unilateralist stance of the US that occurred in tandem, the question inevitably arises as to

³ Consider any of the following statements: “We know that to defeat terrorism in today’s globalized world we need support from our allies and friends;” “Today, the distinction between domestic and foreign affairs is diminishing. In a globalized world, events beyond America’s borders have a greater impact inside them;” “There is little of lasting consequence that the United States can accomplish in the world without the sustained cooperation of its allies...” (“National Security Strategy,” *The White House*).

⁴ Interestingly, in an analysis of Bush’s National Security Strategy, the Brookings Institution devoted discussion to this quote as well, noting that “Previous administrations have emphasized the role that international institutions can play in helping forge international consensus. The Strategy implicitly dismisses such arrangements” (“The Bush National Security Strategy: An Evaluation,” *Brookings*).

⁵ In an exchange between Bush and John Kerry in the 2004 presidential debates, Kerry—attempting to demonstrate the weak international support Bush had garnered for the Iraq invasion—proceeded to enumerate the countries that were part of Bush’s initial “coalition of the willing.” After incorrectly listing only Great Britain and Australia, Bush quickly corrected him, countering “Well actually he forgot Poland.” Though Bush’s correction was meant to underscore his opponent’s supposed ignorance, ironically it had the awkward effect of highlighting Kerry’s main point, which was that the other nations involved were so few in number and their troop numbers so infinitesimal (in comparison to US troop levels) that for all practical purposes, the image of a “grand coalition” was misleading at best. (For the initial invasion in 2003, Poland’s President, Aleksander Kwasniewski, agreed to send as many as 200 Polish soldiers. While no one is denigrating the contribution of non-US troops in Iraq, it is not by any means necessary for us to pretend that the burden of fighting was shouldered equally by US and coalition forces.)

what extent, if any, patriotism and isolationist inclinations go hand in hand.⁶ Strong patriotic sentiments provided a fertile breeding ground for undivided support for preëemptive military action abroad, even when such action meant “going it alone.” Such sentiments were a reaction to the fear mongering of the administration at the time; we found solace in irrational beliefs about the immortal strength of our country, the summation of which are to be found throughout Bush’s speeches and press conferences. It is not difficult to recall Bush’s infamous taunt to insurgents, his words teeming with audacity: “Bring them on” he said boldly, essentially inviting conflict (“Text of Bush’s Wednesday Comments,” *USAToday.com*).⁷

Needless to say, questioning the extent of the link between patriotism and isolationist tendencies only pushes the issue back further by forcing us to first consider what is patriotic and what is not. And it is here that political identity emerges. Still fresh in our memory are the heated accusations of several years ago where critics of the Iraq war were labeled “unpatriotic” and “un-American”—even “anti-American.” Although many conservative politicians have long since given up on using such labels as a large portion of their own constituency has become increasingly disillusioned with the war, remnants of this sentiment still resonate today, demonstrated most recently by Sarah Palin’s comment in the vice presidential debate with Joe Biden that his calendar plans for a definitive cessation of the Iraq war amount to nothing less than “a white flag of surrender.”

Patriotism is loosely defined as devotion to the nation in which one lives. Given the surface level subjectivity of this classification, it is abundantly clear why actions prescribed in the name of patriotism are often contested and debated, as the parameters of the concept of patriotism itself are seemingly broad enough for the inclusion of an array of ideological perspectives. If we look at the implications of this characterization, however, a second descriptive measure of definition can be deduced: simply put, devotion to one’s country means to act in accordance with its best interests. This could be considered the lowest common denominator, so to speak.

If we use this second description as a backdrop against which to assess our recent militaristic endeavors and broader foreign policy, it seems evident that the cost/benefit ratio has been negatively disproportionate—at least from the angle of empirical observation. The tactical approach we’ve implemented in our “war on terror” accounts for our targets but fails to give equal weight to the likely ramifications and unintended consequences that might arise throughout the course of pursuing these targets through the methods of our choosing. We have demonstrated the truth of this evaluation repeatedly—whether it’s holding prisoners indefinitely without charging them, openly violating the sovereignty of other nations by policing within their borders, engaging in torture, or continuing to undertake missions that produce an excessive number of civilian casualties.⁸

⁶ After all, the connection between the soaring patriotism of those days and the willing adoption of the Bush Doctrine by the US population en masse is not by any means a spurious correlation; with the advantage of hindsight, the relationship between the two is crystal clear.

⁷ Interestingly, this comment was made in the context of a reporter’s inquiry as to how we would go about strengthening the weak coalition of non-US forces that had been assembled at that point.

⁸ It is not my intention to dramatically oversimplify the complicated ethical issues involved here. The brevity of my discussion should not be interpreted as an out of hand dismissal of various possible counter-arguments.

In our short-sightedness, we are ignoring the unequivocal truth that while such procedures may achieve our *short-term* goal of capturing and killing terrorists, the process by which these aims are achieved only serves to create conditions that bolster recruitment for terrorist organizations—an ugly but predictable byproduct of fueling anti-American sentiment—thereby nullifying the long-term effectiveness of our successes.⁹ To use an old adage, we are winning the battle but losing the war.

Take, for example, our recent raid in Syrian territory on October 26, 2008, which apparently was a success insofar as its initial objective is concerned, which was to kill a militant who was smuggling fighters and weapons into Iraq. The immediate escalation in tensions that occurred as a result of the operation, however, should leave any neutral observer questioning whether the benefits outweigh the consequences in a scenario such as this—a scenario we are all too familiar with at this point after seeing similar occurrences in Pakistan. As tens of thousands of Syrians flood the streets, burning American and Israeli flags and calling for retaliation, we must question how many more incidents of this type we can afford—incidents that ignite anti-American fury or heighten already existing tensions.¹⁰ We are not in any position to be complacent in this matter, as our image abroad has suffered enormously in the last several years.¹¹

In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, the United States witnessed an unprecedented outpouring of support from nations throughout the world; we have since bankrupted this support through actions that have failed to secure the safety of our own country and of others, and have undermined both our stability at home and abroad. If patriotism is ultimately about seeking to act in accordance with the interests of one's country, then surely we must question the intrinsic patriotic value of the actions undertaken by the Bush administration, for while such actions were not ill-intentioned, they have certainly been self-destructive. It is decidedly *not* in the best interest of our country to act unitarily, to separate ourselves from international institutions and alienate ourselves from the worldwide community, to weaken our military strength, to adopt as a matter of principle the philosophy that we can freely and flagrantly violate the sovereignty of other nations and not suffer consequences far worse than the situation we were attempting to remedy at the outset.

⁹ Statistical analysis aside, there is perhaps even more blatant evidence that terrorist organizations are strengthened in number by our current policies, such as the recent endorsement of John McCain in the 2008 presidential election by a militant website directly affiliated with Al Qaeda. Discussing the matter in an op-ed column in *The New York Times*, Nicholas Kristof quotes Joseph Nye, former chairman of the National Intelligence Council, who states that “From [Al Qaeda’s] perspective, a continuation of Bush policies is best for recruiting,” noting further that a McCain presidency would perpetuate such policies (“The Endorsement from Hell,” *NYTimes.com*).

¹⁰ These types of attacks (in Syria and Pakistan) are significant in that they mark a new and even more aggressive defense strategy on the part of the Bush administration, a strategy that goes further than that of preemption, which was used after 9/11 to provide a rationale for attacking governments and their militaries. In order to justify attacks within the borders of countries with whom we are not at war, the administration has more recently begun developing a “self-defense argument” that expresses the view that if there are insurgents in foreign territory that are a threat to our forces or the interests of the US, we can attack them regardless of whether we have received approval from the nation in question (“Officials Say U.S. Killed an Iraqi in Raid in Syria,” *NYTimes.com*).

¹¹ There is a perception amongst many Americans that we are despised because of our affluence, or our status as a superpower (i.e., we are hated not because of what we do, but because of who we are). A belief such as this is especially devastating, as it gives license to cavalier attitudes about our dealings with the international community.

This is not merely a matter of personal opinion, nor is it about validating one political party over the other, (though certainly some have seized on the failures of the Bush administration so as to create an even wider divide between liberals and conservatives). This is about thinking analytically—examining the relationship between America’s current state of affairs and the administration under which it was governed for the past eight years. According to a blunt assessment of Bush’s leadership by foreign policy analysts Ivo Daalder and James Lindsay,

President Bush has launched a foreign-policy revolution that has discarded or redefined many of the key principles governing how America engages the world. He has relied on the unilateral exercise of American power rather than on international law and institutions to get his way. He has championed a doctrine of preemption and abandoned the tested strategies of deterrence and containment. He has preferred regime change to direct negotiations with countries and leaders that he loathes. It has been a radical change of direction—one that has left America worse off (“Bush’s Foreign Policy Revolution: A Radical Change,” *Brookings*).

Many have become disillusioned with the concept of patriotism in the wake of its association with policies implemented by Bush. People are understandably wary of applying the term in a self-descriptive manner, with some even arguing—mistakenly, in my opinion—that it is time for a transition to a post-patriotism of sorts, through which one’s nationality is regarded as a “morally irrelevant characteristic” and nationalism itself is equated to “ethnocentric particularism” (Nussbaum 5).¹²

Rather than disassociate ourselves from the failed patriotism of yesterday, we should instead disassociate patriotism from the failed policies that do not serve the interests of our country—policies of the type enumerated above. It is time for an expression of patriotism that is rightfully cognizant of the fact that our national interests are inextricably intertwined with the well-being of those beyond the confines of our country, and that we cannot afford to pursue the former at an extreme expense to the latter.

This is explicated most eloquently by noted philosopher Peter Singer in his book *One World: The Ethics of Globalization*, wherein he stresses that in this era of internationalization, of integration between societies and the increasing dissolution of borderlines, altruism is no longer a necessary ingredient for concerning ourselves with the welfare of the rest of the world; indeed, at the very least, an interest in *self-preservation* should motivate us to take seriously the emergent reality of obligations not merely at the national level, but at the global level as well.

In reflecting upon the turn of events that have unfolded since September 11, 2001, we are confronted with the issue of how the very fabric of our identity as citizens must change in order to more thoroughly adjust to the global era in which we find ourselves. Kingsborough’s very own Hall of Flags here on campus is a visible reminder of both the globalized reality that surrounds us and the very essence of our country’s composition:

¹² It should be noted that the espousal of this philosophy certainly predates the Bush presidency and did not by any means begin as a reaction to the policies put forth by his administration. However, it would be an understatement to say that its increasing adoption on the part of many has been driven in large part by dissatisfaction with the direction our country has taken under his leadership.

we are a nation *of* nations, a country whose very own inhabitants are a testament to our bond with the rest of the world.

As the final chapter of the Bush presidency comes to a close, we have an opportunity to begin repairing this bond and rebuilding our image abroad. We should use the costly mistakes we've made thus far as an indicator of the path we must now pursue, a path that sees global interconnectedness not as a threat that necessitates weakening our ties with the outside world—this was the mistake we made following 9/11—but rather, as a basis upon which we can strengthen existing alliances and build new ones in the process. If we are able to transcend the myth of total autonomy and view ourselves as citizens not merely of our own country, but of the larger global community, as well, we will be capable of more effectively meeting the unprecedented challenges we are facing—in a manner that will account for the welfare of ourselves and of others. In building a future that takes into consideration those *beyond* our borders as well as those within them, we are building a future that is less accommodating to terrorism—a future in which attacks like 9/11 are more of a memory than an inevitability.

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