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All those “one more chances” soon turned into five years of my life
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Ruins
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Cover art:
All those “one more chances” soon turned into five years of my life by Holly Bokash, 2018
Digital Photograph
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In Dust Tracks on a Road, novelist and anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston famously writes: “Research is formalized curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose. It is a seeking that he who wishes may know the cosmic secrets of the world and they that dwell therein” (182). The essays gathered together in the seventh volume of Papers & Publications demonstrate Hurston’s core tenets of research. Throughout this volume, students “poke” and “pry” at their subjects, attempting to unearth new knowledge or confirm theories about the world around them. As has come to be our standard mark, the articles range in discipline and focus. Inside, you will find a panoply of ideas and methodologies, from theoretical literary analyses to in-depth field research to qualitative studies. Our researchers literally tackle the small (enzymes) to the large (elephants), while also meditating on challenging social issues affecting campuses including concealed weapons, racial ideologies, and learning styles.

This year’s selections continue to reflect the assorted research interests and exceptional work of students in our region. In placing such diverse articles in conversation, we hope to elicit new conversations and lines of inquiry. We invite you to enjoy the conversation, pass it on to others, and consider contributing – or encouraging others to contribute – to our next volume.

Anastasia Lin, PhD
University of North Georgia

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Whether in the lab, the library, at home on a computer, or in the field, research demands we look beyond ourselves. Although this work might at times seem solitary, the mere act of research expands our sense of community by allowing us to interact with others. The contributors featured in this volume engage meaningfully in the cultural and political conversations of our time, presenting thoughtful analyses on issues such as gun violence, race, environmental concerns, education, and identity. They are participating in communities that foster questions, confusion, and uncertainty or are compelled to respond to an issue raised in a classroom assignment or discussion. How encouraging!

Similarly, this volume is the work of many hands. I am as always indebted to the work of the very capable editorial board and proudly present this volume on their behalf.

Leigh G. Dillard, PhD
Editor-in-Chief
Associate Professor of English
Play Behavior Varies by Age Class in Wild African Elephants (*Loxodonta africana*)

Emily P. Palmer  
*Randolph-Macon College*

**ABSTRACT:** Many environmental factors effect the behaviors of African elephants, *Loxodonta africana*, such as, health, drought, and dominance. The purpose of this research was to observe play behaviors within the different age classes (calf, juvenile, and adult) of wild elephants during recent drought conditions in Amboseli National Park, Ol Pejeta Conservancy, and Samburu National Reserve in Kenya. Scan sampling every 15 minutes was used to record play behavior. The results from this study indicated that there are differences in the types of play behavior among the age classes. Adults displayed the most play frequencies for environmental, alone locomotion, and tactile play. Calves exhibited the most play frequencies for object and calm play. Calves were also the only age class to display nursing attempts, with juveniles displaying zero attempts. Research was conducted at the David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust, an elephant orphanage, as a comparison to the wild data. The findings indicated similarities between wild and captive data. Similar to the results in the wild, juveniles had the highest play frequencies for environmental play. Calves also had similar behavior in the orphanage and in the wild, where the highest play frequencies were object and calm play. Observing play behavior across the different age classes can be beneficial in order to understand the impact play behavior has on social development.

The African elephant (*Loxodonta africana*) is an endangered species that is experiencing declines due to poaching and habitat destruction (Blanc, 2008). Many behaviors of African elephant’s mimic that of other individuals in their cohort through emotional expression; this is important when understanding the impact emotion has on play behavior (Soltis, 2013). Play behavior offers psychological and physiological benefits, as elephants use play behavior as a method to alleviate distress, anxiety, and grief (Lee and Moss, 2014). In the wild there are various factors that influence the different types of play behaviors, including environmental conditions such as drought, social exchanges that reflect personality types, and early maternal investment. The combination of these factors influences the social development of elephants.

Drought conditions can influence maternal investment and play behavior, potentially altering social development. More specifically, drought decreases water availability, which limits food resources and affects the amount of nutrition lactating mothers have access to. Nursing calves, therefore, experience less nourishment (Lee and Moss, 2014). Early maternal investment is critical for understanding social development later in life. Calves experience a tradeoff between nutritional development and social development (Lee and Moss, 2014). Time spent nursing provides more nutrients for growth and survival but is also time less spent on social development through play with other individuals and herds. It is the balance between development payoffs now or
later in life. Males and females display different behavior with regards to nursing and social development. Males attempt to suckle more and are more successful, which provides them with a greater intake (Lee and Moss, 1986). Mothers show equal tolerances of both male and female suckling attempts (Lee and Moss, 1986). These early suckling behaviors are thought to influence social development. Males are believed to need more nutrients for future mating success, whereas females need social success to develop future maternal instincts (Lee and Moss, 1986).

Along with environmental conditions, gender, personality types, age, and hierarchy of herds all influence the types of play behavior in African elephants. As an individual becomes more dominant, it engages in less play behavior. Dominant bulls are less tolerant of play, whereas dominant females are more tolerant (Jeffery, 2017). Different personality types also influence play behavior, similar to humans (Jeffery, 2017). Sheldrick (1992) notes each elephant displays its own distinct personality and can display a range of emotions from happy or sad or envious.

Various types of play include environmental play, tactile play, object play, alone locomotion, and calm play (Lee and Moss, 2014; Table 1). Distinct body movements reflect the type of play behavior. Poole and Granli (2011) found larger juveniles or adults displaying submission to smaller calves, which demonstrates calm play. When older individuals instigate play, calves often respond by climbing, leaning, or rubbing (Poole and Granli, 2011). Object play is when calves, juveniles, or adults use an environmental or artificial object such as a stick or ball to play (Lee and Moss, 2014). Alone locomotion and tactile play consist of ear flapping, head swinging, and the tossing of water or mud on one’s self or others (Lee and Moss, 2014). Lastly, Lee (1987) defines environmental play as when the elephant uses the head or trunk in an abnormal behavior to express play, along with trumpeting vocalizations (Lee, 1987). Elephants held in captivity also demonstrate play behaviors that invoke physical activity and social competency despite artificial conditions. In calf and juvenile elephants, play behaviors increase when water is present (Vicino and Marcacci, 2015), indicating that the presence of water may predict the amount of play behaviors shown. Play is also shown in times of death or grief as elephants use play to relieve stress (Mertel et al., 2009). When nurturing calves and juveniles back to mental and physical health following abandonment or the death of their mothers, Ndume and Malaika (2017) also found similar behavioral patterns in Nairobi, Kenya. Studying play behavior in African elephants is important in order to understand the trade off between social development and nursing. These patterns are expressed long term under various circumstances throughout an individual’s life such as poaching, drought, etc. Therefore, looking at play behaviors across all age classes is beneficial because we expect there to be a difference between social and nutritional needs in African elephants.

This study aims to compare the types of play behavior in calves, juveniles, and adults, under the current drought conditions in Amboseli, Ol Pejeta, and Samburu, Kenya. We predicted a significant difference in play between age classes, with younger calves playing more frequently than older individuals, and the same expectation of calves displaying more play behavior than juveniles as found in Ndume and Malaiks (2017). Within each age class, we also expect play frequency to vary by type of play with a significant difference. With a goal of seeing 3 scans per hour, under each duration of scan sampling, we hypothesized that calves display more calm play, and juveniles display more tactile play (Lee and Moss, 2014). We predicted that in adults environmental play will predominate. Lastly, we also expect nursing frequencies between calves and juveniles to differ, with calves attempting to nurse more frequently. Documenting maternal investments can provide insight in social development, in light of the survival-social trade off. Understanding the social interactions within play behaviors in African elephants may help in times of environmental stress, poaching, or habitat destruction.

**Methods**

**Observational Methods**

Data was collected in various parks throughout Kenya. In Amboseli National Park, 25
observation scans took place from January 8-11, 2018. On January 13 and 14, 2018, 8 observation scans were taken in Ol Pejeta Conservancy. In Samburu National Reserve, 11 observation scans took place January 15-18, 2018. Scan sampling was used to investigate play behavior among different age classes of wild elephants. The time intervals for recorded observations began every 15 minutes for 1-3-minute intervals, or until elephants left the field of view. A wrist watch was used to ensure that all times were precise, as well as a set of binoculars that kept elephants in sight for as long as possible. An ethogram was created to outline the different types of play behaviors based on Lee and Moss (2014) (see Table 1). Play behaviors were operationalized based on the unique characteristics that each behavior displayed, such as body movements, vocalizations, and interactions with others. These play behaviors included: environmental play, alone locomotion play, object play, tactile play, and calm play (Table 1). The nursing frequencies of calves were determined using the same method (Table 1).

A tally system was implemented to record the frequency of each play behavior. For instance, if a juvenile depicted object play, one tally for the age class of juvenile was recorded under the object play behavior type: one tally per bout. The tally system displayed the frequencies of each play behavior, in each age class, for statistical testing. The play behaviors were observed under the set time intervals and recorded based on which age class (Calf, Juvenile, or Adult), and which type of play behavior was shown. Each age class was abbreviated as C (calf), J (juvenile), or A (adult). Having the corresponding letter with each tally mark showed which age class was displaying what behavior.

**Table 1: Play Behavior Types.** The different types of play behaviors are defined with the distinct characteristics (Lee and Moss, 2014).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavior Type</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nursing Behaviors</td>
<td>Attempting to suck the mother's breast milk. Indicates level of energy, play's costs and consequences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental Play</td>
<td>Approach, chase, or vocalize at objects (other species) in the environment typically with movements of: A. Head B. Trunk C. Trumpeting vocalizations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Object Play</td>
<td>Discovering objects with: A. Trunk B. Mouth C. Tusks D. Feet E. Body tossing F. Body movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alone Locomotion Play</td>
<td>A. Running B. Head swinging or head in charge position. C. “Ear Flopping” D. Kicking E. Spinning pattern F. Vocalization sounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tactile Play</td>
<td>A. Rolling B. Tossing of mud, water, or dust C. Other actions shown such as swimming, head dumping in water, &amp; submergence of body.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calm Play</td>
<td>A. Climbing B. Leaning C. Rubbing D. Rolling on behaviors E. Trunk twining and play.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust**

The David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust (DSWT) in Nairobi, Kenya is an elephant orphanage designed to nurse elephants back to mental and physical health following abandonment or the death of their mothers. In this location, the play behaviors of the elephants were observed in the orphanage as a comparison to the play behaviors of the elephants in the wild. It was expected to see calves displaying more play behavior, as it is likely they were still coping with emotional trauma. A total of 4 observation scans took place at the DSWT on January 7, 2018.

**Analytical Methods**

SPSS version 25.0 (2017) was used to calculate summary statistics, including the average number of bouts of each play behavior in both the wild and...
captive populations. Wild observations were then pooled, and a statistical analysis was run to investigate whether play frequency varied by age class, and by play type within each age class. A chi-squared non-parametric test ($\alpha = 0.05$) was implemented in SPSS. Statistical tests on the captive population were not run due to a small sample size.

**Results**

In the wild, adults exhibited the most play frequencies for environmental, alone locomotion, and tactile play. Calves generally exhibited the most play frequencies for object and calm play. Calves were also the only age class to display nursing attempts, with juveniles displaying zero attempts. In the DSWT, the results were similar regarding which type of play was expressed the most. The oldest individuals at the DSWT were juveniles, who displayed the most play frequencies for environmental, similar to the results found in the wild. In addition, calves had similar behavior in the orphanage and in the wild, where the highest play frequencies were object and calm play. Nursing frequencies were not observed at the DSWT because all elephants were held in captivity without mothers; and were, therefore, bottle-fed.

Out of 40 total wild observation scan periods, there were 317 play bouts across all age classes and play behavior types. From the pooled data from all of the parks, a significant difference in play frequencies was found across all age classes and play behavior types ($\chi^2 (2) = 5.91$, $p < 0.05$; Figure 1). Adults displayed more play bouts in environmental, alone locomotion, and tactile play; whereas calves displayed more play bouts in object and calm play (Table 2). Also, the frequency by play type was significantly different within each age class. For calves, play frequency varied by type of play ($\chi^2 (4) = 55.5$, $p < 0.0005$), and calves displayed the greatest number of bouts in calm play. For juveniles, play frequency varied by type of play ($\chi^2 (4) = 27.1$,

**Table 2:** The total number of play behavior occurrences, per age class and play type.
The average frequency of each type of play behavior is displayed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Class</th>
<th>Environmental</th>
<th>Alone Locomotion</th>
<th>Object</th>
<th>Tactile</th>
<th>Calm</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Calf</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juvenile</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>44.66</td>
<td>9.66</td>
<td>16.33</td>
<td>28.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 1.** The total play frequencies for each play behavior type is listed, per age class, from the wild data collection.
p < 0.0005), and juveniles displayed the greatest number of bouts in alone locomotion play. Lastly, in adults play frequency varied by type of play ($\chi^2 (4) = 96.7, p < 0.0005$) and adults also displayed the greatest number of bouts in alone locomotion play. Calves displayed more nursing attempts than juveniles (N = 21 for calves; N = 0 for juveniles). The greatest number of scans were taken in Amboseli National Park, with the least number of scans observed in Ol Pejeta Conservancy (Amboseli = 21; Ol Pejeta = 8; Samburu = 11).

In DSWT there were a total of 4 observation scans, with 30 play bouts, and the DSWT results also showed a difference in play behaviors between calves and juveniles, with calves displaying more total play frequencies (Table 3). Also, the same findings from the various parks were found in the DSWT results as well. Although the number of play frequencies were much less, juveniles displayed higher play frequencies in environmental play; while calves displayed higher play frequencies in object and calm play (Table 3).

**Table 3: The total number of play behavior occurrences for calves and juveniles with respect to each play type at the DSWT.**
The average frequency of each type of play behavior, for calves and juveniles, is displayed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Class</th>
<th>Environmental</th>
<th>Alone Locomotion</th>
<th>Object</th>
<th>Tactile</th>
<th>Calm</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Calf</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juvenile</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average</strong></td>
<td><strong>2.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>4.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>4.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>5.5</strong></td>
<td><strong>4.5</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Asian elephants (*Elephas maximus*), tactile play is recognized as a form of social behavior, as well as a form of play behavior in specific circumstances (Vanitha et al., 2011). The details of the behavior include trunk twining in a ‘S’ or ‘U” shape, as well as using the trunk to touch lips (Vanitha et al., 2011). These specific characteristics can be found at various times such as, disturbance, threatening situations, grooming practices, or for reassurance in partner relationships (Vanitha et al., 2011). Tactile play in Asian elephants is primarily expressed by adults, which corresponds to the findings of this study as adult African elephants displayed the most frequencies for tactile play. Both instances of tactile play in the Asian and African elephant potentially involve other individuals by touching lips, trunk twining, and the tossing of mud or water on one’s self or others. These similarities suggest that tactile play could be used less as a method of play behavior, but rather more as a method of social behavior.

In addition to using tactile play in a social context, both African and Asian elephants display similarities in communication methods. The two different species use the same four categories of communication techniques: trumpets, chirps, roars, and rumbles (Nair et al., 2009). In Asian elephants, Nair et al. (2009) found adults primarily demonstrate the use of trumpets and roars in times of play, distress, and aggression. Juveniles use trumpets, roars, and rumbles in times of play and distress as well (Nair et al., 2009). The findings from Nair et al. (2009) are similar to the findings of this study as adult and juvenile African elephants displayed the highest frequencies regarding alone locomotion and environmental play: the two play behaviors that include vocalization sounds and trumpeting. Notably, these play behaviors involving vocalizations are exhibited by individuals in the more mature age classes. Juveniles and adults are responsible for learning the behaviors of the matriarch with age progression and are therefore likely to vocalize their learning behaviors as a method of social communication (Lee and Moss, 2014).
One of the limitations of this study was that elephants often left the field of view. It became troublesome to keep a continuous scan of the same herd over time due to landscape attributes. Elephants were often covered by bushes, or other members of the herd, which inhibited the ability to observe all members equally. Scans conducted in Amboseli were more continuous because the landscape was open plains as compared to shrubland habitat present in the other parks. Another limitation of this study was the comparison of nursing frequencies between calves and juveniles. We expected that juveniles and calves would have an equal opportunity to nurse and would feel pressure to nurse due to the drought conditions. However, calves were the only age class to attempt nursing. Despite the limitations, the data still relate closely with other findings of nursing behaviors (Lee and Moss, 1986).

This study illustrates that observing play and nursing behavior can help illuminate the social interactions of African elephants. More specifically, as poaching rates and habitat destruction continue to rise, understanding play behavior among age classes can help researchers interpret the meaning behind play behavior. Adults and juveniles used play behaviors as methods of social communication when interacting with other individuals. Calves, however, demonstrated play that included mimicking the behavior of other individuals; potentially indicating play is used as a training tool to enhance survival (Lee and Moss, 2014). Similarities in the results between the wild and orphaned elephants also suggest that the different age classes have similar interactions. From the findings of this study we suggest that play behaviors and nursing attempts may inform the future social success of the individuals in both wild and captive populations.

References


**Contributor Bio**

Emily Palmer is intrigued in the study of animal behavior and has researched play behavior in wild African elephants (*Loxodonta africana*) in Kenya, Africa. She is receiving her B.S. from Randolph-Macon College with a major in Biology and minor in Psychology. After undergraduate education, she will attend nursing school to receive her B.S.N. Her studies and interests are focused around animal and human behavior, as she enjoys learning more about the functions of the brain and the purpose of behavior: both human and animal.

**Acknowledgements**

This research was made possible by the Randolph-Macon College biology department as I have completed many biology courses that have laid the foundation for this project including how to properly write a scientific paper, conduct research, and draw bigger implications based off data. Dr. Stephanie Coster assisted me in choosing a proper research topic, method of observation, and appropriate writing techniques. Dr. Coster served as a professor, and a mentor by providing helpful feedback and insight. This experience was influenced by photographer Joseph Andy Dyson and wife Dr. Alisa Dyson, of Reflections of Nature. Safari guides George Wajuje Wachira and Nick Njuguna were the main persons involved with obtaining data in the wild during game drives due to their professional expertise in safari wildlife.
Student Perceptions of Faculty, Staff, and Students Carrying Concealed Weapons on Campus

Jacob Russ, Summer Jones, Chastity Blankenship, PhD
Florida Southern College

Abstract: Reactions to gun violence and potential policies regarding gun control are often reactions to fear with schools being the focal point of gun control dialogue. From elementary schools to college campuses, the concealed carry debate exists. Should we allow staff, faculty, and at the college-level, students to carry concealed guns? Students at a private college in Florida were surveyed in regards to their attitudes towards concealed carry and campus safety. We tested a number of hypotheses related to how much time students spend being exposed to media, student perceptions of safety, and their attitudes toward concealed weapons on campus. Results show low levels of support for armed campus safety and concealed weapons for faculty among our student sample. Students were even less comfortable with other students being armed on campus. In support of previous research, conservative students were more likely to believe the media spends too much time covering gun violence. While our results show mixed support of previous research on concealed weapons, our findings are particularly interesting due to our close proximity to two recent mass shootings in Florida.

In recent years, social cognizance of gun-related controversies such as concealed carry, and school campus safety has become increasingly relevant (Wolfson, Teret, Azrael, & Miller, 2017). Lately it appears that mass shootings can occur anywhere, which instills a high threat of gun violence in today’s society. There have been reported mass shooting incidents at schools and college campuses, parks, government buildings, nightclubs, and other locations (Wolfson et al., 2017). Among others, certain places have become infamous and synonymous with gun violence, such as Columbine, Virginia Tech, and Sandy Hook (Nedzel, 2014). These high-profile school shootings have caused a great deal of concern and awareness for public safety. The aforementioned tragedies are greatly unwanted problems that the public has to address, and the loss of lives has prompted a debate regarding concealed carry and campus safety (Nedzel, 2014). In many cities within the United States, the news media cover any possible reports of gun violence frequently, sometimes without any new information being presented to the public (Wolfson et al., 2017). Society’s perception of gun violence and opinions regarding concealed carry rights may be influenced by the amount of news coverage dedicated to public safety concerns. Moreover, the public perception of risk in certain places, such as college campuses may be swayed significantly by disproportional news coverage of gun violence compared to other social issues (Callanan, 2012; Wolfson et al., 2017; Yanich, 2001).

For example, more frequent television news and television crime-reality program consumption is significantly related to greater fear of crime (Callanan, 2012). This could be because news media spend more time covering this topic than any other social issue (Yanich, 2001). Of news
reports involving crime, the most prominent were of court proceedings involving murder, which allows the news station to cover a topic without using resources to uncover new information while also providing entertainment (Yanich, 2001). Further, commentary cultures and info-tainment news that present biased perspectives have the ability to create a moral panic, which encourages society to believe that a matter requires critical, instant, and continual awareness. When a condition becomes a threat to societal interests and values (e.g., public safety), a moral panic results (Arrigo & Acheson, 2016). Moral panic incidents can either dissipate or they can have long-lasting effects of adaptations within society. New legal and social policies are examples of long-lasting effects. Another example of a long-lasting effect is in the manner society perceives or conceives itself (i.e., the fear that school campuses are extremely vulnerable to danger or mass shootings) (Arrigo & Acheson, 2016). In America, gun violence and mass shootings have provided the mass media many occasions to establish a moral panic. Public cognizance and discussion have increased concerning the perceived and sensationalized threat in certain contexts. In particular, campus policies on the concealed carrying of guns have become prevalent political topics (Arrigo & Acheson, 2016).

This is an enduring and heated issue that has pulled society to trigger different responses (Birnbaum, 2013). In time, relentless news headlines covering gun violence and school shootings establishes and impresses upon the public that a campus is vulnerable and dangerously at risk. It implies that students and faculty are increasingly not safe (Birnbaum, 2013). In response, two opposing policies have been aimed to shoot down public safety concerns and reduce campus violence. One suggests that violence on campuses could be deterred by arming individuals [e.g., campus safety officers, and other faculty] (Birnbaum, 2013). On the other hand, it has been proposed that campus violence could be prevented by a complete ban on weapons. Both of these positions raise important questions. Would students on campus feel more safe or unsafe, with the implementation of concealed carry policies (Birnbaum, 2013)?

Overall, there is limited knowledge concerning the public’s viewpoints about concealed carry permissibility in places like schools and the prospect for deterring gun violence (Wolfson et al., 2017). Perceptions held by students are particularly noteworthy due to the significant manner in which they are affected by the campus policies (Arrigo & Acheson, 2016). Policies relating to campus-specific gun regulations have to be evaluated in conjunction with an idea of the relative impact it might have on students. Research on students’ perceptions regarding concealed carry laws and campus safety issues will help provide elucidation for society on this critical matter (Arrigo & Acheson, 2016).

**Literature Review**

The media plays a significant role whenever a mass shooting or school shooting occurs (Meindl & Ivy, 2017). The news is where many people initially learn about the occurrence of gun violence. Although the media is a valuable source of public information, the news can elicit tremendous fear in society (Meindl & Ivy, 2017). In reference to people’s perceptions, opinions, attitudes, and behaviors, fear is also very influential. Research findings suggest that there is a contagion effect that can arise from the media (Meindl & Ivy, 2017). The contagion effect is a theory that addresses how behaviors spread. When one person engages in a particular behavior, there is a likely chance that another may partake in that behavior or perform a behavior with similar characteristics. Generalized imitation is a model of this theory and explains the possibility of people partaking in behaviors similar to those that an individual has observed or been made aware of (Meindl & Ivy, 2017). Generalized imitation is learned, and it is gradually reinforced through experiences. Additionally, it is an important contributing factor to why things may occur. Individuals are more likely to imitate a behavior, when the behavior is exhibited by a model who has a higher social status and is believed to be competent [e.g., a news anchor] (Meindl & Ivy, 2017). Typically the news will provide extensive coverage when gun violence occurs. Moreover,
The coverage will be repeatedly depicted and will extend over a long period of time, which can cause a public panic (Meindl & Ivy, 2017).

It is important to note that the duration and the frequency of coverage also influences the amount of fear that is perpetuated. It can be argued that increased news coverage of school shootings results in an increase of fear for public safety. Moreover, it can be argued that less coverage and less hyped headlines will decrease overall interest in the event, which could also limit generalized imitation (Meindl & Ivy, 2017). For example, one study found a significant relationship to fear of crime and exposure to news media, yet this same study did not find a relationship between fear of crime and exposure to crime dramas (Callanan, 2012). This means viewers are likely to believe news reports are realistic representations of gun violence, which in turn influences their level of fear. However, altering the manner in which the news media covers gun violence may be difficult because the sensationalizing of a story brings in more viewers, more revenue, and higher ratings. Additionally, the emergence of social media complicates media portrayals of gun violence because it derives from an individual source and not a corporate entity. The general public needs to be made aware of the media's role in this issue. There is a noteworthy connection between the media's reach and society's motivations for certain behaviors [e.g., the increase in public panic about violence on campuses] (Meindl & Ivy, 2017).

Increased cognizance of the gun violence issue has permeated the policy making in both legislation and schools (De Angelis et al., 2017). Driven by the concept that concealed guns will prevent violence and deter crime, a number of state legislatures have attempted to establish looser restrictions on concealed carry regulations for college campuses. Research by De Angelis et al., (2017) suggests that there is not much known about the relationship between the fear of crime and the support for looser concealed carry rules on colleges. However, it has been reported that the fear of crime is strongly related to the support for concealed carry (De Angelis, Benz, & Gillham, 2017).

The academic world is inundated by the issues related to gun violence and gun control, which serves as an impetus for researching this matter (Dierenfeldt, Brown, & Roles, 2017). Gun violence and control is a large problem that derives partly from cultural influences. Strategies to implement meaningful change have to be addressed, in order to abate the growing public concern (Dierenfeldt et al., 2017). Today, many colleges and campuses still prohibit concealed carry on campus. Therefore, it is a controversial, ongoing issue and debate (De Angelis et al., 2017). Regarding the policy that opposes loosening concealed carry regulations, it is argued that college campuses are generally safe environments and serious crime is a very rare occurrence.

Despite the great deal of media coverage on gun violence and new policies, there is still very limited knowledge about how students perceive the policies and violence. More attention and research needs to be devoted to the perceptions of students (De Angelis et al., 2017). Research by Jang, Dierenfeldt, and Lee (2014) focused on student perceptions, explored and examined their attitudes on legalizing concealed weapons on campus. Assessing student attitudes at a four-year university, they found 27.9% of participants strongly disagreed and an additional 22% disagreed with legalizing concealed weapons on campus (Jang et al., 2014). More participants either strongly disagreed or disagreed with the legalizing of concealed carry on campus than expressed positions in favor of concealed carry (Jang et al., 2014).

Researchers Cavanaugh, Bouffard, Wells, and Nobles (2012) explored the perceptions of students. This study utilized a pool of students from two institutions based in Texas and Washington (Cavanaugh et al., 2012). The study reported finding that a large percentage of the participants had low levels of support and comfort, when asked about allowing concealed carry guns on campus. When asked about on-and off-campus location, the majority of the participants reported different opinions. The majority of reports had higher levels of support and comfort for concealed carry guns in locations off campus. Cavanaugh et al. (2012) found that
student participants were three times more likely to self-report that they were not at all comfortable with the concept of concealed carry being permitted on their college campus, in contrast to being very comfortable. This finding suggests that students may regard a college campus as a unique environment that is perceived to be safer than an off-campus location (Cavanaugh et al., 2012).

Campus locations (e.g. region of the country) may also influence student opinions about this matter, and it behooves researchers to investigate and help inform policy (De Angelis et al., 2017). In the U.S., every state permits individuals to carry a concealed weapon; however region of the country can influence overall support for these policies (Ghent & Grant, 2015). Research on Missouri voters by Ghent and Grant (2015) reports that individuals who support the right to carry are motivated by violent crime. Voter approval for the right to carry a concealed weapon increased by around seven-tenths of a percentage point, when an increase in the violent crime rate was reported (Ghent & Grant, 2015). In comparison to other research, perhaps region of the country in which a campus is located could influence student support for conceal-carry policies.

Beyond region of the country in which the college is located, political affiliation is likely to be correlated with a student’s support of concealed weapons on campus. Regarding voter demographics, the right to carry was supported notably more by those who were affiliated with the Republican political party, which has conservative values and vehemently supports the right to own a gun (Ghent & Grant, 2015). Additionally, 48% of voters supported the right to carry, and of that percentage around 2% of the voters had a permit to carry (Ghent & Grant, 2015). The findings suggest that there is a belief in the idea carrying a concealed weapon deters crime. Voters may have been motivated to vote in support of the right to carry because of their belief in the connection between violent crime and carrying a concealed weapon as a deterrent to crime.

Lastly, other research has shown gender to be a significant factor with attitudes towards concealed weapons. For example, women are less likely to support concealed weapons on campus even after a violent event (Patten, Thomas, & Viotti, 2013). Among gun owners women were less likely than men to support guns in public places (Wolfson et al., 2017). Other research has indicated men are more likely to seek a concealed handgun license and would carry a weapon on campus if legally able to do so (Bouffard, Nobles, & Wells, 2012). Bouffard et al.’s (2012) findings are particularly interesting to the researchers in the current study because our college, as a private college in the state of Florida, could change our rules and permit concealed weapons on campus. Men in another study also reported greater levels of comfort with guns in the community and on campus (Cavanaugh et al., 2012). Overall, we expect our results to echo these studies with men showing greater support and comfort with guns and concealed weapons on campus.

Hypotheses
Based on the previous literature we hypothesize:

1. The majority of students will report feeling safe on campus.
2. Students that report feeling safe on campus will have lower levels of support for concealed weapons on campus.
3. Male students will be more likely to support concealed weapons on campus.
4. Students who identify as Republican/conservative will be more likely to support concealed weapons on campus in comparison to students of other political affiliations.
5. Students who support concealed weapons on campus will be exposed to a variety of news and social media.

Methodology
We conducted a research study in order to better understand college student perceptions regarding concealed weapons on campus and safety concerns. The college used in this research project is located in Florida, and is only a few hours away from two incidents of random mass shootings in the last few years—more specifically, the Pulse nightclub shooting in Orlando...
Concealed Weapons on Campus

and the shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. This college campus provides a vital research opportunity that is relevant to today’s issues concerning gun violence and safety issues.

To obtain our sample, two students and one faculty member distributed 130 surveys in five face-to-face classes. Before students could participate they were read a research script that stated, “As part of this study you will be asked to take an approximately fifteen-minute survey containing questions, which concern information about perceptions of conceal carry laws and campus safety.” Students were also instructed to not complete the survey again if they did so in another class. Beyond asking students to not write their name on the survey we also did not track students in the course who declined to participate in these courses. Due to not tracking class attendance, student participation and those declining to participate, we are unable to report a non-response rate.

Every participant reviewed a consent form prior to deciding to partake in the study. After signing a consent form, each participant received the same survey which contained 30 questions. When the survey was completed, the researchers collected the data for analysis. While 30 items were on the survey questionnaire, in this section we focus on the variables we will discuss in the results section. All survey data was coded and analyzed using the program, Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, commonly known as SPSS.

At the beginning of the questionnaire we asked students to report some basic demographic or background characteristics, such as their sex, ethnicity/race, and political affiliation. These variables were measured as follows: SEX (male or female); RACE (White, Black, Hispanic, Asian, and Other) and POLITICAL (Democrat, Republican, Independent, and Other). Ethnicity/race and political affiliation were later collapsed into dichotomous variables in order to meet t-test and multiple regression requirements. Race became White and all other races, while political affiliation became Republican and all other political affiliations.

Another hypothesis for this research study purports that those who are actively involved with social media or pay attention to the news on a regular basis will report stronger attitudes regarding concealed carry, and they may feel less safe. Previously cited research studies have described the contagion effect, which is when public panic or fear is spread through news and social media. Due to social media and news exposure as a possible factor in their attitudes toward concealed weapons, students were asked to report the following information: how many hours per day they spent on social media (open-ended question), if they have notifications enabled on their social media accounts (yes or no), and how many hours per week they estimated they spent watching the news on television or online (open-ended question).

Utilizing a Likert scale with contingency questions, the student participants also answered questions about their perceptions of safety on campus and concealed weapons. The Likert scale included the following measures of agreement to choose from: (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree). The participants in our study reported their level of agreement, concerning the following two items: “The media spends too much time covering gun violence” and “I feel unsafe on campus” (reverse coded for data analysis). After reporting their perceptions of safety and media coverage of violence students were asked to use the same Likert scale to indicate their comfort and willingness to be around guns generally and weapons on campus. Seven items were combined to create a scale assessing their overall acceptance of guns and weapons. Possible scores on this scale ranged from seven (low level of acceptance) to 35 (high level of acceptance). The seven items we used to assess students’ acceptance of guns generally and weapons on campus included the following: “I feel comfortable being around people with guns”; “I feel safe being around people with guns”; “Campus safety/security should be armed with guns”; “Faculty should be allowed to have concealed weapons at [school name]”; I would feel safer if faculty had concealed weapons at [school name]”; “Students should be allowed to have concealed weapons at [school name]” and “I would feel safer if students had concealed weapons on campus.”
We refer to our sample as [school name], which was the setting for our study. Our goal was to understand students' opinions and attitudes towards concealed weapons and campus safety issues.

Results
After the surveys were coded, data from all of the participants were analyzed. In total, there were 107 completed surveys collected. The subsequent information elucidates on the findings, regarding students' opinions and attitudes towards concealed weapons and campus safety issues. Table 1 depicts the demographic and background characteristics of our sample. Regarding race and sex, a majority of participants were White and female, which were both proportional to the student population of our small, private college.

In Table 2 we report student perceptions of campus as a safe place and media coverage of gun violence. As we hypothesized, a majority of students on campus reported feeling safe (85.1%). Also shown in Table 2 we were interested in knowing how many students disagreed with the questionnaire item, “the media covers too much gun violence.” In other words, do students feel gun violence coverage is “not too much” given our world of 24-hour news coverage? Less than half (36.4%) of students disagreed with this statement. We discuss possible explanations for these findings within the discussion section of the current paper.

In order of our hypotheses, we believed students that reported feeling safe on campus would have lower levels of support for concealed weapons on campus. Overall, students' mean score of acceptance was an 18.85 (7-35 score range, $SD = 8.67$). Students were most likely to support armed safety (72.9% agreed or were neutral to them carrying guns), then armed faculty (58.9% agreed or were neutral to them carrying concealed weapons), and lastly other students (32.7% agreed or were neutral to them carrying concealed weapons). In order to further test these relationships we conducted a t-test comparing two groups of students—those who reported feeling unsafe versus all other students (i.e. students who reported feeling neutral or agreeing they felt safe on campus). Our t-test was not statistically significant, $t(99) = .087, p = .244$. Students who reported feeling unsafe on campus ($M = 18.73, SD = 7.1$) were not significantly more likely to have higher scores on our acceptance of concealed weapons on campus scale in comparison to other students ($M = 18.57, SD = 6.63$).

Our next hypothesis was that male students would be more likely to support concealed weapons on campus than female students. The

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<th>Table 1: Student Sample Demographics and Independent Variable Characteristics</th>
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<td>Sex</td>
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<td>Political affiliation</td>
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<td>Conservative</td>
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<td>Other</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hours per day on social media</td>
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<td>Hours per week watching news media (online or television)</td>
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<th>Table 2: Student Perceptions of Campus as a Safe Place and Media Coverage of Gun Violence</th>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I feel safe on campus</td>
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<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media covers too much gun violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree/Neutral</td>
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<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
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only significant sex difference we uncovered was related to support for concealed weapons for faculty. In a chi-square test, male students were more likely to agree or feel neutral about faculty carrying concealed weapons (disagree, \( n = 10 \), neutral/agree, \( n = 27 \)) in comparison to females who were more divided (disagree, \( n = 34 \), neutral/agree, \( n = 36 \)); \( \chi^2 (1) = 4.64, p = .031 \).

Based on previous literature we also hypothesized students who identify as Republican/conservative will be more likely to support concealed weapons on campus in comparison to students of other political affiliations. While we did not find a significant difference based on political affiliation and attitudes towards concealed weapons on campus, one’s political affiliation had an influence on their opinion about how often the media covers gun violence. More specifically, a chi-square test uncovered Republican/conservative students were more likely to be neutral or agree (\( n = 28 \)) than disagree (\( n = 8 \)) with this statement. Other students were more evenly divided with 31 students disagreeing that the media covers too much gun violence versus being neutral or agreeing with this statement (\( n= 40 \)).

Our next hypothesis was students who support concealed weapons on campus will be exposed to a variety of news and social media, which could support the contagion effect. Two Pearson correlation tests were conducted—first we compared social media hours to acceptance of weapons on campus followed by a second test exploring the relationship between hours per week a student spent watching the news and our acceptance of weapons scale. Both tests did not yield significant results for social media hours (\( r = .014, M = 3.62, SD = 2.39, DF = 105, p = .883 \)) or for number of hours spent watching the news (\( r = .129, M = 3.27, SD = 4.23, DF =105, p = .185 \)). This could be because students overwhelmingly felt safe on our specific campus, which may be more important than how social media may relate to fear of mass shootings or the contagion effect.

Lastly, the researchers conducted a Multiple Regression Test in order to measure favorable attitudes for concealed carry. Even though some of the variables included in the regression were not significant during bivariate analysis we thought they may have a significant effect while controlling for other variables simultaneously. A significant regression equation was found, \( F (4, 96) = 2.26, p = .039 \). Table 4 displays the regression model results. The current regression model was only able to explain 6% of the variance. While controlling for a student’s race, sex, political affiliation, and perceptions of safety only a student’s beliefs that the media spends too much time on gun violence was significant. Students who felt the media spent too much time on gun violence were more likely to have positive attitudes towards guns and concealed weapons on campus (\( \beta = .23 \)).

### Discussion and Conclusions

Our sample showed mixed support for previous research on factors that influence attitudes towards concealed weapons on campus. We did find a majority of our students felt safe, however they did not significantly differ from students that did not feel safe and their acceptance of guns and weapons on campus. Perhaps because a majority of students reporting feeling safe on campus, a majority of our sample also reported that the media spends too much time covering gun violence (63.6%). These results could indicate students feel safe so they may

<table>
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<th>Variable</th>
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<th>( SE )</th>
<th>( \beta )</th>
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<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>1.53</td>
<td>.188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
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<td>1.36</td>
<td>-.183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political affiliation</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>1.39</td>
<td>.095</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feels unsafe on campus</td>
<td>.374</td>
<td>1.83</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media reports too much gun violence</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>1.39</td>
<td>.23*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>17.816</td>
<td>3.07</td>
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</tr>
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\( R^2 = .06 \)

Note: * = \( p \leq .05 \), ** = \( p \leq .01 \),

Table 3: Multiple Regression Results for Measuring Favorable Attitudes for Concealed Weapons
believe media focus on gun violence is disproportionate to the likelihood of a shooting occurring. Our student population is relatively small (~2,500 enrolled) with the largest courses capped at 40 students. It could be difficult for students to imagine someone they know or see on a regular basis committing an act of violence against them. This study was conducted after the Pulse Night Club shooting in which the victims did not personally know the shooter and before the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting in Parkland when some students did know the offender.

Within our data we also found male students were more likely to support faculty having concealed weapons on campus. Female students were more mixed on their feelings towards faculty having concealed weapons on campus. Perhaps while other literature shows females to be more fearful of crime in general, our results support other research that indicates after a violent crime near campus women are more opposed to concealed guns on campus (Patten et al., 2013).

While previous research found Republicans were more likely to support concealed weapons perhaps the unique environment (i.e. college campus) and age of those who may be permitted to carry them (e.g. students) influenced our results (Ghent & Grant, 2015; Patten et al., 2013). We did find that students overall were more likely to support armed campus safety as opposed to concealed weapons among faculty or students. Perhaps if we asked if faculty and students were trained prior to being permitted to have weapons on campus we might have found significant results. We do not know if students are aware that in the state of Florida training is required for a concealed guns license.

In reference to people’s perceptions, opinions, attitudes, and behaviors, fear can be influential. While we did not see support for the contagion effect it could be because nearly 75% of our students reported feeling safe on campus even though our campus security does not currently carry guns or other weapons on campus. Society’s perception of gun violence and opinions regarding concealed carry rights may be influenced by the amount of news coverage dedicated to public safety concerns. It could be that we surveyed students between school shootings—the Parkland mass shooting even happened about a month after data collection began while we were analyzing our results. Perhaps if we resampled students after this tragedy we would have found more significant results to support the contagion effect. Some students that survived the Parkland shooting have called for stricter gun control, which shows perceptions held by students are noteworthy, due to the significant manner in which they are effected by the campus policies (Arrigo, & Acheson, 2016). Policies relating to campus-specific gun regulations have to be evaluated in conjunction with an idea of the relative impact it might have on students. Research on students’ perceptions regarding concealed carry laws and campus safety issues will help provide elucidation for society on this critical matter (Arrigo, & Acheson, 2016).

Columbine, Virginia Tech, Sandy Hook, and Parkland are just a few out of the many examples of high-profile school shootings that are now infamous and synonymous with gun violence (Nedzel, 2014). After some high-profile shootings, recommendations regarding safety on campuses became more pertinent (Kyle, Schafer, Burruss, & Giblin, 2017). Incident response policies became instrumental when calculating the perceived risks. Campus community members make up a society and culture that have important opinions that should be considered by state legislatures and policymakers (Kyle et al., 2017). Deterrence of campus crime and violence is a high priority for suggested campus policies (Jang et al., 2014). This priority is maintained by the dedication of schools to protect their campus communities, which include students, administration, faculty, and visitors. The aforementioned research provides critical information when contemplating students’ perceptions regarding concealed carry laws and campus safety issues (Cavanaugh et al., 2012). Despite intense media coverage, regular citizens’ voting records, and the fear instigated by the event of a school shooting, most of the previous research studies have found that students are not in favor of the implementation of a concealed
carry policy on campus.

In the United States of America, there are college and university campuses almost everywhere. There have been frequently reported incidents of gun violence across the country, and at both universities and colleges (Nedzel, 2014). These numerous incidents of gun violence and shootings have caused a great deal of concern and awareness for public safety.

The purpose of this study was to gain more knowledge about student perceptions regarding concealed carry and campus safety issues. The participants of this research study represent a constituency that has valuable opinions that could influence future gun control policies; however, more research still needs to be done, in order to gain better knowledge. Increased social cognizance of the gun violence issue and its relationship to college and university perceptions has become a relevant research opportunity. Campus community members such as students and faculty make up a society and culture that have important opinions that should be considered by state legislatures and policymakers. Regular shootings will continue to prompt action from all parties involved. The gun violence issue is not going to be resolved, without more research.

References


**Contributor Bios**

Jacob Russ is originally from Brandon, Florida. He is a member of the National Society of Leadership and Success. He holds an interest in the criminal justice system. Shelly Summer Jones graduated *summa cum laude*, with a Bachelor of Science degree in Psychology, Criminology, and Pre-Law from Florida Southern College. She is originally from Chattanooga, Tennessee. Shelly was a recipient of the 2017 Psychology Department Service Award. Among other clubs, She is a member of the Phi Eta Sigma, and the Psi Chi honor societies. She holds interests in various areas of research related to forensic psychology, and the criminal justice system. In the near future, she intends to pursue a graduate degree. Moreover, She aspires to help contribute to the education of social issues and hopes to make a relevant difference for the better. Dr. Blankenship is an Assistant Professor of Social Science at Florida Southern College. Her research area interests include race, class and gender portrayals within educational media. She is also interested in and writes about a variety of issues within the criminal justice system.

**Acknowledgments**

A special thanks to Dr. Mick Lynch and the Institutional Review Board at Florida Southern College for providing feedback for the current study.
Our identities have become dependent upon how other people envision us, so we’re reinventing ourselves all the time. In today’s society, we are so focused on negative stereotyping and preemptive judgment, with an “assume first, ask questions later” attitude, that we’ve been taught to hide our hearts and bury our true nature because we’re afraid we’ll be misunderstood. Because of this, we never really get to know the true identity of a person—what makes them who they are.

All those “one more chances” soon turned into five years of my life, is a piece from my senior show Who Says, which is made up of five digital portraits of females whose identities have been obscured.\(^1\) The purpose of this work is to focus on the idea of getting to know someone. Not only for who they are now, but who they used to be and what experiences made them grow. While photographing my model, we spoke in the hopes of getting to the core idea of who she believed herself to be and what life events brought her to that conclusion. I asked her questions regarding her biggest influences, dreams of the future, moments of failure, who she’s forgiven, and the quiet moments that seem the loudest in her mind.

“What does vulnerability mean to you?” I asked to which she replied, “being susceptible to some form of harm.” She said only one person has the ability to make her feel truly vulnerable—a past love. “All those ‘one more chances’ soon turned into five years of my life believing he had changed time after time only to find, he hadn’t. Not even a little bit.” This type of raw vulnerability she experienced helped mold a portion of her because every memory, every scar, and every day made up who she is.

Identity is fleeting and people are constantly fighting to be seen the way they see themselves, which gets lost along the way due to society’s notion of who they think you should be. But who says people’s opinions of you are the right ones? Who says regression in life won’t allow for your personal growth? Who says the path you’re walking isn’t the path you were meant to be on? Only you can say who you are and who you will become.

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\(^1\) For full access to Who Says, visit https://hollybokash.wixsite.com/whosays/blank-5 or the QR code at left.
Contributor Bio
Holly Bokash is a portrait and landscape photographer based in Charleston, South Carolina. She received her Bachelor of Science degree in Art Marketing from the University of North Georgia in Dahlonega in 2017, concentrating in photography and graphic design. Bokash’s journey as a photographer began at a young age, always being inspired by photographs and the stories behind them. Portraiture, her main passion, allows her to connect with the subject through their personalities. Holly loves capturing moments frozen in time that tell a story and compel the viewer to experience an emotional response.

Acknowledgments
I’d like to thank my family for their support, my mentor for his guidance, my friends for their encouragement, and my anonymous muse for her inspiring story. Without all of you, this wouldn’t have been possible.
All those “one more chances” soon turned into five years of my life
Searching for Purpose:
Silas House’s *The Coal Tattoo*

**Abstract:** This paper examines *The Coal Tattoo* by Silas House and its focus on psychological self-reflection by its two main characters, Easter and Anneth Sizemore. Anneth, the younger of the sisters, is characterized as a “wild child,” chasing after men and sex in an attempt to discover her identity and fulfill a longing within her that may be too large to satisfy. The Sizemore girls’ mother, Birdie, committed suicide when Anneth was five years old. Through a Lacanian lens, Anneth’s entrance into subjectivity is a violent and incomplete one, which evolves into an incomplete sense of her “imaginary” self and an intensified longing for her real desires while these two warring elements intensely disrupt her sense of existence and placement within the symbolic order. Anneth’s entrance into the symbolic was irreparably disrupted, and she is the picture of social rebellion: multiple marriages, going to bars, underage drinking, smoking, and becoming pregnant. The unhealthy state of her identity manifests itself in a myriad of ways, including psychic restlessness and the intensification of her desire for the Other. Anneth only feels a partial sense of wholeness when she listens to music, using music as an incomplete expression of her desire. Within a Lacanian context, due to the linguistic nature of music, she is incapable of fully articulating desire; however, because music is also non-linguistic, she is able to achieve a partial expression of desire, though she cannot articulate it herself and it cannot be articulated fully even through music.

*B. Boling*

*Johnson University*
desire for the Other exists as an extra-linguistic longing that cannot be satisfied within the bounds of the symbolic. Lacan further develops his theory of psychoanalysis that centers on the psychological development of the individual as a subject of the ideology that they are under, focusing especially on the role of language in this psychological development. According to Lacan, identity is irreparably entered through language, and with this comes the system of deferral of true meaning and the inability to articulate true desire due to the insufficiencies of language. Lacan formulates that what he terms “the mirror stage” fundamentally begins the process of the individual’s identification of themselves as I, stating that “this act [a child looking into a mirror] … immediately rebounds … in a series of gestures in which he experiences in play the relation between the movements assumed in the image and the reflected environment, and between this virtual complex and the reality it reduplicates” (1). He continues, “we have only to understand the mirror stage as an identification, in the full sense that analysis gives to the term: namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image – whose predestination to this phase-effect is sufficiently indicated by the use, in analytic theory, of the ancient term imago” (2). Lacan theorizes that the mirror stage allows the individual to take on an identity through viewing their own image and reconciling this image as a marker of identity. This formation of identity through the mirror stage, though triggered by something seemingly mundane, begins the transformation of the individual as they begin to separate their identity from that of their mother. I argue that Anneth’s entrance into subjectivity was irreversibly damaged by the violent nature of the separation with her mother, and that this causes her to be unable to develop her sense of identity. Anneth therefore cannot fully acknowledge the imaginary in order to ascend the symbolic order within subjectivity because her mirror stage was stunted. The imaginary as a unified concept of the self has been shattered, causing her perception of herself as an entire being to be impossibly broken, amplifying the level of her longing for the Lacanian Other as a method of finding her own identity as well as a place of belonging. Furthermore, Anneth pursues her desires through sex and music, using sex as an attempt to discover the intimacy of the prelinguistic stage that she was never fully able to experience due to both her estrangement and violent separation from her mother and using music as a partial expression of her desire that she herself cannot articulate.

Birdie lost her sanity when Anneth was one, spending the rest of her life locked in her room, “talking to herself, shuffling and reshuffling the stack of postcards that had been Matracia’s prized possessions, singing, dusting her dresser, and remaking her bed dozens of times before she would come out and eat” before committing suicide four years later (House 17). Birdie’s absence occurs before Anneth’s mirror stage and entrance into subjectivity through language, causing Anneth’s identity to form incompletely, for the mirror stage exhibits “a form [that] situates the agency of the ego, before its social determination, in a fictional direction, which will always remain irreducible for the individual alone, or rather, which will only rejoin the coming-into-being of the subject asymptotically, whatever the success of the dialectical syntheses by which he must resolve as I his discordance with his own reality” (Lacan 2). Put more simply, the mirror stage “is also the point at which the triadic construction of the psyche’s relation to the world is established … the imaginary is rooted in a unified concept of the self as a whole being made of these different elements” (Lundell 250). Anneth struggles with this reality throughout the novel, as she is unable to express the broken state of her identity. She tries to explain this to her sister, stating, “I’m so sad I don’t think I can stand it,” and “I don’t know what’s wrong with me” (House 50). Anneth’s deepest desire is love, which should have been given to her by her mother, allowing her to properly enter the symbolic through the mirror stage. Due to her mother’s total absence in her life, however, Anneth pursues intimacy through sex and marriages in order to attempt to reconcile her fractured identity, though she does not love any of the men she marries. In the same conversation with Easter, Anneth states, “I know I’ve got
no reason to be unhappy…But somehow I just feel like nobody will ever love me” (House 50). Anneth never truly experienced the prelinguistic object of her desire, causing her entrance into subjectivity to be ruptured and her sense of both identity and awareness of extra-linguistic desire to be disrupted.

Lacan states that “the total form of the body … symbolizes the mental permanence of the I, at the same time as it prefigures its alienating destination,” or, an individual’s sense of singular identity is essentially disrupted by the existence of the body and its disconnection from the mind and psyche (3). Furthermore, Lacan argues that the “total form” of the body “is still pregnant with the correspondences that unite the I with the statue in which the man projects himself, with the phantoms that dominate him, or with the automaton in which … the world of his own making tends to final completion” (3). In other words, the concept of a “whole identity” is rooted in the unification of the imaginary and the symbolic, but because of the disconnect resulting from bodily existence and subjectivity, the imaginary and the symbolic must remain separate, resulting in extra-linguistic desire that cannot be expressed using embodied functions such as speaking. Lundell further develops this theoretical premise, stating that “the ability to understand and manipulate the relationship between the symbolic and the imaginary is necessary if one is to achieve a healthy and mature adult psyche” (251). This acknowledges that, while a unification of these two aspects of identity is impossible, the relationship can, and must, be controlled in order to develop a healthy sense of personal identity. In Anneth’s case, however, “elements outside of the control of grasp of the subject – that is to say, intrusions or irruptions of the imaginary – play an important role in constituting the symbolic order,” and therefore Anneth’s ruptured entrance into subjectivity has lead to “[disrupted] … development,” or “psychosis or social or aesthetic rebellion” (Lundell 251). Anneth’s entrance into the symbolic was irreparably disrupted, and she is the picture of social rebellion: multiple marriages, going to bars, underage drinking, smoking, and becoming pregnant. The unhealthy state of her identity manifests itself in a myriad of ways, including psychic restlessness and the intensification of her desire for the Other. Her sister describes it as if “her sister had sucked up some of their mother’s sorrow and carried it around with her. Nothing seemed to help Anneth except, sometimes, Easter’s singing” (House 46).

Easter’s singing helping Anneth exemplifies Anneth’s use of music as a partial expression of her desire and temporary reconciliation of her identity. Anneth only feels a partial sense of wholeness when she listens to music, using music as an incomplete expression of her desire. Within a Lacanian context, due to the linguistic nature of music, she is incapable of fully articulating desire; however, because music is also non-linguistic, she is able to achieve a partial expression of desire, though she cannot articulate it herself and it cannot be articulated fully even through music. She expresses this feeling of unification in a moment of grief over her dead mother, as she “jumped out of her chair and went to her record collection, knowing that music healed her” (House 148). Because of this conflation of her fractured identity and incapability to express her desire, she often attempts to heal her broken psyche through music and sex simultaneously. This occurs most obviously with her first husband, Matthew. During nightly rendezvous, “Anneth would push him aside and turn it up. While she sung he kissed her neck, but she was lost to the music…felt as if she was completely alone in the world” (House 57). Suzanne Cusick expresses this conflation of a search for intimacy and music when she describes a concert: “This music—intimate, alive, in me and around me, was something like noetic union for me, and something like sex” (Peraino and Cusick 862). She goes on to argue that “the relationship between music and sexuality is one of difference in similarity (similarity in difference), in a constant flux that allows each element to remain itself, coexisting with the other in a borderland made of sometimes tense, sometimes joyous relations” (863). To define the relationship between music and sex as one resembling the relationship between the symbolic and the real, regarding the “slipperiness” of the relationship, is
to make sense of Anneth’s conflation of the two and her use of them as an attempt to reconcile her identity and her desires.

Sindhumathi Revuluri describes music as “a performed, lived art, with clear bodily connections; as a vehicle to communicate or consummate desire—can act as a powerful, if also conditional, force on the negotiation of identities” (Peraino and Cusick 849). The only way Anneth can express her desire, however incompletely, is through music. Her inability to heal her identity keeps her searching for intimacy and sex as she ultimately attempts to reach a time before her mother’s death that never existed as it should have. When Anneth meets Bradley, the only man she ever actually loves, she is unable to express their connection, stating that “there was something that happened between them that she couldn’t explain” (House 271). Though Bradley seems to appear as a possible chance to reconcile her identity, their relationship is brief and passionate, as Bradley has been drafted. Despite the impermanent nature of their relationship, he is the only man who Anneth does not avoid true intimacy with through listening to music during sex, for “kissing him was like dancing, like moving to the music” (House 273). By separating the two things that previously characterized her attempts to reconcile her identity and her desire, it is possible for her to achieve partial reconciliation. Bradley helps Anneth understand her fractured identity: “she saw suddenly that she had been afflicted – not only by her blues… but also by a need to feel that she was part of somebody else” (House 272). He also becomes a way for her to partially realize her desire, replacing music in that capacity, for when they have sex “they undressed in the grey shadows of night and did not speak” (House 278). In order to complete the opportunity for Anneth’s reconciliation with the symbolic, she even rejects sex as a necessary means of intimacy, for “sex hadn’t brought them as close as sleeping together had” (House 279). Anneth is emotionally satisfied by sharing a bed for a purpose outside of sex, momentarily accepting a seemingly less potent form of intimacy that allows her the possibility of reconciling her true desire.

Anneth recognizes the extra-linguistic components of her and Bradley’s relationship, stating that “telling it seemed to lessen the meaning of what she and Bradley had together” (House 281). For a moment, it seems possible for Anneth to reconcile some of her fractured identity. She found something as close to her desire as possible, for her and Bradley’s relationship had many non-linguistic elements. Additionally, Anneth no longer has a reason for chasing after sex, for she finds a sense of partial fulfillment and the love she was searching for. This opportunity for change and reconciliation, however, disappears. Anneth decides once again to marry a man she does not love, stating that “she might as well snatch up any love she could get. She thought she could live a lie for the rest of her life … hadn’t her own mother done this?” (House 309). Rather than utilizing the potential for moving forward in a partial reconciliation of her identity, she falls back into the exact same patterns. The reason for this can be seen in the aftermath of her discovering Bradley’s likely death, as she dances to music in her apartment and realizes that it does not heal her in the same way it once did. Because Bradley brought her closer to reconciliation than music was able to, music loses its potency to partially express her desire. It is at this moment that she chooses to marry Glenn, a man she does not love and who she even identifies as dangerous. Her reasoning is that “she would never stop loving Bradley, but she had to go forward with her life. If she sat in this apartment and waited on him, she would go mad” (House 312). Anneth refuses to make an effort to find out whether or not Bradley is alive, halting the grieving process in its tracks and putting her in a state of limbo. Rather than accepting the possibility of moving forward in a new awareness of identity, she runs away to get married for the third and final time.

When Anneth marries Glenn, Easter realizes that “her sister had finally turned herself over to that big sadness she had carried around with her all her life. She had lost her mind” (House 315). She is unable to reach a reconciliation of her identity, and when music loses its power for her, she feels hopeless. By reaching the closest point possible within a Lacanian context of realizing her desire, she surrenders to the knowledge that
true healing is impossible. Her despair stems from the awareness that “she feared she would never know … for certain that what she was doing was what she most wanted to do in her life … she was positive that such knowledge would never come to her” (House 200). The fracture of her whole identity caused by her disorganized entrance into the mirror stage without the presence of her mother finally overcomes her. She is ultimately unable to reach the imaginary to mend her identity, permanently disturbing her state of existence within the symbolic. Because “the relation of the imaginary to the real must be negotiated through the symbolic, because the real has no ‘place,’” the splintered state of Anneth’s imaginary paired with the Lacanian impossibility of articulating the real, places Anneth in a state of constant dissociation. Anneth’s only comfort throughout her life is music, for it is the only thing that brings her sense of identity close to reconciliation.

Works Cited


Contributor Bio
Brooke Boling graduated in May 2018 with an undergraduate degree in English and a double concentration in Literature and Writing/Rhetoric. She is currently pursing her MA in English at the University of Louisville. Her primary areas of research focus within English are psychoanalysis, feminism, 18th/19th century British literature, and 21st century Appalachian literature. She plans to eventually receive a doctoral degree in English literature and join the faculty of a university English department.

Faculty Mentor
April Kilinski, PhD
How Do Millennials Learn? An Investigation of the Learning Styles, Strategies, and Perceived Academic Success Among College-aged Millennials

Lalar Hannans, Jolie Johnson, Brittany Litton, and Ivana Torres
Georgia Southern University

ABSTRACT: Research shows millennials learn better by actively doing things than listening to lectures. However, there is little research on millennials and how they learn or what drives them towards success. The purpose of this study was to investigate the preferred learning styles of undergraduate college students and their perception of academic success. Data collection included quantitative and qualitative measures that were used to collect data from a convenience sample of 344 undergraduate college students in a rural southeast regional university. Study was IRB approved prior to data collection. Data were analyzed using appropriate descriptive statistics, cross-tabulations, and coding of qualitative data. Findings indicated that 35.4% of the 344 participants self-reported as kinesthetic (hands-on) learners compared to visual (23.6%), auditory (17%), and read/write (24%) learners. Findings also revealed that only 12.9% of the participants “spend 3 or more hours a day outside of class studying; 34% “ask for help when they do not understand something in class”; 41.1% “feel comfortable approaching professor for extra help” and 60.6% “prefer a teacher who incorporates hands-on activities with lecture.” Millennials in this study defined academic success as (1) establishing effective learning habits, (2) attending class regularly to maintain consistent performance, (3) achieving academic goals, and (4) making good grades. Incorporating kinesthetic activities in the classroom setting will positively enhance learning outcomes and academic success of millennial college students.

Academic success is learning from your mistakes, so even when you make a bad grade, it does not stop there, it is not over. You go back to see where you are lacking and improve until you understand. The understanding is the success, not the number that determines the grade.

– Undergraduate Female Sophomore, Health Major

Many millennial students are faced with many more distractions than previous generations. They are characterized as digitally savvy, skilled with computers, cell phones, smart phones, and social media. They depend on the Internet for retrieving information, texting instead of calling on the phone, and emailing instead of writing letters. They get bored easily and engage more with their smart phones. Teaching approaches carried out decades ago no longer apply to how students today are learning and retaining information (Olszewski, 2016; Howe & Strauss, 2007). They desire to be engaged in their learning, and lecture alone will not do it.

The VARK learning model, developed by Neil Fleming, has been explored by investigators seeking to understand how students learn (Michael & Prirthikumar, 2014). The questionnaire offers an individualized approach to comprehending how learning preferences and ways in which individuals receive and process information are influential in active learning. V stands for visual learners that require graphs, brochures,
and charts to learn more efficiently; $A$ stands for auditory learners who retain information better during lectures, discussions, and seminars; $R$ for read/write learners who prefer taking notes, writing essays, and reading textbooks; and $K$ for kinesthetic learners who prefer hands on approaches like role playing, laboratories, field trips, to learn best. Fleming’s model has been used worldwide and has been known to be effective in enhancing student understanding and learning motivation. In addition, the VARK model showed higher student performance in courses where educators incorporated students’ learning styles into the learning activities (Hawk, 2007).

The Learning Style Inventory Theory, developed by David Kolb, is another approach that researchers have utilized to better understand how students learn. The Learning Style Inventory theory uses a method for describing how students solve problems and apply new knowledge from personal experience within their learning environments (Olivos, Santos, Martin, Canas, Gomez-Lazaros & Maya, 2014). It classifies the learning styles as accommodators, divergers, assimilators, and convergers. Divergent learners use their intuition to process information and exhibit concrete thinking, whereas accommodators exhibit concrete thinking, while actively processing information (Olivos et al., 2014). Convergent learners and the assimilators both engage in abstract thinking but differ in that they use active and reflective processing of information, respectively (Olivos et al., 2014). Considering the use of a more holistic style of learning classification may help educators change the way they present information to students in a classroom setting. Previous research has suggested that the assessment of learning styles can aid educators in developing teaching strategies (Tulbure, 2012; Harmon, Alpert, Banik, & Lambrinos, 2015; Chavan, 2011; Mitchell, James, & D’Amore, 2015).

Self-confidence and self-efficacy are important to one’s academic success (Liem, Lau, & Nie, 2008; Bong, 2004). Bandura’s theory of self-efficacy involves how beliefs determine cognitive processing, including: motivation, emotional arousal, and behavior. The self-efficacy theory is significant because it shows an impact on behavior and influences other psychological variables. There are two types of expectations of success that the Self-Efficacy theory describes. The first expectation is called outcome expectations which refers to the belief that certain behaviors will produce certain outcomes (McCabe, 2015). The second efficacy expectation which is belief that one has the capabilities to perform the behavior required to produce an outcome (McCabe, 2015). Self-efficacy is known to reflect an individual’s confidence to achieve a goal.

Previous studies have been conducted to understand millennials and how they function under certain conditions given their individual qualities. More than half of millennials are known for their multi-tasking qualities and for heavily incorporating technology in most aspects of life. However, there is little information on millennials, in regards to how they learn or what drives them towards success. Understanding millennial college students and how they learn is essential to their academic success. The research questions guiding this study are:

1. How do millennial college students learn?
2. What are their preferred learning styles?
3. How do millennials perceive their ability to achieve academic success?
4. How do they define academic success?

Review of Literature

Kirklin et al. (2013) investigated the impact of multiple technologies in nursing courses among millennial student nurses. Classroom technology included electronic clickers, virtual learning, podcasts, patient simulators, and computerized testing. Data collected from 108 nursing students, of which the majority of the participants were sophomores. While participants reported that virtual learning, clickers, and the patient simulators positively impacted their class participation and critical thinking skills, a large percentage of the cohorts reported they preferred computerized testing (Kirklin et al., 2013). One of the limitations of this study was the investigators were faculty members that currently worked at the university. This study suggests that millennial students learning were positively affected by
technology in the classroom setting.

Saga, Qamar, and Trali (2015) analyzed the learning preferences of preclinical students at the Department of Anatomy at Army Medical College using the VARK learning model. Participants consisted of 400 first- and second-year undergraduate students who completed a Visual, Auditory, Read/Write, Kinesthetic version 7.8 questionnaire. Student responses were assessed to determine the significance in how often individuals applied a specific learning style to several situations in daily life (Saga, Qamar, & Trali, 2015). Out of the 400 students, 38% of students preferred a unimodal learning style, 34% were auditory and 36% were kinesthetic learners. However, the study showed a majority of the learners preferred a multimodal method.

On average, 58% of undergraduate students in the United States complete college within a six-year period (Turner & Thompson, 2014). A student’s successful, productive freshman year in college is essential to the success and completion of the student’s college experience. It has been stated that some millennials face many challenges transitioning from the high school setting to the college environment. Turner and Thompson (2014) found this generation requires an increased use of technology and communication strategies to be integrated into their learning. Millennials’ reflections of their freshmen experience provided insight on obstacles faced and factors that could have created a smoother transition. Turner and Thompson (2014) found that the transition into the college environment for freshmen is directly influenced by the integration of the social and academic involvement the student experiences. This integration is successful when there is a balance of the two. Turner and Thompson (2014) recommended that freshmen of the millennial generation “need ongoing academic guidance, a collaborative and interactive learning environment, and skill development training during the first year to create a seamless social and academic transition into the college environment” (Turner & Thompson, 2014).

Harmon, Alpert, Banik, and Lambrinos (2015) explored how instructor-provided lecture notes and individual learning styles influenced learning outcomes and attendance rates in a principles of economics course. Classroom settings for principles of economics have been typically taught in large-scaled lecture halls using traditional methods of teaching where a professor lectures and students take notes while listening. Data was collected from a convenient sample of 125 undergraduate students at a large northeastern public university that were enrolled in an introductory economics course. In this course, the instructor provided students with lecture notes that went along with a live PowerPoint presentation. The researchers gathered data using iClickers to record attendance, participants’ college transcripts, and a student survey that included information regarding learning styles and demographic characteristics. The results concluded that a majority 54% (39) of students were classified as having a multimodal learning style and that 7% (10) students were visual learners (Harmon et al., 2015). Students who claimed to have never been absent held GPAs that were six percent higher than students who had absences. This finding supports the general claim that students who attend class more may have better learning outcomes. The authors concluded that classes in which professors provided lecture notes that outlined online PowerPoint correlated to lower rates of class absenteeism.

**Methods**

**Research Design**

The study was approved by the authors’ Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to data collection.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Definition of Key Terms</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Learning Strategies</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Learning Styles</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-efficacy</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A total of 350 surveys were distributed to undergraduate students in a general core class in the colleges of Business Administration, Health and Human Sciences, Education, Public Health, Liberal Arts, Science and Mathematics; and student common areas including the University Library. Study participants had to be 18 years or older, participation was voluntary. The investigators took several steps during the administration of the survey to ensure the participants’ anonymity and confidentiality. Instructions provided to participants included: 1) no names on the survey, 2) all individuals had to be 18 years or older to participate, 3) participation was voluntary, and 4) completion and return of the survey indicated informed consent. Ineligible participants returned their blank surveys to a manila folder that was placed at the front of the classroom. Completed surveys were kept in a locked safe accessible only to the research team and advisor. Terms used in the study were defined in Table 1.

**Instrument Description**

A four-part questionnaire was used to collect data relating to demographics, learning strategies, self-efficacy, and academic success. Questions were collected from established questionnaires such as the VARK questionnaire (VARK a Guide to Learning Styles, n.d.), the General Self-Efficacy scale (General Self-Efficacy, n.d.), and the Learning Strategies Inventory (McGuire, n.d.), all of which have yielded accurate results in previous research studies.

Demographic information included age, class level, college major, and grade point average (GPA), number of times changing academic major since enrolling in college, and type of learning style. Individual learning styles were classified as either visual, aural, reading/writing, and kinesthetic learners. The higher the number frequency of answers that were related to a particular learning style indicated the classification of the learner. Learning strategies measured student engagement in activities that would improve learning. The participants rated the statements based on accuracy where, 4 = Always, 3 = Occasionally, 2 = Rarely, and 1 = Never. Students with more 4s implied that they engage in more activities to learn information.

**Table 2: Sample Demographic Characteristics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N=344</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-20</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>60.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-24</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>35.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;25</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>33.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>66.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Classification</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>20.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>27.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>31.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>18.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>On Track to Graduate on Time</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>310</td>
<td>91.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of times changed Major since enrollment in college</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least one change in Major</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>81.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or more changes in Major</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>18.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Preferred Learning Styles</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>23.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auditory</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>17.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read/Write</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>23.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kinesthetic</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>35.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
grouped into categories. The survey took about 10-15 minutes to complete. Participation was voluntary and implied passive consent.

Quantitative data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23.0. Open ended responses to the definition of academic success were summarized to reflect the majority of participants’ responses. Similar responses were categorized into themes for meaning.

**Findings**

A demographic profile of the participants is presented in Table 2. Of the 344 total participants; 66.9% were female, and 60.8% were between 18 and 20 years old, all were undergraduate students and represented different colleges including information technology, education, business administration, liberal arts, health sciences, public health, and science and mathematics. A majority (91.4%) of the participants indicated they were on track to graduate on time; only 18.1% self-reported they had changed their major 2 or more times since enrolling in college.

Participants’ learning strategies for academic success (Table 3) show that while 49.4% always spend at least an hour studying outside of class, only 13.4% reported they always spend 3 or more hours a day outside of class to study. In addition, only 5.3% self-reported they go over lecture notes after class to rework them and note problem areas. Interestingly, only 21.6% indicated that they always learn best using online resources compared to 38.6% that rarely or never use online resources to support their learning.

Perceived self-efficacy of participants and their ability to solve challenging situations to achieve academic success are displayed in Table 4. Findings indicate 63% of participants prefer class work that is challenging, 83.4% indicated they can succeed at most endeavor to which I set my mind, and only 17.5% either give up when work is hard or only study the easy parts. While millennials are perceived to be technological savvy, about 62% of the study participants disagree to learning best when using technology.

**Table 3: Learning Strategies for Academic Success**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item Description (N=344)</th>
<th>Always (%)</th>
<th>Occasionally (%)</th>
<th>Rarely (%)</th>
<th>Never (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I spend at least an hour studying outside of class</td>
<td>49.4</td>
<td>39.3</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I spend 3 or more hours a day outside of class to study</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>38.6</td>
<td>32.0</td>
<td>16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel comfortable approaching my professor when I need extra help</td>
<td>42.7</td>
<td>39.2</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I preview the material that will be discussed before I go to class</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>43.0</td>
<td>22.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I get better grades when I cram study</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>40.8</td>
<td>35.7</td>
<td>14.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I learn best using online resources</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>39.6</td>
<td>23.7</td>
<td>15.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I go over my lecture notes as soon as possible after class to rework them and note problem areas</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>42.4</td>
<td>26.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Perceived Definition of Academic Success**

Qualitative responses revealed four overall
themes that supported millennials’ definition of academic success:

1. learning,
2. performance,
3. achieving goals, and
4. making good grades.

A selection of responses reflecting each theme based on majority perception on academic success is summarized below.

**Learning**

It is the ability to relate the information taught and understand it well while making the grades needed for success.

– Male Freshman, Business Administration

**Performance**

I think academic success is working your hardest and trying your best to get good grades. Performing at the best of your ability with your gifts and talents and learning to compensate for your weaknesses. It is about education, not grades.

– Female Sophomore, Liberal Arts

**Achieving Goals**

Accomplishing goals for yourself, learning efficiently, and gaining the proper knowledge from the class and reflecting in the class with a passing grade.

– Female Junior, Health Sciences

**Making Good Grades**

Mastering the material well enough to get a good grade. What is considered a good grade is relative to the difficulty of the class.

– Female Senior, Science and Mathematic

**Discussion**

The findings of this research study indicate that millennials’ learning strategies do not align with their academic success. There is a disconnection between perceived learning strategies and academic success. While participants in this study understand what academic success is, only a small percent previewed material prior to class, studied more than three hours a day outside of class, and/or reviewed their notes after class for comprehension or re-enforcement. Though a majority of the participants in this self-reported as kinesthetic learners, findings indicated that a majority do not learn well with technology. This interesting finding may suggest that personal knowledge of smart phone use is not the same as use of classroom technology as a learning tool to earn a grade or evaluate performance. Online learning requires self-learning, maturity, and independence compared to face-to-face classroom learning that provides a sense of student dependency, guidance, and supervision from educators. A combination of multi-modal teaching approaches including the use of lectures, visuals such as PowerPoint, hands-on activities, and online resources should be considered to enhance the academic success.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item Description (N=344)</th>
<th>Agree (%)</th>
<th>Disagree (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I prefer class work that is challenging so I can learn new things.</td>
<td>37.0</td>
<td>63.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is important for me to learn what is taught in this class.</td>
<td>88.9</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I learn best when I’m able to use technology.</td>
<td>38.4</td>
<td>61.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m easily distracted when my fellow classmates have their computers out.</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>83.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can always manage to solve difficult problems if I try hard enough.</td>
<td>66.1</td>
<td>33.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am confident that I could deal efficiently with unexpected events.</td>
<td>69.6</td>
<td>30.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Even when I do poorly on a test, I try to learn from my mistakes.</td>
<td>76.7</td>
<td>23.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compared to other people, I can do most tasks very well.</td>
<td>60.2</td>
<td>39.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When work is hard, I either give up or study only the easy parts.</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>82.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe I can succeed at most any endeavor to which I set my mind.</td>
<td>83.4</td>
<td>16.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I am confronted with a problem, I can usually find several solutions.</td>
<td>61.0</td>
<td>39.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Self-Efficacy: Perceived Ability to Achieve Academic Success

Performance

I think academic success is working your hardest and trying your best to get good grades. Performing at the best of your ability with your gifts and talents and learning to compensate for your weaknesses. It is about education, not grades.

– Female Sophomore, Liberal Arts

Achieving Goals

Accomplishing goals for yourself, learning efficiently, and gaining the proper knowledge from the class and reflecting in the class with a passing grade.

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Making Good Grades

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Discussion

The findings of this research study indicate that millennials’ learning strategies do not align with their academic success. There is a disconnection between perceived learning strategies and academic success. While participants in this study understand what academic success is, only a small percent previewed material prior to class, studied more than three hours a day outside of class, and/or reviewed their notes after class for comprehension or re-enforcement. Though a majority of the participants in this self-reported as kinesthetic learners, findings indicated that a majority do not learn well with technology. This interesting finding may suggest that personal knowledge of smart phone use is not the same as use of classroom technology as a learning tool to earn a grade or evaluate performance. Online learning requires self-learning, maturity, and independence compared to face-to-face classroom learning that provides a sense of student dependency, guidance, and supervision from educators. A combination of multi-modal teaching approaches including the use of lectures, visuals such as PowerPoint, hands-on activities, and online resources should be considered to enhance the academic success.
of millennials.

Though the present study adds to the literature on teaching strategies to help millennials be effective learners in the classroom, some limitations do exist. Race and ethnicity was not identified therefore we were unable to do comparison analysis on learning styles and strategies among students of diverse backgrounds. Information was self-reported and therefore findings should be interpreted with caution beyond the participants in this study.

Conclusion
How education is transferred in millennials is an important factor in future learning outcomes. It is known that a majority of millennials are more difficult to understand and more difficult to teach in higher education. Although it has been implied that a majority of millennials may process information in different ways than earlier generations, the principles of learning and memory still apply. By using their knowledge of the learning process, educators need to create an adaptive environment in the classroom that caters to individual learning needs. It is important that millennial learners use multi-modal resources to allow them to actively participate in their learning to produce desirable results for students and educators. Meeting the learning challenges of millennials in higher education is difficult. However, effective educators must be intentional in their teaching. This includes understanding the factors in the classroom environment, respecting the individuality of each student, believing in each student’s ability to be successful, and recognizing that not all millennials fit the stereotype.

References


**Contributor Bios**

All authors were undergraduate senior nursing students in the Georgia Southern University Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) Program. They all graduated in the Fall 2017. Each contributor is presently practicing in medically underserved areas, specializing from pediatric to adult care. The each aspire to pursue graduate nursing education in their specialized practice after one year of primary care nursing.

**Acknowledgments**

The authors would like to acknowledge their faculty mentor, Dr. Marian Tabi, for her guidance support, and encouragement through the initial stages of the project and editorial comments. We would also like to thank the participants who made the study possible.
Ever since I was young, I yearned to know how objects worked, how they moved, how they interacted. Growing up with the rise of technology sparked a curiosity of the innovative. From watching “How It’s Made” to tearing items apart just to build them back again, interlocking and interchangeable pieces have always been prominent in my life. When studying anatomy in drawing classes for college, I struggled to understand the movement and parts of human body until I compared it to a machine. This comparison sparked interest in a concept called transhumanism, a movement that shows humans advancing their way of living with the emerging technical landscape.

This fascination led to the idea of a future human race that not only interacted with machines to enhance efficiency as products but incorporated them into their physical bodies as well. My piece is a small glimpse into how this future society lives. Knowing I wanted to showcase these refined humans, I decided to do so in the form of advertisements since I am pursuing a career in advertising. I pushed this concept of evolved human-living with the product I created for my ads, Petrolia. My piece showcased here is one of five total advertisements. I mimicked the look of many high-end modern lotion and moisturizer ads to convey the nature of how the product is used by these hybrids. The name is derived from the word “petroleum” to reveal its true form oil.

It only makes sense that I would be drawn to a digital medium. From the moment I made my first brush stroke in Adobe Photoshop two years ago, I was taken with the idea of technology aiding my artistic endeavors. It was then that I introduced these themes of transhumanism more prominently in my work. I have formulated a process of photo manipulation and digital illustration that allows me to portray these cyborgs in a believable way. Formally, the juxtaposition of the organic and soft human body against the geometric and rigid nature of machinery serves as an ironic commentary on the robotic nature of man.

The goal of my work is to create conversation. There are critics who say technology is dehumanizing the way we interact with each other; however, I believe communication is just evolving and adapting the same way that the human race always has. I want my audience to walk away from my work thinking more deeply about the world we live in and where we are going in the future.
Contributor Bio
Jada Weaver received her B.S. in Art Marketing from the University of North Georgia at Dahlonega in 2017 with a concentration in Graphic Design and Digital Illustration. Her work is a commentary on dehumanization, trans-humanism, and our struggle with technology and industry. Her work often features cyborgs, androids, and imagery that depicts enhanced human performance through machinery. Working digitally helps Weaver convey these themes as she continues to grow as an artist and in her professional career as a graphic designer.

Faculty mentor
Craig Wilson
Digital Art,
11 inches x 17 inches
Quantification of extended-spectrum-beta-lactamase-producing Enterobacteriaceae from water sources in Hall County, Georgia, USA

**Abstract:** Extended-spectrum beta-lactamases (ESBLs) are a family of enzymes that confer resistance to a number of antibiotics, including those containing a beta lactam ring. ESBLs exhibit antibiotic resistance by destroying the antibiotic's structure and may be encoded by bacterial plasmids that can easily be transferred between bacteria from the family Enterobacteriaceae. Organisms that produce ESBLs pose both threats and challenges in the administration of appropriate therapeutic agents to treat infections. Water environments such as streams can help the spread of antibiotic-resistant bacteria which can originate from a variety of sources, including food processing, waste water treatment plants, and urban runoff. We are studying the isolation and identification of ESBL-producing Enterobacteriaceae from water samples obtained from a water treatment plant and its receiving stream in north Georgia. In this paper, we carried out enumeration of ESBL-producing bacteria from water samples obtained immediately upstream and downstream from the water treatment plant. ESBL-producing Enterobacteriaceae were observed from both pre-treated water obtained from the water treatment plant and from upstream (240/100 ml) and downstream (240/100 ml) water samples, including ESBL-producing *Escherichia coli* and *Klebsiella pneumonia*. Our results indicate that ESBL-producing Enterobacteriaceae are present in all water sources sampled. This suggests that the waste water treatment plant is not the source of these microorganisms. Further studies are needed to determine the originating source.

**A**ntibiotics were one of the miracles of the 20th century and were used for treating several different common infections that were fatal without treatment. Repeated exposure to antibiotics can select for bacteria-containing genes that code for antibiotic inactivating enzymes. Although some bacteria naturally possess the genes for antibiotic resistance, other bacteria can acquire resistance via the uptake of DNA from the environment or by random DNA mutations (Lorenz and Wackernagel, 1994; Paterson and Bonomo, 2005). Therefore, common infections are now becoming harder to treat due to the frequency of occurrence of multi-drug resistant bacteria. According to the Center for Disease Control, more than two million people in the United States become infected with antibiotic resistant microbes each year (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2017).

*Enterobacteriaceae*, such as *Escherichia coli*, are part of the natural intestinal microbiota of humans. They can also cause common infections such as GI tract distress. Most of these infections are easily treated with beta-lactam antibiotics (Damoas-Siakwan, 2005). However, some of these pathogens have gained antibiotic resistance due to acquisition of extended-spectrum beta-lactamases (ESBLs) (Zhang et al., 2015). ESBLs are enzymes that have the ability to hydrolyze the structure of beta-lactam antibiotics, breaking open the ring and thereby inactivating the antibiotic (Medeiros, 1997). ESBLs are primarily produced by
members of the family *Enterobacteriaceae*. They are capable of conferring resistance to a number of antibiotics, including penicillin, aztreonam, and first-, second-, and third-generation cephalosporins. ESBLs were first seen in the 1980s (Doi et al., 2016) and now exceed 200. Studies from Europe and Asia have documented the presence of ESBLs in wastewater, streams and wells (Canton et al., 2008; Brechet et al., 2014; Paterson & Bonomo, 2005).

The spread of antibiotic-resistant bacteria through the heightened use and misuse of antibiotics has become a growing problem in both clinical and environmental settings. Waterborne pathogens are just one of the ways in which antibiotic resistance is spread throughout communities, since certain aquatic environments such as creeks and streams can play a role as both a habitat and a transporter for these organisms (Kittinger et al., 2016). The concern with aquatic environments is that bacteria from different origins are able to mix and exchange antibiotic resistant genes. These modified bacteria can then go on to contaminate municipal urban waters, important sources for drinking and recreational activities (Doi et al., 2016). If ingested, these bacteria can potentially cause infection in humans as well as alter the normal gut microbiota (Blaak et al., 2015). Without drugs to treat infections caused by antibiotic-resistant microbes, results/infections could be fatal. Prior unpublished data from our lab has detected the presence of ESBL-producing *Enterobacteriaceae* in both local streams and waste-water treatment plant (McCuen et al., 2017). However, the impact of that finding is unknown without quantification.

The objective of the present study is to quantify ESBL-producing *Enterobacteriaceae* to determine the potential impact of waste water, the treatment plant, and environmental sources. We sampled water entering (pre-treated) and leaving (post-treated) a wastewater plant as well as up- and downstream of the release point from the plant. A study has shown that waste water treatment plants can significantly contribute to dissemination of ESBL-producing *Enterobacteriaceae* (Blaak et al., 2015). There is also data showing the presence of these bacteria in natural waters (Zhang et al., 2015). Therefore, we wanted to determine if a similar occurrence is found in the water bodies of north Georgia. Analysis of these samples could help identify potential contamination sources.

**Materials and Methods**

**Sampling Sites and Water Sample Collection**

We collected pre- and post-treated water on 26 September 2016 from a water treatment plant in north Georgia. We collected water approximately 300 meters upstream and downstream from the discharge from the plant on 4, 9, and 16 November 2016. For each collection date, the water samples were collected in triplicate at the water surface using sterile bottles (50 ml/bottle). The water samples were put on ice and transported to our lab for further analyses within 1 h.

**Microbiological Analysis**

The pre- and post-treated water samples from the water treatment plant were first diluted in a series of three 9 ml (10⁻¹, 10⁻², 10⁻³ dilutions) saline tubes, then 100 µl from all dilutions were plated on CHROMagar ESBL plates (CHROMagar, Paris, France) and incubated at 37°C for 23 hours.

The surface water samples immediately upstream and downstream from the treatment plant were diluted in a series of the 9 ml saline tubes (as above), then 100 µl from all dilutions were plated on MacConkey agar (Thermo Scientific™ Remel) and incubated at 37°C for 24 hours.

**Most Probable Number (MPN) Analysis**

Up- and downstream water samples were analyzed using plating and a presumptive most probable number (MPN) analysis with confidence intervals using standard methods as described (Oblinger and Koburger, 1975; USDA, 2014). MPN is a serial dilution method that is particularly useful for low concentrations of bacteria (Blodgett, 2010). Briefly, 10 ml of each sample was placed in a separate series of 3 double-strength lactose broth (DSLB) tubes; 1.0 ml of each sample was placed in a separate series of 3 single-strength lactose broth (SSLB) tubes; and 0.1 ml of each sample was placed in...
a separate series of 3 SSLB tubes. All 18 tubes (9 upstream, 9 downstream) contained a durham tube and the following antibiotics to select for the presence of antibiotic resistant gram negative bacteria: cefotaxime (50 µg/ml) and cefepime (50 µg/ml). These tubes were incubated at 37° C for 24 hours. The ratio of positive and negative tubes gives a confidence interval for the concentration of bacteria present per 100 ml of sample (Blodgett, 2010; Rice, 2012).

To confirm the presence of lactose fermenters, Eosin Methylene Blue (EMB) agar plates (Oxoid, Hampshire, England) were streaked using samples from gas positive tubes. ESBLs were confirmed using HardyCHROM ESBL agar plates incubated for 72 hours.

Results

Enumeration of ESBLs using spread plate technique

The HardyCHROM ESBL plates inoculated with water from within the treatment plant showed growth on the ESBL plates with pre-treated water samples (Figure 1) but no growth on the plates with post-treated water after 23 hours of incubation. On the pre-treated water sample plate diluted to 1/10 the concentration of the original sample, colony forming units (CFUs) were observed and calculated (Figure 1 & Table 1). Of these colonies, 23% were identified as ESBL-producing Klebsiella, 8% were ESBL-producing E. coli, and the rest were grouped together into a broad category of white to yellow colonies containing ESBL-producing Acinetobacter or ESBL-producing Pseudomonas (69%).

Enumeration of ESBL-producing Enterobacteriaceae using MPN Analysis

Stream samples collected on 4 and 9 November did not yield statistically significant number of colonies on HardyCHROM plates (Goldman and Green, 2008), but we confirmed the presence of Enterobacteriaceae using MacConkey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Isolate</th>
<th>CFU/ml</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pre-treated</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. coli</td>
<td>1.51 x 10^4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Klebsiella spp.</td>
<td>5.1 x 10^3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everything else</td>
<td>4.55 x 10^4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Post-treated</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. coli</td>
<td>undetected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Klebsiella spp.</td>
<td>undetected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everything else</td>
<td>undetected</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Average number of CFUs per ml of original pre-treated sample obtained from a water reclamation center located in north Georgia, USA.

Table 2: Results from the presumptive MPN test containing cefotaxime and cefepime, performed with samples obtained on 16 November 2016 upstream and downstream from a water reclamation center, located in north Georgia, USA.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>10ml</th>
<th>1.0ml</th>
<th>0.1ml</th>
<th>MPN index per 100ml (Confidence interval)</th>
<th>Confirmation of ESBL-producers on ESBL plates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Downstream</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>240 (36 – 1300)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upstream</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>240 (36 – 1300)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Enumeration of ESBL-producing Enterobacteriaceae

Agar plates. Therefore, we utilized MPN analysis (Oblinger and Koburger, 1975) specifically for 16 November water to inoculate a larger sample size. All 3 of the DSLB tubes, all 3 of the 1.0 ml SSLB tubes, and 0 out of 3 of the 0.1 ml SSLB tubes contained gas bubbles. Based on the MPN chart, the antibiotic resistant coliforms present in 100 ml of water was 240/100 ml for both locations (Table 2; Oblinger, 1975). To confirm the presence of ESLBs, we inoculated one loop of culture from 2 downstream and 2 upstream DSLB tubes each of which were plated on HardyCHROM ESBL plates. After 72 hours incubation, ESBL-producing Klebsiella was observed on 1 of the downstream plates and other ESBL-producing bacteria were observed on all 4 plates (Table 2).

Discussion

In this study, we detected and quantified antibiotic resistant ESBL-producing Enterobacteriaceae up- and downstream of a water treatment plant. Our preliminary result indicate 240 ESBL-producing Enterobacteriaceae /100 ml of water sample. Thus, we have confirmed the presence of ESBL-producing Enterobacteriaceae in a north Georgia stream. Positive results for coliforms and ESBL-producing Enterobacteriaceae were observed in all tests of this preliminary study. Isolates showed resistance to the third-generation cephalosporin, cefotaxime and, importantly, showed resistance to cefepime, the fourth-generation cephalosporin, in both upstream and downstream water samples. The MPN analysis showed there are potentially significant number of ESBL-producing Enterobacteriaceae present both upstream and downstream of the treatment plant. Additional studies involving water samples from different upstream and downstream locations will determine if this result is the norm. Collection dates were spread apart enough that temperatures during the November collection periods had already fallen below ideal temperatures; however ESBL-producing Enterobacteriaceae could still be found in the last water samples. Additional studies examining the number of ESBL-producing Enterobacteriaceae versus environmental temperature will be informative.

While the impact of these numbers is not yet known (Brechet et al., 2014), we have set a baseline for future water quality monitoring in this stream. A Dutch study of surface water and wastewater has found 220 CFU / 100 ml ESBL-producing E. coli. While their study specifically looked for one type of bacteria, we have enumerated all ESBL-producing bacteria present (Blaak et al., 2015). Interestingly, the numbers of ESBL-producing bacteria up- and downstream are similar. This suggests the water treatment plant does not contribute to stream contamination by these bacteria. Doi et al. suggests multiple sources that lead to introduction and spread of ESBL-producing Enterobacteriaceae in the environment including food animals, companion animals, wild birds and runoff in addition to waste water (2017). The presence of ESBL-producing Enterobacteriaceae may be related to nearby food processing plants and urban runoff, which may be worth looking into in the future. Pinpointing the origins of certain ESBL-producing strains could prove beneficial in the treatment of bacterial infections and prevention of the dissemination of such bacteria. Sampling is planned for spring 2019 to investigate further the prevalence of ESBL-producing Enterobacteriaceae in the waters of north Georgia.

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Contributor Bios

Monica Leavell is a 2017 graduate of the University of North Georgia. She holds a Bachelor of Science in Biology. Monica has presented her research at the 2017 UNG Annual Research Conference and the 2017 Society for Freshwater Science’s Annual Meeting. In the future, she plans on attending medical school. Dr. Jeanelle Morgan is a professor and Associate Department Head of Biology at University of North Georgia. She received her BS degree in Biology from Ursinus College and her PhD in Molecular Cell Biology and Genetics from Drexel University College of Medicine. She teaches a variety of courses on the Gainesville campus including Genetics and Microbiology while maintaining an active research program with undergraduates. Margi Flood is an Associate Professor of Biology at the University of North Georgia. She is a freshwater ecologist who specializes in community structure of aquatic insects. Dr. Swapna Bhat is an Assistant Professor of Biology at the University of North GA, Gainesville campus. She obtained her PhD in Microbiology from the University of Georgia. Her research interests involve understanding antibiotic resistance in bacteria and cell communication.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank Brandon Mangum, Sarah Bell, Lindsay McCuen, and Michael West for technical support and University of North Georgia CURCA and Biology Department for funding the project.
The World’s Eye, the World’s Heart:
Frederick Douglass and the
Transcendence from Slavery

Emmy Dixon
University of North Georgia

ABSTRACT: In nineteenth-century America, Ralph Waldo Emerson’s essay “The American Scholar” finds a satisfying manifestation in Frederick Douglass’ autobiographical Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself. A careful examination reveals Douglass to be the epitome of Emerson’s “Man Thinking,” a distinction which allows Douglass to escape slavery in a thoroughly transcendental way. In “The American Scholar,” Emerson expounds upon the deficits in the American education system, in particular, passive knowledge consumption. In an attempt to correct this deficit, Emerson enumerates the qualifications necessary to achieve the pinnacle of American scholarship, which he calls “Man Thinking.” Emerson claims that a man must be in touch with nature, he must explore the past through books, he must activate his soul, and he must use his new knowledge to take action and produce change. Douglass reaches each of the essential phases and meets all necessary requirements for Emerson’s conceptualization. As a slave, often commodified and rendered as livestock, he can be no closer to nature. Reading the written orations of the past, Douglass is spurred into action to change his slave status. His soul is fundamentally active. It is this combination of factors which allows Douglass to transcend slavery and embody, ironically, the zenith of white transcendental intellectualism.

“Always now it is an object of beauty, however base its origin and neighborhood. … In its grub state, it cannot fly, it cannot shine, —it is a dull grub. But suddenly, without observation, the selfsame thing unfurls beautiful wings, and is an angel of wisdom.” – Emerson (249)

While they initially appear to have little in common, Frederick Douglass, the ex-slave, and Ralph Waldo Emerson, the transcendentalist, sprang from the same literary-historical matrix, American romanticism of the antebellum era. During this period, especially from 1840-1860, the two men frequently crossed paths, inspiring each other to ever greater works, specifically in their abolition efforts, efforts necessary because of what they perceived as indefensible outrages to a commonly accessible divinity. For his part, Emerson felt that America had drifted from its moorings in an independence that was not available to all citizens and failed to live up to its full intellectual potential. Aiming to rally academics to a higher purpose, Emerson presented a lecture entitled “The American Scholar” to the Phi Beta Kappa society in Cambridge, Massachusetts. In this 1837 address, Emerson enumerates the deficiencies of passive knowledge consumption, calling for an active interaction with books and the creation of an entirely American style of intellectual: “He is one who raises himself from private considerations, and breathes and lives on public and illustrious thoughts. He is the world’s eye. He is the world’s heart” (251). He is “Man Thinking,” he is “an active soul” (244, 247). He is the American Scholar. When Douglass
wrote his autobiography *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself* in 1845, as a black former slave, much of society (and likely Emerson, too) considered him an unlikely person to assume the prescribed role. Ironically, however, chattel slavery, a fundamentally dehumanizing institution, aids in Douglass’ personification of the ideal Man Thinking, which, according to Emerson, is the height of human intellectual evolution. Thus, like a grub becoming a butterfly, the American Slave becomes the American Scholar.

As abolitionists, Douglass and Emerson shared the public stage during a period of increasing social hostilities. Recently declared legal in the South, the issue of slavery was pushing the limits of the American crucible, and the country was threatening to fracture over the contentious topic. On one side were the pro-slavery, largely white, Southern citizens who resisted slavery’s dissolution using every weapon at their disposal, including perversions of the Bible and pseudo-science. On the other side were the abolitionists, a group largely composed of former slaves, like Douglass, and white intellectuals, like Emerson, who used newspapers and public speaking to call for an immediate end to what they considered heinous acts against fellow human beings. One major quarrel between the groups was over the intrinsic humanity of black people. Ethnology was used to claim those of African descent were subhuman and therefore unable to be free and in no need of human rights. Emerson scholar Len Gougeon references “the common, contemporary belief that blacks belonged to a ‘feminized race,’ were unwilling to fight for their freedom, and were ‘therefore deserving of enslavement’” (626). Emerson believed this theory was refuted by the series of slave revolts in the West Indies that eventually led to tempered emancipation celebrated on August 1st. By violently throwing off their yokes, the slaves proved to be a race of free men, like any other, deserving of the same rights: “The first of August marks the entrance of a new element into modern politics, namely, the civilization of the negro. A man is added to the human family” (Emerson, “Emancipation”).

While it is problematic that Emerson qualified his statements with the idea that black people were subhuman before this uprising, that does not disqualify the progress his speech represents. The American Civil War, beginning in 1861, was eventually fought, in part, over this ideological clash.

These rapidly changing opinions about the humanity of blacks are reflected in the slave narrative, such as Douglass’ *Narrative*, an authentically American genre of literature, which fulfills Emerson’s petition in “The American Scholar.” In this lecture, Emerson warns against America’s dependence on European writers: “We have listened too long to the courtly muses of Europe” (256). Continuing his dim forecast, he predicts, “Our day of dependence, our long apprenticeship to the learning of other lands, draws to a close. The millions that around us are rushing into life, cannot always be fed on the sere remains of foreign harvests” (244). Instead, Emerson suggests action: “Each age, it is found, must write its own books … The books of an older period will not fit this” (246). A product of the antebellum period, Douglass’ *Narrative* fully represents this age. Emerson concludes with hope: “Perhaps the time is already come, when it ought to be, and will be something else; when the sluggard intellect of this continent will look from under its iron lids and fill the postponed expectation of the world with something better than the exertions of mechanical skill” (243-4). The “something better” is revealed in the form of the slave narrative.

While arguably the most famous, the *Narrative* is only one of many similar works, the aims of which were to foster abolition and, according to William L. Andrews in *To Tell a Free Story*, elicit empathy from readers (5). Because both sides of the debate already used pamphlets and speeches, a new rhetorical form of protest was required, and this new form of writing proved remarkably effective at reaching “the hearts of men.” In addition to pulling at the heartstrings of readers, at the root of these narratives are tales of striving for and achieving freedom, both physical and intellectual: “In the slave narrative the quest is toward freedom from physical bondage and the enlightenment that literacy can offer to the restricted self- and social consciousness of the slave” (7). This liberation is
the kind of true freedom that Emerson claims will come with the status of Man ‘Thinking, or the American Scholar, an intuitive and highly philosophical freedom that for Douglass was instead experiential and intellectual.

Freedom's reverberations are felt within many other works of the American literary renaissance, as well. In the seminal work To Wake the Nations, Eric J. Sundquist explains that freedom figures prominently in this literature because it was written during a time when the nation was a house divided over slavery, which recalled the same division felt during the Revolution (30). Since the Revolution was fought for American independence, the energies that fomented that conflict inspired works of self-sovereignty. Sundquist continues, while it is then no surprise that an era as tempestuous as this should result in a rich cultural renaissance, one angle is oft overlooked: “writing about the problem of slavery … by African Americans—can be seen to have animated that rebirth … because it defined the overarching ideology of liberty which left the nation in a state of unresolved crisis while at the same time authorizing its cultural independence” (30). Therefore, Sundquist concludes, "the slave narrator that composed his own story was among the most ‘American’ of antebellum writers” (86-7). Douglass, then, is ideally situated to bring American literature to life, as called for in “The American Scholar.”

This is not the first time that Emerson and Douglass have been brought together in scholarship. Gougeon argues that Douglass is also the embodiment of Emerson's “anti-slave,” a person Emerson described in his 1844 speech given on the anniversary of the emancipation of the black slaves in the British West Indies. In that speech, Emerson claims the Anti-Slave is the hero needed to accomplish full emancipation: “So now, the arrival in the world of such men … outweighs in good omen all the English and American humanity. The anti-slavery of the whole world, is dust in the balance before this … the might and the right are here: here is the anti-slave: here is man: and if you have man, black or white is an insignificance” (“Emancipation”). Gougeon further claims Douglass is the inspiration for Emerson's conception and concludes this inspiration works both ways, as it appears Douglass was equally impressed with Emerson: “Following his appearance in Concord, Massachusetts, where he heard Emerson's call for militant resistance, Douglass set to work on an autobiography that would eventually become an American classic, the Narrative” (632). The Anti-Slave can be likened to Man Thinking with the further addition of violent resistance where necessary to maintain human dignity.

Another critic highlighting striking similarities between the two men, African American literary specialist Douglas Jones analyzes Douglass' address “The Claims of the Negro Ethnologically Considered” to show how Emerson's conception of divinity, called the Over-Soul, and Douglass,’ called the All-Wise, are similar in their use of impersonality to reveal the inherent sameness of all men. “Claims” was given in 1854 at a time when there were “increasingly prevalent cultural, ethnological, and theological discourses that questioned and, in some cases, outright denied 'the negro's manhood’” (Jones 7). Because of this, Douglass had to always remember that many audiences would question his full personhood, and so he goes to great lengths in “Claims” to prove that “Negros” are men, the same as Caucasians: “Throughout ‘Claims,’ Douglass’ meditations on cultural, linguistic, physiological, and socio-historical differences return to this principle of transcendentalist impersonality: essential human sameness” (Jones 23). According to Jones, not only does Douglass successfully employ Emersonian impersonality, he also adds to it, making it his own, which is another hallmark sign of his arrival as Man Thinking: “at the core of Douglass’ most painstaking refutation of ethnological racism emanates a notion of the impersonal that not only parallels Emerson’s but also enhances it” (11). It is this notion of connecting to the impersonal divinity that makes immersion in nature a central tenet of transcendentalism.

Immersing in nature, or the divinity, is the first step in becoming Man Thinking, explains Emerson in “The American Scholar.” Through this process, Emerson claims man “shall see that nature is the opposite of the soul, answering to
it part for part. ... Its beauty is the beauty of his own mind. Its laws are the laws of his own mind. Nature then becomes to him the measure of his attainments" (245). Here Emerson is explaining a personal, intuitive freedom gained through nature. Gougeon explains this intuitive freedom:

Emerson believed that through the agency of personal intuition, the individual becomes aware of his/her own divinity and truth and is thereby empowered. ... This indwelling divinity is for Emerson, and other transcendentalists, the ultimate source of self-reliance, since a reliance on self is actually a reliance on God. For Emerson, we are closest to this primal, intuitively perceived dignity when we are in nature. (653)

Hence, communing with nature allows man to identify himself and hold dominion over his own life. While he could still be physically held in bondage, he can be no man's slave in truth once he recognizes his intrinsic connection to nature and, through nature, his connection to every other human. For Douglass, however, these attainments are quite literally measured with a pen in the scars upon his feet: “My feet have been so cracked with frost, that the pen with which I am writing might be laid in the gashes” (Douglass 33). For the slave in America, nature is not a place to dwell in peaceful communion, it is an arena that offers scarce refuge, and in this moment, Douglass measures the freedom attained – evident by the pen he holds as memoirist – from his physical struggle to survive nature’s onslaught. Jurgen Grandt explains: “The prolepsis ... contains the autobiographer's historical conscience. Here, the pen links the text with historical experience and personal memory; the memoirist's pen literally touches a lived experience” (29). So, while Emerson considers freedom a philosophical proposition to be mulled over in serene reflection, for Douglass, freedom is an experiential reality inextricably joined to a negotiation with nature. This prolepsis signifies the importance of the battle. Surviving nature gives him dominion over his own life, and while he continues for a time in physical bondage, his mind is set free.

This negotiation with nature begins at birth. Often categorized with livestock, Douglass is forced to confront nature in a way a man born free never could. The former slave, in recollection of his childhood, was routinely reduced to an element of nature, and even more sinisterly, a commodified element: “I had no bed. I must have perished with cold, but that, the coldest nights, I used to steal a bag which was used for carrying corn to the mill. I would crawl into the bag, and there sleep on the cold, damp, clay floor, with my head in and feet out” (33). This small slave child, depicted head-first in a feed sack, as if he is already meal fresh-ground from the mill, places Douglass in the very midst of nature; he cannot be closer bound. Continuing the reflection, he recalls that when he was fed, he was fed like swine, in a “trough ... upon the ground” (33). The children of slaves are treated like livestock in a bucolic scene gone awry. This conflation with nature continues throughout the Narrative, deepening the connection. Douglass describes a slave auction with the same twisted pastoral imagery as the children eating: “We were all ranked together at the valuation. Men and women, old and young, married and single, were ranked with horses, sheep, and swine. There were horses and men, cattle and women, pigs and children, all holding the same rank in the scale of being, and were all subjected to the same narrow examination” (46). Men are inspected for their ability to plow fields, women for their ability to produce milk and meat, and the children, the children are faceless swine on which one can only speculate future profits. This intimate bond between man and nature, achieved by the rendering of slave as brute animal, ironically prepares Douglass to accept the mantle of Man Thinking. Though not meant to oversimplify the complex and contentious history African Americans have with nature, this preparation is a situationally ironic outcome. Masters would never willingly have given their slaves an advantage as prescribed by Emerson, and indeed would have actively fought to mitigate such an advantage if it were viewed thus.

Among the other justifications for enslavement mentioned above, this conflation illustrates a common belief that blacks were inherently more at one with nature and thus
rightfully viewed as animals. Kimberly N. Ruffin confirms, “[F]rom the beginning to the end of a slave’s life the message that African-descended people were somehow less human and more pejoratively ‘animal’ was a pillar of enslavement ideology and practice. This approach subjected them to work conditions akin to and sometimes worse than conditions for beasts of burden” (34). Many whites held these beliefs (and some still do), and even Emerson subscribed to highly prejudicial views early in his career, something that changed in his later years as his racist notions confronted his lived experiences. Identifying this intimate connection to non-human nature is also not intended to valorize slavery. Quite the contrary, as Dianne D. Glave explains, “African Americans did not ‘find themselves’ in the wilderness; instead they found, potentially, deliverance from lives of servitude” (33). And while it is true that “African Americans actively sought healing, kinship, resources, escape, refuge, and salvation in the land” (8), they also “experienced nature entwined with fear and violence” (4). By surviving these elements, Douglass is simultaneously enslaved and set free. So, while I am indeed linking Emerson and Douglass in terms of nature, I want to make clear that their realities were quite different. Regardless of perspective, whether this intimacy with nature is achieved through thoughtful reflection, à la Emerson, or base reduction, à la Douglass, the results give equivalent preparation.

Douglass, his mind now primed by an intimate connection to nature, though forcibly imposed, is prepared for the next phase of Emersonian soul activation: a mind for the past, best found through books. Exploring the past through books provides valuable commentary on the present. Even more significant than reading books for the facts they present, Emerson implies, is creating a narrative for the present in relation to the past. In other words, apply history to present circumstances and let the world know this new truth: “The scholar of the first age received into him the world; brooded thereon; gave it the new arrangement of his own mind, and uttered it again. It came into him – life; it went out from him – truth” (Emerson 246). The books are useless if the reader does not apply the material to the world and create original knowledge. Emerson further expounds upon the dangers of becoming too bookish, and concludes that books are simply a tool in the quest to become Man Thinking. He claims books “are for nothing but to inspire” (247). They are only useful to inspire man to reach for truth in the world, a journey that leads to an active soul, the ultimate tool for achieving freedom (247). Emerson asserts that all men are capable of this achievement: “The soul active sees absolute truth; and utters truth, or creates. In this action, it is genius; not the privilege of here and there a favorite, but the sound estate of every man” (247). Most of his audience at the time of the lecture did not consider slaves capable of attaining such intellectual freedom.

Douglass, however, disproves this racial fallacy as he is wholly capable of achieving an active soul through his use of books as inspiration to escape his bondage. Initially, books inform Douglass of his enslavement’s depravity. When his mistress seeks to teach him to read, his master interrupts her saying, as relayed by Douglass, “‘if you teach that nigger (speaking of myself) how to read, there would be no keeping him. It would forever unfit him to be a slave.’… These words sank deep into my heart, stirred up sentiments within that lay slumbering and called into existence an entirely new train of thought” (37). Suddenly child-Douglass knows that his state is just as unnatural as he has always sensed: “I now understood what had been to me a most perplexing difficulty—to wit, the white man’s power to enslave the black man” (37). He fully comprehends the depth of discordance between man’s natural connection to other men, something he feels innately, and the deep divide produced by chattel slavery. This realization sets him on the path to literacy: “Though conscious of the difficulty of learning without a teacher, I set out with high hope, and a fixed purpose, at whatever cost of trouble, to learn how to read” (38). Achieving his goal allows him to make appropriate use of books as a catalyst.

The fresh knowledge of his debased condition coupled with his fledgling literacy spurs Douglass to closely examine his environment and study human enslavement. Later, as he
delves on this newfound information, applying it to his life just as Emerson says should be done, he despairs:

Just the thought of being a slave for life began to bear heavily upon my heart. Just about this time, I got hold of a book entitled “The Columbian Orator.” … These were choice documents to me. I read them over and over again with unabated interest. They gave tongue to interesting thoughts of my own soul, which had frequently flashed through my mind, and died away for lack of utterance. … The reading of these documents enabled me to utter my thoughts, and to meet the arguments brought forward to sustain slavery; but while they relieved me of one difficulty, they brought on another even more painful than the one of which I was relieved. (41-2)

Reading the book “Colombian Orator,” about a slave and master relationship, allows him to articulate his master’s depravity, but unfortunately, it does not show him the way to relieve his torment: “It opened my eyes to the horrible pit, but to no ladder upon which to get out. … The silver trump of freedom had roused my soul to eternal wakefulness” (42-3). Forced to become one with nature and educated by books, yet deprived of his liberty, Douglass has become pure, active soul frustrated within its chains. Though he is at this point unsure of his course, the books have inspired him to act.

Douglass’ subsequent actions constitute the last step in becoming Man Thinking, which, according to Emerson, is using one’s discoveries to take action to produce change. Emerson says, “Action is with the scholar subordinate, but it is essential. Without it, he is not yet a man” (248). Douglass cannot become Man Thinking, free and independent, without acting to change his enslavement. Gougeon argues Douglass and Emerson both espoused this point in later works: “[they] contended that moral self-reliance and physical courage are absolutely essential to securing and maintaining freedom” (650). Because he has activated his soul, he feels he must act or die: “I often found myself regretting my own existence, and wishing myself dead; and but for the hope of being free, I have no doubt but that I should have killed myself” (43). His resolution begins from the moment he learns to read, but escalates when he encounters a free Irishman that laments over Douglass’ sorry state: “The good Irishman … [said] that it was a pity so fine a little fellow as myself should be a slave for life” (43). Douglass concludes, “from that time I resolved to run away” (44). His desire to be free has solidified and his mind is fully free, though resolved to wait for the right plan to form. Later, his life’s enduring stagnation renews Douglass’ urgency for purposeful action, and he explains, “I was fast approaching manhood, and year after year had passed, and I was still a slave. These thoughts roused me—I must do something” (72). Douglass can see his future life strangled in the vise of slavery and can bear it no longer. He concludes, “I should prefer death to hopeless bondage” (74). His urgency is rewarded, and his actions are ultimately successful: “The wretchedness of slavery, and the blessedness of freedom, were perpetually before me. But I remained firm, and, according to my resolution, on the third day of September, 1838, I left my chains, and succeeded in reaching New York” (89). In his subsequent freedom, he writes his story, fulfilling the final caveat for the importance of books: the creation of one. Sundquist agrees this authorship is a defining moment in Douglass’ emancipation:

The Narrative was set down primarily so that Douglass might guarantee its authenticity … but also that he might take personal possession of it, declare it his own property, thereby capping the quest for literacy that had been so crucial to his resistance to and escape from slavery. When he transfigured the text of his scarred slave’s body into the Narrative, Douglass changed ‘property in man’ into property in himself and took the first step in a lifelong series of reinterpretations of his life. (87)

His entire autobiography is a re-description of action undertaken due to inspiration derived initially from books. He could not be a better embodiment of Emerson’s concept.

Emerson ends his description of the American Scholar with a reminder that it is
not enough to simply become Man Thinking, one must work to lead others to this evolved state. Emerson explains, “The office of the scholar is to cheer, to raise, and to guide men by showing them facts amidst appearances” (251). Douglass’ activism starts long before his hard-won freedom, predicting his ascendency to Man Thinking. His intimate relationship with literacy provides an avenue to help his fellow slaves, something he feels compelled to do from the time he learns the truth of his bondage. He begins by extolling literacy’s potential, which results in a devoted slave following: “I succeeded in creating in them a strong desire to learn how to read … [therefore] I agreed to [teach them], and accordingly devoted my Sundays to teaching these my loved fellow-slaves how to read” (70). The school is very successful and brings joy to Douglass’ otherwise dim life:

They were great days to my soul. The work of instructing my dear fellow-slaves was the sweetest engagement with which I was ever blessed. … They came because they wished to learn. Their minds had been starved by their cruel masters. They had been shut up in mental darkness. I taught them, because it was the delight of my soul to be doing something that looked like bettering the condition of my race. (71-2)

His love for this vocation indicates an active soul and foreshadows a fully realized Man Thinking.

His passion for service continues after his escape into the free North, where he discovers the abolitionist newspaper the _Liberator_: “The paper became my meat and my drink. My soul was set all on fire. Its sympathy for my brethren in bonds – its scathing denunciations of slaveholders – its faithful exposures of slavery – and its powerful attacks upon the upholders of the institution—sent a thrill of joy through my soul, such as I had never felt before” (96). While he has attained his own freedom, he is not content to rest on his success; he will not stop until he deals a mortal blow to the institution of slavery. This is no easy task and is often met with societal resistance. Emerson explains how Man Thinking must persevere in the face of such difficulties:

For the ease and pleasure of treading the old road … he takes the cross of making his own, and, of course, the self-accusation, the faint heart, the frequent uncertainty and loss of time which are nettles and tangling vines in the way of the self-relying and self-directed; and the state of virtual hostility in which he seems to stand to society, and especially to educated society. (251)

For Douglass, this “virtual hostility” is painfully true in his new state of freedom. He writes by way of explanation, “Let him be a fugitive slave in a strange land – a land given up to the hunting-ground for slaveholders – whose inhabitants are legalized kidnappers – where he is every moment subjected to the terrible liability of being seized upon by his fellows” (90). However, no matter the danger and discomfort, Douglass works tirelessly for the abolition cause. He feels it is his duty to aid the other slaves: “We owe something to the slaves south of the line as well as to those north of it” (85). He stays true to his principles. He is an activist. He is Man Thinking.

Breaking his chains with the past and succeeding in the face of his oppressors results in the true freedom defined by Emerson. At the end of his narrative, Douglass is an independent Man Thinking, trusting in his faculties and his intrinsic tension with nature, using his freedom in service to his fellow man. Emerson pens, “In self-trust, all the virtues are comprehended. Free should the scholar be,—free and brave. Free even to the definition of freedom” (252). No longer restrained by the definition of freedom that has haunted his life, white versus black, north versus south, Douglass knows he has always been a free man and thus denies slavery its power over him, dealing it a devastating blow by writing his _Narrative_: “In revising his life story while immersing it rhetorically in the ideology of the Revolution, Douglass at once engaged the ancestral masters in struggle and made their language and principles his weapons of resistance” (Sundquist 30). This concept is crucial: ultimately, Douglass takes the tools of white culture and uses them to undermine the flawed system from within, thus denying the system its power. Because he started his life with
value no higher than a piglet, full of unrealized potential in the marketplace perhaps, but with no inherent worth of his own, Douglass intuitively sees the lie that is chattel slavery. He knows that underneath the historically divisive shibboleth of skin color, man is connected to man, and therefore refuses to be defined by pigmentation. Emerson agrees with Douglass’ intuitions: “The world is his who can see through its pretension. What deafness, what stone-blind custom, what overgrown error you behold, is there only by sufferance,—by your sufferance. See it to be a lie, and you have already dealt it its mortal blow” (252). The moment Douglass places his pen in the gashes of his feet to measure the suffering of American history, he becomes not just Man Thinking, but Black Man Thinking. While Emerson in his early days would have been incredulous at the outcome, Emerson in his later years would have found it perfectly fitting that a nation born, at least economically, from the systematic rape of one race of people by the other, should birth a mixed-race man embodying his American Scholar.

**Works Cited**


write, and repeat, it’s all poetry.

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Ruins

Cover Art Contest Finalist

Ruins is a selection from a larger body of work, titled waste not, want not, used to explore the role of waste in a consumer society. Ruins' low saturated color scheme and dream-like haze is created through the use of a large format photography and color film. Film is a purist medium, allowing for the capture of consumer waste with little to no digital interference- encouraging self-reflection and a critical view of the way we as consumers treat the environment. The discarded materials and trash in Ruins not only poses a moral question, but also draws the viewer's eye in a way that is unusual of the subject matter.

My work at the time was industrial in nature; this series stemmed from an exploration of industrial waste eventually leading to various forms of consumer waste. This image features the elaborate line work and movement found amidst the chaos of construction waste.

Much like the majority of people in our society, I am a participant in the consumer cycle. The irony found in my medium and the wastefulness of film production and development is not lost on me. The imagery in Ruins is meant to challenge not only my audience, but myself as well, taking a deeper look at exactly what and how much we waste on a regular basis - while also taking the time to stop and appreciate the more unsightly things.

Contributor Bio
Lauren Copelan is a Visual Arts Educator and artist from North Georgia. She has been making art for 15+ years, focusing on photography, textiles, and illustration. Copelan's work primarily features observational subject matter and social issues. Copelan hold a B.A. in Studio Art from the University of North Georgia with a concentration in Film Photography and Darkroom Production and is current M.A.T. Candidate at Piedmont College.

Faculty mentor
Craig Wilson
Ruins

Film Photography,
24 inches x 30 inches
Undergraduate Perceptions of Race Ideology Groups as Problematic in Society

Abstract: Recently protests or marches such as those in Charlottesville, Virginia, have caused concern among the public regarding the balance between freedom of speech and race-based violence. The purpose of the current study was to explore current perceptions of race ideology groups and race relations in the United States. More specifically, we assessed if students at our small, southern college viewed race ideology groups as problematic in society. We were particularly interested in how students viewed Black Lives Matter and White supremacist groups differently depending on their own race and political affiliation. Overall, roughly half of our respondents reported all race ideology groups have a right to freedom of speech. Other results indicated conservative students were more likely to view Black Lives Matter as harmful for race relations and violent in comparison to liberal students. This relationship remained significant while controlling for other factors such as a student’s gender, race, and other factors.

A mericans are divided on issues related to race ideology groups, tolerance, and the First Amendment right to freedom of speech according to a survey by the Cato Institute (Ekins, 2017). Protests or marches such as those seen in nation-wide news reports concerning Charlottesville, Virginia, have caused some concern among the public regarding the balance between freedom of speech and the possible endorsement of race-based violence. More specifically, race ideology group protests have mixed support from the general population—some may not support the message these groups are sending yet believe it is their right to express their beliefs under the First Amendment. On the other hand, some may feel that the First Amendment right to freedom of speech is important but that it should not protect White supremacist groups or others engaging in protest that support violence or hate crimes against other race groups in the United States. The current study seeks to explore several themes related to current perceptions of race ideology groups. First, do individuals view race ideology groups as problematic in society and does it matter which race ideology groups we are talking about when assessing them (e.g. Black Lives Matter or Neo-Nazis)? Second, what do individuals believe should be the media and society’s role in current race relations, race ideology groups, and First Amendment rights (Ekins, 2017)?

Literature Review
Before discussing the factors that may influence an individual’s perception of race ideology groups it is important to define them. In the current study, race ideology groups include those that are race/ethnicity based, which seek to support others within that group, or reduce problems that
Race Ideology Groups

are specific to their community. One of the most recent groups to emerge that fits our definition of a race ideology group is the Black Lives Matter Movement. This group came to the forefront after a Black youth, Travon Martin, was killed by George Zimmerman. According to blacklivesmatter.com, this member-led organization wants to, “build local power and to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes” (Black Lives Matter, n.d.). Additionally, they refer to themselves as a collective of liberators who want to move beyond the narrow nationalism that is prevalent in Black communities (Black Lives Matter, n.d.). Black Lives Matter does not specifically say that they promote violence, though some, particularly White voters, believe their organization does more harm than good for race relations (Monmouth University Poll, 2016).

Race ideology groups are different than hate groups. The Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), an authority on hate group activity, defines a hate group as an organization having beliefs or policies that attack an entire class of people, typically for their unchangeable characteristics (2018). The hate groups that we commonly see in America today are racial in nature, meaning they hold one race as superior to others or feel hatred towards people of another race. Their ideologies are based on hate and hostility rather than equality or rights, and they may incite violence and harm (Jacobs & Potter, 1997; Mulholland, 2011).

Many advocacy groups, scholars, politicians, and journalists would go so far to say that the country is experiencing a hate crime epidemic and that race ideology groups do participate in hate crime activities (Jacobs & Potter, 1997). The term “hate crime” refers to the criminal behavior that is motivated, not by hate, but by prejudice. Although some states or organizations may have different definitions of hate crime, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (2018) has defined them as, “criminal offense[s] against a person or property motivated in whole or in part by an offender’s bias against a race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, ethnicity, gender, or gender identity.” Generally, “hate crime” is meant to distinguish criminal behavior that is motivated by prejudices from criminal conduct that is driven by lust, jealousy, and politics. Unlike burglary and assault, hate crime emphasizes the offender’s character, values, and attitudes (Crocker 1992/93, pp. 491-94). The term hate crime has established its place in the crime and justice lexicon, and it appears routinely in the media, journals, legislation, and judicial decisions and opinions. In recent events, many protests have led to riots and violence and arguably could fit under the definition of hate crime.

According to the SPLC (2018) hate crimes were up twenty percent and the number of hate groups rose from 917 to 954 between 2016 and 2017, and many violent events have occurred in the last year beyond the death of protester Heather Heyer in Charlottesville. The SPLC (2018) claims that violent attacks that are promoted through hate group rallies have increased in the last year, such as when, “James H. Jackson, a pro-Trump Daily Stormer reader, traveled from Baltimore to New York City to kill black men… [or when] a black college student was stabbed to death May 20 at the University of Maryland. The alleged attacker, Sean Urbanski, was a member of a racist Facebook group called Alt-Reich. Six days later, police say Jeremy Christian, a fan of both Trump and Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh, stabbed two men to death on the MAX train in Portland, Oregon.”

With the onset of hate crimes happening in the country today, a movement has risen to criminalize hate speech. According to Jacobs and Potter (1997), “The anti-hate speech movement asserts that certain kinds of racist, sexist, anti-Semitic, misogynistic, and homophobic expressions and epithets impose emotional damage on persons to whom they are addressed and to other members of the groups to which these persons belong” (p.9). Proponents of hate speech restrictions urge that such expressions be prohibited and that those who say these things should be punished. However, hate speech laws have not done well in the courts, which have declared them unconstitutional on First Amendment grounds (Jacobs & Potter, 1997). Perhaps these laws have been declared unconstitutional because it is difficult to show what could
provoke another to commit a crime against another group and it is also legal to dislike or hate others. According to Eugene Volokh of the Washington Post, hate speech is just as protected under the First Amendment as other ideas (Volokh, 2015).

Political affiliation plays a major role in perceptions of race ideology groups and First Amendment rights. Recent studies have suggested that conservatives and liberals express similar levels of intolerance towards groups that are ideologically dissimilar and threatening (Brandt, Reyna, Chambers, Crawford, & Wetherell, 2013). Conservatives and liberals regularly accuse each other of intolerance. During the election of 2012, liberals accused conservatives of voter suppression tactics similar to Jim Crow laws and conservatives accused liberals of class warfare (Brandt et al., 2013). Supporting Brandt et al.’s research (2013) the Cato Institute came to similar conclusions in regards to both liberal and conservative individuals blaming each other for issues related to poor race relations (Ekins, 2017). For example, liberals feel they can’t say, “Racism is alive and well in America. White people refuse to believe it and take offense” (Ekins, 2017, p. 38).

On the other hand conservatives believe, “BLM [Black Lives Matter] and Antifa are terrorist groups and are as antithetical to the United States as any neo-Nazi group or white nationalist group” (Ekins, 2017, p. 38). However according to the SPLC (2018) with President Trump hiring alt-right favorites – Steve Bannon and Sebastian Gorka – as two of his key advisers we would expect to find greater support among conservatives for race ideology groups except for BLM.

Beyond political affiliation, there are other factors that influence perceptions of race ideology groups. The SPLC reports large numbers of Whites in survey research believe racial discrimination against them is even more pervasive than of Black individuals (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2016). In a recent study, Whites were more likely to report feeling discrimination against them and believe anti-White bias is a current social problem in comparison to Whites in 1950 and 1960 (Norton & Sommers, 2011). In this same study, Black respondents were less likely than in previous generations to feel White or Black individuals experience discrimination or anti-race bias (Norton & Sommers, 2011).

The campus climate is reflective of overall society and our acceptance of multiculturalism and racial justice or the belief that all race ideology groups worsen race relations. More specifically, students may enter college with little knowledge of race ideology groups or racial justice. In a study focused on college students by Johnson and Lollar (2002), they found that if educated on diversity, students display a greater knowledge of different cultures, which is important for understanding racism in our society. If students are uneducated on race ideology groups, their perceptions are limited to what they do know through the media or personal experience. It is important to note that not all college campuses are equally supportive of social justice for minority groups. Depending on the race ideology group, for example, those that are considered positive for racial minorities might be seen as negative by White students. More specifically, many Black students viewed race ideology groups related to multiculturalism as supportive whereas White students saw it as segregation (Loo & Rolison, 1986, p. 72). Additionally, students of color in predominantly White school settings received far less support than White students (Loo & Rolison, 1986).

Further, Black students felt they were the targets of racism and hostility from other students and faculty on these campuses. These findings are consistent throughout the literature on the lack of support Black students may feel on predominantly White college campuses (Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr, 2000; Cabrera & Nora, 1994; Hurtado, 1992; LaSure, 1993; Sedlacek, 1999).

Hypotheses
Based on the research previously discussed, our hypotheses for this study are:

1. White students will view race ideology groups as less problematic in society in comparison to non-White students, however they will be less likely to support racial minority ideology groups such as...
2. Similar to the above hypothesis, conservative students will be less likely to believe race ideology groups are problematic in society in comparison to liberal students. However, conservative students will be more likely to have negative perceptions of Black Lives Matter in comparison to liberal students.

Method
Participants
This study was conducted using a sample of undergraduate students attending a small, Methodist-based, private, liberal arts college located in the Southeastern United States. A majority of our student population consists of middle- and upper-class Whites, which is reflected in our data analysis results (see Table 1).

Procedure
A survey questionnaire (see Appendix A) measuring student perceptions of race ideology groups was distributed across the college campus in classroom settings in a variety of departments. Prior to participation in our study students signed a consent form which indicated the survey would concern their perceptions and knowledge of race ideology groups. Students were asked questions related to their socio-demographics, perceptions of race ideology, and self-assessed knowledge of race ideology groups.

Survey Measures
In this section we focus on the variables we will report within the Results and Discussion sections of the current paper. The first page of questions contained socio-demographic information such as respondent's gender, race, political affiliation, birth city, city they grew up in, and a general question about their knowledge of race ideology groups. The demographic questions for birth city, and city, state where they spent a majority of their childhood and teen years were open-ended questions. After reviewing the data, we recoded respondent’s city, state where they spent most of their childhood into two regions based on the four U.S. Census regions comparing the South (1) to all other regions (0) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). Race/ethnicity was coded as ‘RACE’, and included White/Caucasian (1), Black/African American (2), Hispanic (3), Asian (4), and Other (5). This was later collapsed into non-White (0) and White (1) to meet multiple regression model requirements. Next, respondent’s sex was originally measured as male (0), female (1) and other (2), which was then recoded to include only male and female respondents. We recoded sex by removing two respondents from our data analysis (i.e. one student did not respond and one student selected other). We removed these two cases to simplify data analysis. Political Affiliation was coded as ‘POLITAFFIL’ and measured as Conservative (1), Independent (2), Liberal (3), and Other (4). This was also collapsed into a dichotomous variable comparing liberal (0) and conservative (1) respondents to meet multiple regression model requirements with Independent and Other removed from the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Demographic Variables</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White/Caucasian</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>80.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black/African American</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>41.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>59.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Political Affiliation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>35.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>30.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>23.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>11.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Region of the country</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All other regions</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>35.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>64.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>35.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
analysis. Students that identified as Independent and Other were removed during early stages of data analysis since the researchers realized some students may reject the label of self-identifying as one of these two groups. This meant many that self-identified as independent may in fact lean either conservatively or liberally and could influence our results. For example, some may have identified as Libertarian rather than Conservative.

Directly following the demographic questions, we asked respondents several questions about their knowledge of race ideology groups. We attempted to select some of the most common race ideology groups, including some which would be considered hate groups. More specifically, we asked students, “Which of the following race ideology groups have you heard of? (Circle all that apply).” Options included, the Ku Klux Klan, National Socialist Movement, Aryan Brotherhood, American Congress for Truth for America, American Border Patrol/American Patrol, Black Lives Matter, Jewish Defense League, and the Nation of Islam.

We also measured students’ self-assessed knowledge of race ideology groups by asking them, “in general, how knowledgeable are you with race ideology groups?” using the Likert scale of Not at all (0), Somewhat (1), Moderately (2), Very (3), and Extremely (4). Lastly, we asked respondents to indicate their level of agreement from Strongly Disagree (1), Disagree (2), Neutral (3), Agree (4) and Strongly Agree (5) with the statement, “I would participate in a race ideology protest/march.” This question was included within the same series of questions that appear in the subsequent paragraph of the current study. It does not immediately follow our questionnaire item concerning how knowledgeable the participant is about race ideology groups (i.e. items 12 and 29). This question was asked generally and respondents were not asked about each race ideology group that appeared on the questionnaire. Generally, depending on the group the respondent would be willing to participate in a race ideology protest against (e.g. the Nation of Islam or Aryan Brotherhood) the act of protest may be considered positive or negative. Due to our lack of measuring a

respondent’s willingness to protest hate groups in particular a respondent’s willingness to protest only measures a form of political activism.

Next, students were asked to indicate their opinions regarding the media and society’s role in race relations and if race ideology groups were problematic through a series of 27 statements. Some of these statements in our scale were based off a previous unpublished doctoral dissertation on hate crime with new statements primarily focused on specific groups such as Black Lives Matter or the Ku Klux Klans (Jardina, 2014). For example, some of the items within this section included: I believe there are a lot of hate crimes in the United States; our media is influential in promoting hate and violence from hate groups; this country would be better off if we worried less about how equal people are; the group Black Lives Matter promotes violence; the group Black Lives Matter does more harm than good for race relations; Neo-Nazis and other White supremacy groups promote violence; Neo-Nazis and other White supremacy groups do more harm than good for race relations’ among other statements assessing student perceptions of race ideology groups, the media, and society. Students were asked to indicate agreement to these statements by using the following Likert scale: Strongly Disagree (1), Disagree (2), Neutral (3), Agree (4) and Strongly Agree (5). Missing data were removed, which means if a student skipped a question their responses were removed from later analysis. With missing data removed and reverse measure items recoded, possible scores could range from 27 to 135 on our race ideology perception scale. Higher scores indicated students felt race ideology groups and race relations in the U.S. were worrisome/problematic.

Results

After reviewing our data we decided not to include analysis of the questionnaire item, “which of the following race ideology groups have you heard of?” This was primarily due to coding and measurement issues in how we collected our data. For example, a student may not be aware that the National Socialist Movement is considered by the SPLC to be a White supremacy hate group (2018); however they may have later agreed with
our questionnaire items, “Neo-Nazis and other White supremacy groups promote violence” or “Neo-Nazis and other White supremacy groups do more harm than good for race relations.” Additionally, we became concerned that our question may have contained researcher bias by only including the groups we knew to be popular and we inadvertently may have left out race ideology groups our participants may have known about. Due to our lack of clarity in our questionnaire item about the nature of some these groups we decided to omit this question from data analysis. In this section we focus on the strongest relationships we uncovered during data analysis.

For our first bivariate analysis results, “Black Lives Matter promotes violence” and “Black Lives Matter does more harm than good for race relations” we conducted a chi-square test. Based on our results we found there was a significant relationship between a respondent’s race and their opinions on Black Lives Matter promoting violence, $\chi^2 (4, N = 267) = 13.45, p = .009$. More specifically, only White respondents strongly agreed with this statement ($N = 19$) and they were generally more likely to agree ($N = 43$) in comparison to non-White students ($N = 5$). Overall, non-White students were more likely to disagree or strongly disagree ($N = 31$) than agree or remain neutral with this statement ($N = 22$). In our second chi-square test there was a significant relationship between a respondent’s race and their opinion on Black Lives Matter doing more harm than good, $\chi^2 (4, N = 267) = 13.86, p = .008$. White students ($N = 63$) were more likely than non-White students ($N = 9$) to agree or strongly agree with this statement. Non-White were slightly more likely to disagree or strongly disagree ($N = 28$) than agree or remain neutral with this statement ($N = 26$). Overall, White students had more negative perceptions of Black Lives Matter in comparison to non-White students.

Using the same two questions related to Black Lives Matter we conducted a chi-square analysis using respondent’s political affiliation. There was a significant relationship between a respondent’s political affiliation and Black Lives Matter promotes violence, $\chi^2 (4, N = 153) = 59.92, p < .001$. Only three Liberal students reported strongly agreeing/agreeing with that statement in comparison to 43 Conservative students. Forty-nine Liberal students strongly disagreed or disagreed with the statement Black Lives Matter promotes violence in comparison to 19 Conservative students. There was also a significant relationship between the political affiliation and Black Lives Matter doing more harm than good, $\chi^2 (4, N = 153) = 65.56, p < .001$. Conservatives were much more likely to strongly agree or agree ($N = 47$) than liberal students ($N = 4$). Overall, liberal and conservative students were divided in terms of the perceptions of Black Lives Matter with conservatives more likely to report negative attitudes towards this group.

We also assessed the relationship between race or political affiliation and two other race ideology group statements, “Neo-Nazis and other White supremacy groups promote violence; Neo-Nazis and other White supremacy groups do more harm than good for race relations.” The only significant relationship uncovered was between political affiliation and “Neo-Nazis and other White supremacy groups do more harm than good for race relations.” As displayed in Table 2, a chi-square test revealed a significant

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Neo-Nazis and other white supremacy groups do more harm than good for race relations</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Political Affiliation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Percentages reflect column percentages.
relationship with conservative students more likely to report being neutral, disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with White supremacy groups being harmful $\chi^2 (4, N = 152) = 12.36, p = .015$.

Our next type of bivariate analysis included a t-test in order to compare student scores that assessed their opinions regarding the media and society's role in race relations and if race ideology groups were problematic. As displayed in Table 3, Whites had significantly lower mean scores in comparison to non-Whites. Non-White students felt race ideology groups and race relations in the U.S. were more worrisome/problematic than Whites.

Another t-test was conducted comparing conservative and liberal students and their scores on our race ideology group perception scale. Conservatives had significantly lower mean scores ($M = 82.65, SD = 8.47$) in comparison to Liberals ($M = 93.30, SD = 9.77$), $t (97.36) = 6.84, p < .001$. Similar to other findings above, conservative students were less likely to feel race relations and race ideology groups were problematic in society.

As shown in Table 4 our final data analysis was a multiple linear regression predicting student perceptions of race ideology groups as problematic based on their race, gender, political affiliation, region of the country they grew up in, and if they would participate in a race ideology group protest/march. The overall model was determined to be statistically significant and explained 27% of the variance ($F (6, 127) = 9.069, p < .001$). Only two of our variables remained significant when controlling for the other factors. A respondent's political affiliation continued to be a significant predictor of their belief that race ideology groups and race relationship were not problematic in the United States ($\beta = - .429, p < .001$). On the other hand, respondents that primarily grew up in the South were more likely than students who grew up in other regions of the U.S. to say race ideology groups and race relationship were problematic in society ($\beta = .170, p = .025$).

### Conclusions and Discussion

In reflection of the protest and marches by race ideology groups occurring in our country, many individuals may disagree regarding race ideology groups and their impact on race relations within the United States. As we predicted in our hypotheses there were race and political affiliation differences related to perceptions of race ideology groups. Overwhelmingly, conservative

### Table 3: Race Attitudes Toward Race Ideology Groups as Problematic

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race Ideology Groups are Problematic</th>
<th>Non-Whites</th>
<th>Whites</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>88.98 (6.69)</td>
<td>87.02 (9.89)</td>
<td>1.61*</td>
<td>97.36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: * = $p \leq .05$, ** = $p \leq 0.01$. Standard Deviation appear in parentheses below means.

### Table 4: Multiple Regression Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitudes Toward Race Ideology Groups as Problematic Based on Race, Gender, and Political Affiliation</th>
<th>$b$</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>88.138</td>
<td>3.146</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Affiliation (1 = conservatives)</td>
<td>-9.136</td>
<td>1.892</td>
<td>-.429**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (1 = females)</td>
<td>-.541</td>
<td>1.688</td>
<td>-.026</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race (1=Whites)</td>
<td>.410</td>
<td>2.174</td>
<td>.015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Region of the Country (1=South)</td>
<td>3.714</td>
<td>1.642</td>
<td>.170*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participate in protest</td>
<td>2.587</td>
<td>2.184</td>
<td>.101</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| $F$-value                                                                                   | 9.069** |
| $R^2$                                                                                       | .267    |

Note: * = $p \leq .05$, ** = $p \leq .001$. 

students were more likely to view Black Lives Matter as harmful for race relations and violent. Our results support other research that indicated conservatives view Black Lives Matter and Antifa as terrorist groups (Ekins, 2017). This relationship remained significant while controlling for other factors such as a student’s gender, or race.

We also found liberal students to be more likely to say there is a race ideology group problem in the United States. Overwhelmingly the list of race ideology groups in this study focused on White organizations. Perhaps if we had a study focusing only on groups like Black Lives Matter and other non-White organizations conservative students may have found them to be more problematic than liberal students. In particular this finding echoes a comment by a Sebastian Gorka, a Trump supporter and conservative when he claimed White Supremacist hate groups were not a terrorist problem in this country (SPLC, 2018). This connection could be explained due to many race ideology groups being driven by conservative ideas or as stated earlier in the paper, could be related to the view that First Amendment rights are more important than agreeing with a group’s hateful message.

Our study did not find support for older research that found a difference in how race groups perceive race ideology groups. For example, in Loo and Rolison’s 1986 study they found White and Black students disagreed on whether race ideology groups promoted multiculturalism or were a form of segregation. More specifically, in our multiple linear regression predicting student perceptions of race ideology groups as problematic only political affiliation and region of the country in which the respondent grew up remained significant while controlling for respondent’s race and sex. In other words, when controlling for a variety of factors political ideology and region of the country seem to matter more than a respondent’s race.

We encountered many limitations while analyzing our data results. Our first limitation is that our pool of respondents came from a small southern liberal arts college and a majority of them were White conservatives. Further, with a majority of our sample reporting they grew up primarily in the South we would expect their perceptions of race ideology groups and the controversy surrounding them to be different than other regions of the country. As indicated in our data analysis, respondents from the South were more likely to report race ideology groups as problematic. Our results are similar to what Johnson and Lollar (2002) found, which was that students educated on diversity may be more supportive of multiculturalism and have greater knowledge of other race groups. In other words, even though our students were primarily from the South they were attending a private, Methodist, liberal arts college. Perhaps our results would be different if we included a representative sample from the South and other regions of the country rather than a sample of college students at a liberal arts college.

It is evident that this subject matter is significant enough to conduct further research. As a result of the constantly changing political climate in our country today, we continue to see a rise in membership and movements throughout race ideology groups in our society. Some of these groups are peaceful; however, there are also those that display violent and destructive behaviors. Future research on race ideology groups should measure attitudes towards First Amendment rights in a more specific way than the measures included in the current study. For example, respondents could be directly asked for each race ideology group if they would support that group’s ability to march in a public park within their city. Perhaps researchers could better understand just how willing individuals are to support freedom of speech when the individual is faced with a race ideology group’s message with which they may not agree.
References


Contributor Bios

Bailey Williams is an alumna of Florida Southern College where she graduated cum laude and earned a B.A. in Criminology and Interpersonal Communications. She is currently working in Sarasota County while studying for the LSAT. She hopes to continue her education in the future at a Florida law school. Niyyah Bilal
Hayes is recent graduate of Florida Southern College. She graduated *cum laude* and earned two degrees, a B.A. in Criminology and a B.S. in Psychology. Niyyah is currently working towards her Masters in Social Work on the clinical track with a focus on forensics and the armed forces at the University of Central Florida. She works as a Graduate Coordinator for Housing and Residence Life at UCF and hopes to continue researching race, the criminal justice system, and collegiate opinions of world issues. After graduating from UCF, Niyyah plans to pursue a PhD in Clinical Psychology. Caroline Lombardo is an alumna from Florida Southern College with her Bachelors of Science degree in Criminology and Psychology. Caroline is continuing her education and is enrolled in the Masters of Criminal Justice Program at University of Central Florida. Caroline is currently working as a deputy for the Brevard County Sheriff’s Office. Dr. Blankenship is an Assistant Professor of Social Science at Florida Southern College. Her research area interests include race, class and gender portrayals within educational media. She is also interested in and writes about a variety of issues within the criminal justice system.

**Acknowledgments**

A special thanks to Dr. Mick Lynch and the Institutional Review Board at Florida Southern College for providing feedback for the current study.
Appendix A
Undergraduate Perceptions of Race Ideology Groups Survey

Thank you for your assistance. Please circle each designation that best applies to you.

1. Gender: Male Female Other
2. Race/Ethnicity: White/Caucasian Black/African American Hispanic Asian Other
3. Political Affiliation: Conservative Independent Liberal Other
4. Religious Affiliation: Christian Catholic Jewish Atheist Other
5. Current Age: ____________________
6. Relationship status: Single (not in a relationship) In a committed relationship Other
7. City, State you were born in: ____________________
8. City, State you spent a majority of your childhood and teenage years if different than the location you were born in: ____________________
9. Residency while at Florida Southern College:
   - On campus
   - Off campus, student housing
   - Off campus, not in student housing
   - Other
10. College major ________________________________
11. Which of the following race ideology groups have you heard of? (Circle all that apply).
   - Ku Klux Klan
   - National Socialist Movement
   - American Border Patrol/American Patrol
   - Black Lives Matter
   - Aryan Brotherhood
   - American Congress for Truth for America
   - Jewish Defense League
   - Nation of Islam
12. In general, how knowledgeable are you with race ideology groups?
   - Not at all
   - Somewhat
   - Moderately
   - Very
   - Extremely

Please circle the number that best represents your attitude/perception for each of the following:

1) Racial hate groups are a problem in the United States. 1 2 3 4 5
2) The confederate flag is “heritage not hate.” 1 2 3 4 5
3) The number of hate crimes is not as frequent as the media portrays them to be. 1 2 3 4 5
4) I believe there are a lot of hate crimes in the United States. 1 2 3 4 5
5) I am/was concerned about protests occurring in Charlottesville. 1 2 3 4 5
6) I am/was concerned about neo-Nazis in Charlottesville. 1 2 3 4 5
7) I am/was concerned about leftist Antifa in Charlottesville. 1 2 3 4 5
8) Many of those in Charlottesville upset about the removal of confederate soldier statues were neo-Nazis or racists. 1 2 3 4 5
9) I feel guilty about the past and present social inequality of minority groups. 1 2 3 4 5
10) If people were treated more equally in this country we would have fewer problems. 1 2 3 4 5
11) Our society should do whatever is necessary to make sure that everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed. 1 2 3 4 5
12) Our media is influential in promoting hate and violence from hate groups. 1 2 3 4 5
13) This country would be better off if we worried less about how equal people are. 1 2 3 4 5
14) Police treat all race groups equally and fairly. 1 2 3 4 5
15) I am very satisfied with the police in the United States. 1 2 3 4 5
16) I would participate in a racial ideology protest/march. 1 2 3 4 5
17) I talk with my friends or family about race relations and/or race ideology groups. 1 2 3 4 5
18) Our government is effective in handling situations with race ideology groups. 1 2 3 4 5
19) Race ideology groups violate constitutional rights. 1 2 3 4 5
20) Race ideology groups have the right to freedom of speech. 1 2 3 4 5
21) Race ideology groups have the right to protest in public spaces. 1 2 3 4 5
22) Race ideology groups should have a voice in American politics. 1 2 3 4 5
23) People are swayed by race ideology group protests. 1 2 3 4 5
24) My race/ethnicity is better than other race/ethnicities. 1 2 3 4 5
25) Irish, Italians, Jewish and many other minorities overcame prejudice and worked their way up. Blacks should do the same without any special favors. 1 2 3 4 5
26) The group Black Lives Matter promotes violence. 1 2 3 4 5
27) The group Black Lives Matter does more harm than good for race relations. 1 2 3 4 5
28) Neo-Nazis and other white supremacy groups promote violence. 1 2 3 4 5
29) Neo-Nazis and other white supremacy do more harm than good for race relations. 1 2 3 4 5
30) I am very concerned about the future of race relations in the United States. 1 2 3 4 5

Survey design has been altered to fit this page.
Snakeskins, Sunsets, and Seeing: Creation and Theodicy in *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*

Madeline Perkins  
Samford University

**Abstract:** In *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, Annie Dillard uses nature to talk about philosophical and spiritual topics. She exercises the habit of seeing, which is both passive observation and active creation, and uses it to explore questions of God’s goodness, or theodicy. Dillard’s creation – *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* – does not deny that both cruel things and beautiful things exist in God’s creation. Dillard instead proposes that “[t]he answer must be … that beauty and grace are performed whether or not we will or sense them. The least we can do is try to be there” (10). The result of Dillard’s decision to “sense them” and “be there” is *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, which invites the reader to explore along with her, both in its content—stories of outdoor explorations—and in its overt position as a book, or something created in order to be sensed. Dillard champions the act of creation as the counterpart to the horrors found within creation; creative action is her theodicy.

In *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, Annie Dillard exhibits a focused use of imagery and a free use of interpretation, pairing specific, lively descriptions of nature with imaginative, earnest analysis. These images are organized into chapters divided evenly into two categories, as Dillard has noted in various interviews and the book’s Afterward (279-80). The first seven chapters align with the *via positiva*, the eighth chapter is a transition, and the final seven chapters explore the *via negativa*. The *via positiva* and the *via negativa* are “two ancient mystical concepts … used to define an approach to the doctrine of God” (Carroll 26). Christian mystics have used these methods for centuries to investigate the presence or absence of the divine in nature (Smith 17). The *via positiva* is “a religious path devoted to naming and affirming God’s presence in creation” (Kelleher 47). One example of this is when Dillard explores the excessive presence of details in nature (*Pilgrim* 134-39). The *via negativa* “maintain[s] that knowledge of God is impossible, since he transcends the limits of human knowledge and language” (Smith 28). Dillard writes according to the *via negativa* when she describes horrific destruction she observes in nature. Certain of Dillard’s critics call the act of writing the *via creativa*, or “by the creative way” (Smith 33). This term recognizes Dillard’s authorship as a participation in creative action. Dillard’s work participates in the spiritual literary tradition; she also joins the tradition of nature writing.

Henry David Thoreau began the movement which is recognized today as the nature writing genre with his book *Walden*. His work “combined diary format with acute observation” (Jolly, n. pag.). The titles of each chapter – “Winter Animals,” “Sounds,” “The Bean-Field” – illustrate his intent to document his surroundings. He describes facts of nature, and then he writes his thoughts on these facts. Thoreau’s works demonstrate how nature writers use nature to think about important aspects
of life. Like Thoreau, Dillard uses her writing to interpret as well as describe her experiences. However, she addresses the presence of good and evil with greater negativity than Thoreau. As a result, Linda L. Smith describes her work as "posttranscendental" (43-4). Dillard departs from the blind optimism of the transcendental writers and creates a tradition that, rather than explaining away the horrors of nature, describes them in detail and discusses their ramifications. The willingness to engage with all aspects of nature is a feature of Dillard's writing that calls to mind the mystic tradition.

Dillard describes facts of nature and imaginatively attaches spiritual interpretations to them. She observes the beauty and horror of nature and records her reflections on these observations, a dual set of actions that I term seeing. As Dillard translates her observations into philosophical and spiritual musings, her analysis activates nature, moving beyond observation into creation. The text exhibits a tension between the via positiva and the via negativa. This tension brings up the issue of theodicy, which is the attempt to justify God's goodness in a world replete with pain and horror (Jones, n.pag.). Although Dillard does not specify a specific religion or deity, her work is highly spiritual and assumes the presence of a creative God. Dillard's vindication of God's goodness is aesthetic and exploratory rather than logical. This essay argues that the via creativa is Dillard's theodicy; she allows the tension between beauty and horror to result in a creative product that unifies the two through its exploration of them.

**Blend: Interpreting Facts to Imagine**

Dillard speaks about nature with imagination and inventiveness. David Shields sanctions the use of innovation within a nonfiction text: “The essay consists of double translation: memory translates experience; essay translates memory” (Shields 61). Dillard translates her memories into an essay not in order to report stiff facts but to explore ideas of divine revelation in nature. Dillard's shift from fact to faith is the fulcrum where I set my argument: *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* successfully discusses serious issues because it uses dying frogs and pond microorganisms and backyard cedars. Dillard's text illustrates that nonfiction writing blends factual, nature-based observations with imaginative and philosophical musings.

Shields' book *Reality Hunger* studies genres, specifically fiction and nonfiction, and Shields embraces the notion that modern culture often blends fact and fiction (115, 110). Cathy Alter notes in an article in *The Atlantic* that the book "is a literary battle cry for the creation of a new genre, one that doesn't draw distinctions between fiction and nonfiction, originality and plagiarism, memoir and fabrication, scripted and unscripted" (n. pag.). Shields's ideas relate to *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* because Dillard's work is shelved with nonfiction, yet aspects of the work itself call to mind many different genres. To quote Shields, it blends “memoir and fabrication” to an effective end. Shields writes, “fiction'/nonfiction' is an utterly useless distinction” (63). Although I find this melodramatic, Shields’ sentiment remains: there is overlap between genres. Dillard comments in *The Writing Life* that “even with the most literal intentions, the work twined into the infinite again and dissolved, or the infinite assaulted the page again and required me to represent it” (Writing 90). Dillard's work is situated in the overlap between fiction and nonfiction that Shields spends so much time describing, and specifically moves between the investigation of the natural and the eternal.

Dillard imaginatively interprets factual observations of nature with philosophical musings. One classic example occurs when Dillard describes the experiences of people who were able to see for the first time in their life after having cataracts removed: “When her doctor took her bandages off … the girl who was no
longer blind saw ‘the tree with the lights in it.’ It was for this tree that I searched” (*Pilgrim* 35-6).

Dillard follows this, concluding the chapter, with her own mystic experience:

> Then one day I was walking along Tinker Creek thinking of nothing at all and I saw the tree with the lights in it. I saw the backyard cedar where the mourning doves roost charged and transfigured, each cell buzzing with flame. . . . Gradually the lights went out in the cedar, the colors died, and cells unflamed and disappeared. I was still ringing. I had been my whole life a bell, and never knew it until at that very moment I was lifted and struck. I have since only very rarely seen the tree with the lights in it. The vision comes and goes, mostly goes, but I live for it… (*Pilgrim* 36)

In this passage, Dillard exhibits her comfort with translating a fact into a narration of a mystic experience. Smith describes this tendency, writing that critics “praised the ‘special beauty of surprise’ that results from [Dillard’s] rapid-fire shifts from the ‘colloquial and the everyday to the reverential and the celebratory’” (48). In the story of the cedar, one colloquial aspect of the setting is Dillard’s mention of the creek and the cedar. Both of these natural features empirically exist; this existence could be proven by a second opinion, a photograph, or a short trip to Virginia. The “rapid-fire shift” comes when Dillard claims that she saw lights in the tree. This is a vision unique to Dillard herself, one that Susan Elizabeth Yore describes in this aspect of Dillard’s work: “[I]t abounds with attention to the details of nature while at the same time displaying a disregard for literal truth. . . . the reader never really knows what Dillard sees with her eyes or where temporal reality ends and the eternal breaks through.” (155) Yore purports in the previous quotation to accept Dillard’s flaming sycamore, as does Shields: “a nonfiction reader is asked to behave more deeply [than a fiction reader]—to imagine, and also to believe. . . . Fiction gives us a rhetorical question: ‘What if this happened?’ (The best) nonfiction gives us a statement, something more complex: ‘This may have happened’” (60). Yore writes that “Many in our age have forgotten how to use their imaginations to transcend the limits of rational and empirical knowledge . . . there is a pressing need to reactivate the imaginative faculties once more” (103). Dillard steps into an analytical, sometimes prescriptive role as she describes her experiences in nature.

Dillard uses a literal encounter with a giant water bug to investigate ideas of cruelty. Once, walking along an island of Tinker Creek, she notices a frog who, unlike all the other frogs, does not jump, or even twitch. She crouches down to look at him, writing “just as I looked at him, he slowly crumpled and began to sag. The spirit vanished from his eyes as if snuffed” (*Pilgrim* 7). She searches for the cause of its death: “An oval shadow hung in the water behind the drained frog . . . I had read about the giant water bug, but never seen one” (8). In telling this story, she moves from relating an experience to creating an expression: “That it’s rough and chancey out there is no surprise. Every live thing is a survivor on a kind of extended emergency bivouac . . . Cruelty is a mystery, and the waste of pain” (9). Unlike the despondent paragraph preceding this one, this paragraph moves from providing the facts to exploring both sides of the idea of cruelty and destruction in creation. In the next phrase, the narrator remarks, “But at the same time we are also created” (9). She then writes about a moment in the Koran where Allah asks, “think you I made heaven and earth in jest?” (9). Throughout the book, as in this instance, Dillard shares an image of nature or an interesting experience and uses that story as a departure point for serious consideration, in this instance using the experience to consider the purpose of cruelty. The book *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* creates leverage from stories like these, stories that explain nature in terms of life and life in terms of nature. Dillard’s explanation of cruelty is grounded in her narrative about the nature encounter.

One instance where Dillard uses an encounter in nature to discuss philosophy is her discovery of a snakeskin in chapter five. Dillard tells the story of finding a snakeskin that was both tied in a knot and partially turned inside out. She turns it over and over in her hand before
realizing that she’s already looked at the whole loop more than once and has still not found the starting or ending point of the snake. On its own, this discovery is interesting. But Dillard does not leave it as an interesting story; she follows it by saying “Time is a continuous loop. … or Time is an ascending spiral if you will, like a child’s toy Slinky. Of course we have no idea … down whose lofty flight of stairs the Slinky so uncannily walks” (Pilgrim 77). She switches from the original analogy – the snakeskin – to the new analogy of the Slinky. She then goes back to the original analogy: “…the spirit seems to roll along like the mythical hoop snake with its tail in its mouth. There are no … edges to untie. … this is the arsonist of the sunny woods: catch it if you can” (77). That section of quotations seems unfocused because Dillard talks about the snakeskin discovery, time as a Slinky, and the spirit as the hoop of snake skin. Yet the focus comes when she develops a theme by gathering the different images. Through writing about the snakeskin, she thinks about time and realizes that it is fleeting. It is here that Dillard introduces the phrase “catch it if you can,” which is a motif throughout the book.

Throughout the work, Dillard discusses the fleeting nature of all life on earth. At one point, she says she wants to be there the moment the grass turns green. This mention is characterized by the hopeful connotation of spring, but the fleetingness of life is also mentioned when Dillard is exploring destruction in nature. After mentioning that more men have died in the action of fishing than in any other human activity apart from war, she mentions that despite how much people chase fish, they may not get them: “catch it if you can” (188). In this new iteration, the phrase is ironic. Dillard uses the snakeskin to introduce a theme she carries throughout the text. She mentions it in relation to the magnanimous beauty of nature and in relation to horrific destruction, like that of fishing.

Dillard also uses nature to discuss philosophical and spiritual ideas when, after sharing the giant water bug episode, she looks up exactly when a mockingbird dives from the corner of her roof to the ground (Pilgrim 9-10). The sudden, unexpected beauty of this simple bird flight surprises her. Dillard juxtaposes this story with that of the giant water bug in the text, which allows her to explore ideas of beauty and cruelty in the world. She brings up both of these situations again multiple times throughout the book. Shields points out the potent ability of nonfiction to take “the subjectivity of the personal essay and the objectivity of the public essay and [conflate] them into a literary form that relies on both art and fact, on imagination and observation, rumination and argumentation…” (38). This quotation fits Dillard’s style of writing throughout Pilgrim at Tinker Creek. As the giant water bug and mockingbird stories show, she pairs fact – the bug ate the frog, the bird flew – with art – the bug inspires her to explore horrors in nature, the bird reminds her of its beauty. These disparate features of nature push her to examine the via positiva and via negativa. Dillard writes, blending experiences with spiritual musings, in order to see.

See: Watching and Writing

I define seeing, in the context of Pilgrim at Tinker Creek, as a process that includes two actions: watching and writing. Watching is Dillard’s choice to engage with the nature that surrounds her. Writing refers to Dillard’s practice of recording her experiences and what she learned from them. Dillard herself says that seeing is a conscious choice (Pilgrim 122). The whole of Pilgrim at Tinker Creek exhibits a persistence in seeing, in what Yore terms an “engagement with the here and now through the cultivation of ‘amazement’” (141). Through watching and writing, Dillard creates a discipline of seeing. As she watches, she discovers destruction in nature. As she writes, she reflects on nature’s lessons. Writing, an act of creation, and thus the opposite of destruction, is Dillard’s theodicy.

Dillard shares a story of studying pond water that features watching and writing, and from partaking in these two actions she reflects on divinity in creation. In chapter seven, Dillard explains her method for studying pond water. She sorts the water samples in glass bowls on her kitchen table and watches them under the microscope, pointing out “the little rotifer called monostyla” that “zooms around excitedly,
crashing into strands of spirogyra alga or zipping around the frayed edge of a clump of debris” (*Pilgrim* 121). She describes with great knowledge the different creatures she sees, which exemplifies *writing*. Although she studies pond water regularly, she admits that she does not enjoy it (122). Dillard persists in engaging with these creatures; she writes, “as a moral exercise; the microscope at my forehead is a kind of phylactery, a constant reminder of the facts of creation that I would just as soon forget. …” (*Pilgrim* 122-3). When using the microscope, Dillard watches and writes and realizes that she finds herself responsible for remembering the existence of microorganisms. Dillard compares the microscope to a phylactery, which is a box worn on the forehead as a reminder of devotion (“Amulet”). The microscope reminds Dillard of her devotion to the microscopic organisms. She compares herself to the creatures, then follows the comparison with philosophical questions: “The monostyla goes to the dark spot on the bowl: To which circle am I heading?” and “I can move around right smartly in a calm, but in a real wind … am I really moving, or am I ‘milling around?’” (*Pilgrim* 123). Her understanding of the microscope as a symbol of devotion inspires her to consider her lifestyle and mental habits. Dillard does not answer the questions she poses—to which circle does she head, is she moving or milling? Her writing only develops the questions. This passage is a creation, and the very act of creation is Dillard’s theodicy.

Dillard participates in watching, or observation, in her chapter titled “Stalking.” She describes her method for stalking muskrats, perfected over the course of three years (*Pilgrim* 192-203). After writing about three different muskrat sightings, Dillard mentions the revitalization that comes from watching nature: “I have often noticed that even a few minutes of this self-forgetfulness is tremendously invigorating. I wonder if we do not waste most of our energy just by spending every waking minute saying hello to ourselves” (200). Dillard expands her experience observing the muskrats to promote momentarily forgetting oneself. She also voices the opinion that between birth and death, humans seek “to discover where we so incontrovertibly are. It’s common sense: when you move in, you try to learn the neighborhood” (129). She compares it to a sailor in open sea: “I am as passionately interested in where I am as a lone sailor… What else is he supposed to be thinking about? Fortunately, like the sailor, I have at the moment a situation which allows me to devote considerable hunks of time to seeing what I can see, and trying to piece it together” (129). Whether Dillard discusses the specific activity of watching, such as walking to the creek to look for muskrats, or the general attitude of watching, such as in her sailor analogy, she champions the importance of looking around.

In order to animate and share her observations, Dillard moves beyond just watching—she crafts her observations into writing. She translates her observations from interior thoughts into sentences and paragraphs. Shields writes that “Good nonfiction has to be as carefully shaped as good fiction, and I’m not bothered at all by this artifice” (67). During the year that she lived by Tinker Creek, Dillard filled journals with her experiences. She later copied the information onto note cards and shuffled them into coherent chapters (*Pilgrim* 280). Dillard herself espouses the importance of incorporating creation into observation, writing that “Seeing is of course very much a matter of verbalization” (33). By mentioning the importance of verbalizing, or recording, what one sees, Dillard endorses my dual definition of seeing, a definition that requires both watching and writing. Yore expresses that Dillard “understands that learning who she is, and what kind of God there is, is partly the story of determining what is occurring in the nature close at hand. Intimate knowledge … brings her the disorienting moments of feeling ‘lost’ … followed by mystical affirmations of being found” (21). Dillard chooses to see; she pursues those moments of being lost and being found. As she interacts with the “nature close at hand,” noticing that “beauty is both concealed and revealed,” Dillard engages with questions of theodicy.

*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* embraces the conscious choice to see, based on the understanding that seeing carries creative power. Vision is important, John McAteer claims, because “To
lose faith in God would be to lose enthusiasm for creation due to a failure of vision” (793). He continues, speaking of losing faith, “But since this is an aesthetic and emotional issue, we need an aesthetic experience capable of reorienting our vision” (793). Dillard continually uses nature to inform and orient her vision. She sees the giant water bug as cruelty, the floating mockingbird as beauty. She studies pond water and stalks muskrats. And she concludes every story about nature with questioning, exploratory thoughts. The creation and expression of these thoughts eventually lead her to develop her theodicy.

Write: Addressing Theodicy through Creation

Dillard structures Pilgrim at Tinker Creek according to the via positiva and the via negativa (Pilgrim 279-80). Despite the tension created by these disparate approaches – one claims God is discoverable through nature, the other that he is obscured by nature's darkness – Dillard unifies the two by using the via creativa. Creativity is one of the defining characteristics of God, and as Dillard creates, she assigns divine value and purpose to the topics of her discussion (Smith 40), redeeming them from the darkness in which she finds them. Dillard’s creation, Pilgrim at Tinker Creek, unifies the duality of the via positiva and the via negativa. The via creativa is Dillard’s theodicy, her vindication of divine goodness despite pain.

Dillard uses light as a metaphor for divine power to illustrate her experience of God through nature, which is an example of her utilization of the via positiva. She writes about the sun: “We have really only that one light, one source for all power, and yet we must turn away from it by universal decree” (Pilgrim 25). Dillard describes light as representing divine power. Here, Dillard’s comment on the physical “source for all power” corresponds to the spiritual “source for all power,” a God whose control of nature is encompassing and potent. Dillard writes about light and discovers characteristics of God. McClintock writes that

An important theme of Pilgrim at Tinker Creek is that nature’s beauty is both concealed and revealed, just as God is both hidden and glimpsed. But the hiddenness does not keep her from perceiving, accepting, and loving a nature that includes her and whose beauty … shines not in its imperfections but overwhelmingly in spite of them” [qtd. from Dillard] (19).

This quotation characterizes the Dillard of the via positiva: a writer who points out that the sun is powerful and unapproachable, but does not allow this difficulty to preclude her access to divine experience. Dillard also uses light to indicate revelation; in one instance Dillard emerges from the woods into “a yellow light” that enables her to see “intricacies in the mountains’ sides I never knew were there” (Pilgrim 50-1). While the light reveals to Dillard things she did not previously understand or see, Dillard experiences the divine power in nature. Smith writes that throughout the work, Dillard “uses light to represent the appearance of God in the world, the moment of revelation for which she waits” (22). In reference to Dillard and the via positiva, Carroll writes that Dillard “has gone to nature to derive her theology” (Carroll 26). When Dillard finds beauty in nature, such as the continual presence of light, she learns through her experiences theological characteristics of God.

Halfway through the book, Dillard “turns from the beauty and intricacy of nature to its horrors” (28), beginning to explore the difficulty of understanding God who allows nature’s destruction and darkness. The chapter entitled “Fecundity” exemplifies Dillard’s participation with the via negativa. Fecund is defined in the New Oxford American Dictionary as “producing or capable of producing an abundance of offspring or new growth; fertile” (Stevenson). Rather than seeing this fertility as beneficial, Dillard points out how many fertile things are never fertilized; she views nature’s extreme fecundity as waste. Dillard mentions barnacles as one example of excessive fecundity: the whole ocean, Dillard explains, is full of dying barnacles. So extremely few barnacles successfully attach to a piece of driftwood in the middle of the ocean, and without a host object, they die (Pilgrim 176). Dillard frets over this extreme waste and wonders whether she should let her hand dredge through the water so that some barnacles could
survive by latching on to her fingers (176). She rebels against the uncontrolled death of these creatures; she decries God’s complicity in the death of so many of his creatures. Dillard also details other instances of the fecundity of nature, such as lemmings, parasite wasps, and flatworms, all of whom reproduce rapidly with almost no chance of survival (168, 169, 171).

These examples fit within the via negativa because Dillard uses them to point out how darkness and destruction obscure—or perhaps override—the beauty of nature that calls to mind the divine presence. She writes, “What kind of a world is this, anyway? Why not make fewer barnacle larvae and give them a decent chance?” (176). Dillard deplores the number of creatures that are destroyed before they are even given life.

Smith notes that, unlike the via positiva, where Dillard looked for beauty, in the via negativa she instead looks for signs of death (31). Dillard’s discovery of the illogical presence of both beauty and death in nature situates her in a unique tension that requires theodicy.

The tension between the via positiva and the via negativa in Pilgrim at Tinker Creek illustrates Dillard’s comfort with creating an aesthetic, rather than rational, theodicy. Dillard’s description of both the understandability of God in nature and the obscuring of God by nature inhibit a logical solution to theodicy. Most of Dillard’s critics accept and endorse this nonlinear feature of her work; for example, Paul Eggers says that “For the postmodern mystic … the question of evil is not something that can be rationally addressed … rather, evil, death, and waste are a great mystery that can only be addressed, not explained” (334). The contradictory use of both the via positiva and the via negativa does not indicate a mistake or laziness on Dillard’s part. Rather, Dillard embraces the tension as an opportunity for creation within: “What I have been after all along is not an explanation, but a picture. This is the way the world is” (Pilgrim 181). This sentiment is indicative of Dillard’s comfort with the tension throughout the work, a comfort she developed through recognizing that she cannot change the beauty or the horror in nature. John McAteer supports this idea with his argument that “since this is an aesthetic and emotional issue what we need is not a philosophical and theological explanation of evil and suffering; rather we need [an] … aesthetic experience … a mystical vision that silences any question of theodicy without answering it” (793). Dillard offers this aesthetic experience on each page of her work. Although McAteer argues that Dillard does not answer theodicy, when stalking coots or watching clouds or climbing fences, Dillard’s theodicy comes from her creation of a text that describes both beautiful and destructive aspects of nature. Her treatment of the tension between understanding God through nature and being unable to see God because of nature is not a logical syllogism: it is a nature exploration, a walk along the via creativa. As she explores, she creates, and this is her theodicy.

Dillard’s use of the via creativa is her theodicy, her vindication of divine goodness in a world of destruction. Smith claims that the via creativa is a “third path” that joins “nature’s beauty and intricacy on the via positiva and nature’s horror and death on the via negativa” (34). This is illustrated by the fact that the final chapter moves away from the allegiance of the previous six chapters to the via negativa and steps into what Smith calls a “profound unity beneath the appearance of irreconcilable opposites” (33). Dillard effectively exemplifies this by characterizing water two ways: She describes “waters of beauty and mystery” and “waters of separation” that “purify” and “cut me off” (Pilgrim 272). These descriptions read like a microcosm of the via positiva and the via negativa. Dillard then follows her creation of tension by describing a moment when she watched falling, twirling maple seed. This juxtaposition is Dillard’s method for unifying the via positiva and the via negativa throughout her book: she describes something beautiful (via positiva), then she describes something destructive (via negativa), and finally she discovers a natural occurrence that creates within her a new attitude. The maple seed is, in this example, that final occurrence, the via creativa. She finishes her description by writing, “If I am a maple key falling, at least I can twirl” (273). Smith points out not only that she can twirl, but also that even a falling maple seed will rise again when its grows into a
new tree (41). Dillard’s positive opinion towards the maple seed and the lesson she learns from it step away from a focus on the destruction of nature and step toward the presence of beauty despite nature. This is an attitude Dillard must work to create, it does not follow seamlessly after the horrific images she finds in the via negativa. Hillary Kelleher’s description of the via negativa allows the via negativa to coexist with harmony: “In negative theology … cosmic harmony takes place within an overall dialectic at once positive and negative, light and dark” (47). This interpretation of the via negativa keeps that approach from overriding Dillard’s argument. Images of darkness do not overcome images of light; Kelleher points out that harmony exists in places where both light and dark are found. The power of the via creativa is the dual experience of the via positiva and the via negativa.

Conclusion: Habit and Choice

In Pilgrim at Tinker Creek, Dillard uses nature to talk about philosophical and spiritual topics. She exercises the habit of seeing, which is both passive observation and active creation, and uses it to explore questions of God’s goodness, or theodicy. Dillard’s creation – Pilgrim at Tinker Creek – does not deny that cruel things and beautiful things both exist in God’s creation. Dillard writes, “The answer must be, I think, that beauty and grace are performed whether or not we will or sense them. The least we can do is try to be there” (Pilgrim 10). Her book invites humanity to look at the world together. Shields supports this use of nonfiction, stating, “There isn’t any story. It’s not the story. It’s just this breathtaking world—that’s the point. The story’s not important, what’s important is the way the world looks” (49). Pilgrim at Tinker Creek proposes that creation is the counterpart to theodicy.

Although the explorations in Pilgrim at Tinker Creek are limited to a small area by a small creek in Virginia, Dillard’s writing invites readers to engage with the beauty and horror around them. Writing is an act of creation. The problem with the world is destruction; creation is the opposite of destruction. Dillard’s creation of the text is an act of rebuilding. Through Pilgrim at Tinker Creek, Dillard shows that the important thing is not justifying the presence of destruction in nature but rather engaging in creation, which acts against the destructive horror endemic in the natural world. Deborah C. Bowen recognizes the motivational quality of Pilgrim at Tinker Creek, writing that “Dillard’s journey to wisdom answers the question of how observation becomes ethic, how doing what appears to be nothing can in fact be doing something profound, how the via creativa unites time and eternity … that is . . . a willing complicity in a discourse of suffering on behalf of another” (324). By the final chapter, Dillard’s work both vindicates God’s goodness through the via creativa and encourages its readers to walk along the via creativa in their own lives.

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Contributor Bio

Madeline Perkins currently works at Porter Capital Corporation as a factoring consultant. She graduated in May of 2018 from Samford University with a double major in Creative Writing and Public Administration. Throughout her time at Samford, she has served as a tutor in the writing center and as president of Sigma Tau Delta, the English Honors Society. She has also enjoyed her time as Chi Omega House Manager and director of Grace Dance Company. Her recent favorite books are Bad Feminist, What the Dog Saw, and The Defining Decade. Her perennial favorite books are On Writing Well, The Power of Habit, and the Betsy-Tacy series.
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