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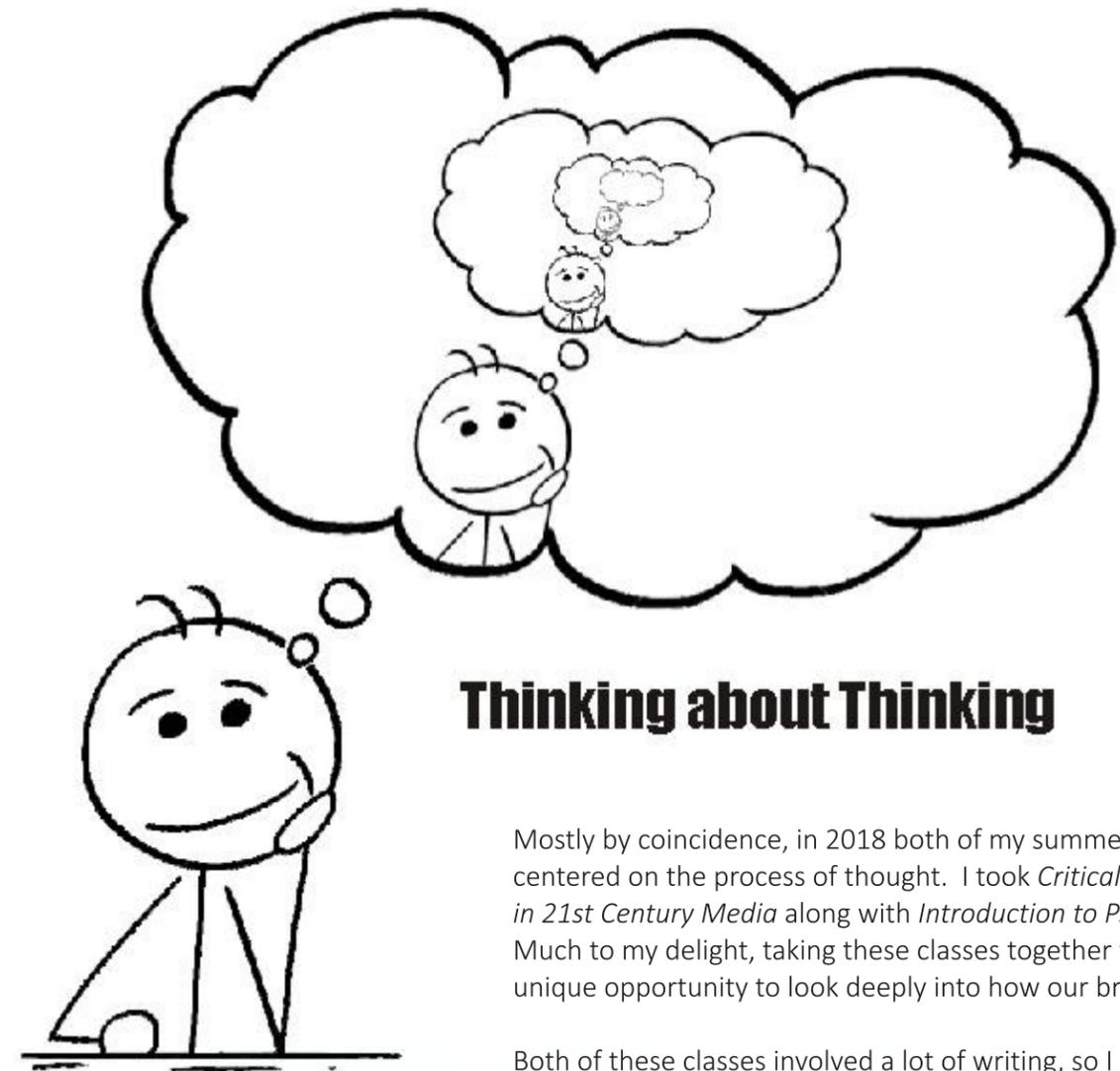
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Brain Summer
created by
Shara Merrill
August, 2018



Thinking about Thinking

Mostly by coincidence, in 2018 both of my summer classes centered on the process of thought. I took *Critical Thinking in 21st Century Media* along with *Introduction to Psychology*. Much to my delight, taking these classes together was a unique opportunity to look deeply into how our brains work.

Both of these classes involved a lot of writing, so I decided to bring all of the most interesting written pieces together in one illustrated publication. Several topics drifted back and forth between the classes, like morality and politics. Like most of my other courses at MSU, I feel lucky to be taking these classes at such an interesting crossroads in history. The news and politics of our time make a particularly illustrative backdrop to learning.

Thanks to all my wonderful teachers for expanding my brain another three sizes this summer!

Love,
Shara Merrill





Planned Parenthood

The assignment was to think critically about a social media topic. On this day, the topic trending on Facebook was a group of 56 lawmakers calling for an investigation into Planned Parenthood for covering up child abuse and enabling abusers. This is a very serious accusation requiring critical examination.

According to the Davies article "How to Spot Fake News," it is important to examine news sources. What I have discovered is this scandal is based on an expose by Live Action, an organization that has been behind a concerted smear campaign against Planned Parenthood since at least 2003. Also, despite trending on social media, the story appeared in no mainstream news outlets and was only being reported on sites like The Daily Signal and The Christian Broadcasting Network, sites which openly purport to have a conservative agenda which includes curtailing Planned Parenthood.

Because this is a serious allegation which is only being featured by one side of the political aisle, I think as critical thinkers we should take the claim that Planned Parenthood enables child abuse with a grain of salt. As the QualiaSoup video on critical thinking states, it is important to wait until all the evidence comes to

light before making a decision. Similarly, the Petress article states that critical thinkers should "suspend judgment until all facts have been gathered and considered." In the case of serious allegations of enabling abuse, I think a caution is warranted before rushing to judgment and I will continue to watch this story.

Insult Technology

Alex: "You're too sensitive" is the ultimate insult: it can't be refuted without proving the accuser's point. There is an assumption here that refuting makes someone appear more sensitive; and that there are not worse insults.

I think the discussion of insult technology is actually rather revealing. It reminds me that when engaged in online discussion, the goal is very rarely to get to the truth of the matter, but usually to find some way to "win." Coming up with an "irrefutable" insult may feel like a win but does nothing to demonstrate that one's views are correct. As the Petress article said, for critical thinking one needs objectivity, with supporting materials that are fair and undistorted. Resorting to insults, even very clever ones, is hardly fair. Thanks for bringing this up! -S

The Conversation

Critical thinking is important in conversation. Our group discussions explored many current events and issues with a critical eye.

Media Silos

Vanessa: Often the news will only give us the part of the story or study that we want to hear and they may reword it in a way.

I believe this was the phenomenon Eli Pariser was discussing in his Ted Talk, "What FACEBOOK And GOOGLE Are Hiding From The World - The Filter Bubble." I have seen this referred to as "media silos." When television was first becoming accepted as a medium, there were only a few television stations and much of the content was the same distributed nationwide through syndication. Americans were all getting their news from just a few sources, so even if they disagreed on policy, there was a wide acceptance of certain things as facts.

Now everyone can turn to the news outlet of their choice, custom tailored to their interests. With the internet, it's easy for practically anyone to build what looks like a news channel, but made, as you say, to only give us part of the story or only what we want to hear. So now, everyone can hear news that fits their pre-conceived world view, or even information that is just plain wrong dressed up as news.

As Eli Pariser mentions, journalistic standards have come and gone before over the years. I think the negative fallout from inaccuracy and siloing will eventually make news orgs want to be known for integrity again, and standards will get higher as we error correct from learning to use the new technology.

Primary Source Analysis

Observe: What Do You See?

This is a New York Times article, dated June 9, 2018, reporting that as President Trump heads into nuclear disarmament talks with North Korea, he has no one with any kind of scientific expertise in nuclear matters to advise him.

The article provides background by pointing out that every president since 1941 has had science advisors, and that "the other side" will undoubtedly have them also. This points to a larger trend, the marginalization of expertise in the current administration. There are no scientific advisors in the State Department or the Department of Agriculture, and the science advisory committees of the Interior Department and Food and Drug administration have been disbanded.

Of chief concern to the world is the abrupt American withdrawal from the Paris climate accords, a move condemned by over 1000 members of the National Academy of Sciences. Significant changes at the EPA are resulting in "tolerance for more exposure to pollution." Similarly, the Justice Department has declared an end to the use of "Guidance Files," or briefs written by experts to clarify science as it applies to law.

This indifference and hostility to science is creating a "brain drain" for the United States. Serious scientists are being lured to France.



Primary Source Analysis: Portrait of a Predicament

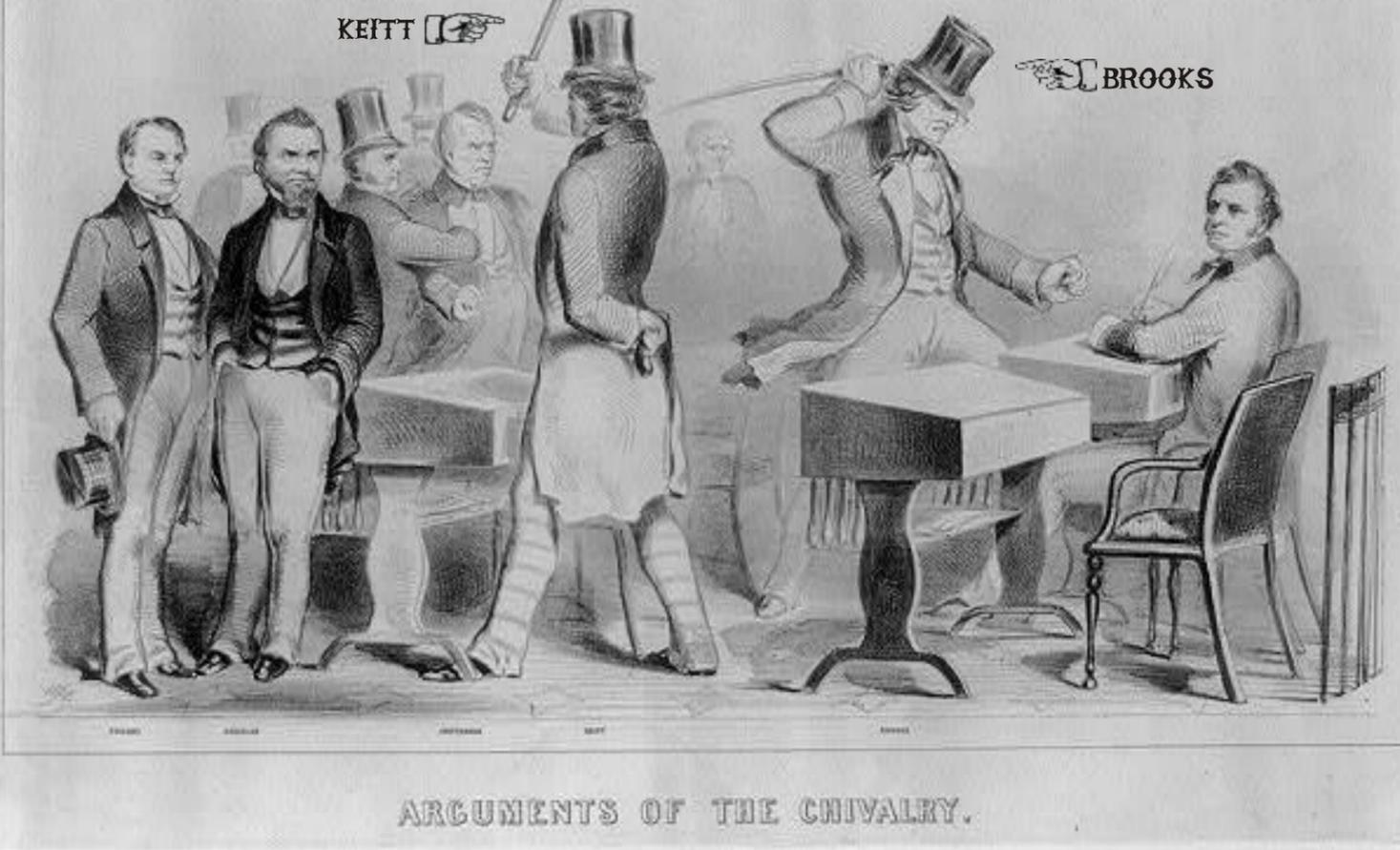
The image is typical of modern reporting. A photographer has captured a leader with his hand raised in a wave to a crowd. It was taken during the "magic hour," the time nearing sunset when the light takes on a golden hue which is very flattering to the subject. When George W. Bush landed aboard the aircraft carrier for his misbegotten "Mission Accomplished" stunt, he was shot in "magic hour" lighting to enhance his appearance of leadership. The lead photo for this article does the same, but rather ironically since the article is decrying rather than applauding administration policy. In this context, perhaps the unflattering shadow over Trump's face is symbolic of the unilluminated darkness in which he is willing to function.

The author's claim is that the Trump administration is hostile to science and by extension, to factual knowledge in general, and this puts the United States at a disadvantage. The evidence that the Trump administration is hostile to science is the lack of appointments to scientific advisory posts, the disbanding of scientific advisory committees, and the disregard of climate science which led to withdrawal from the Paris accord. The reasoning is that scientific knowledge was part of our government decision making process for a reason, and therefore operating without that information will result in poorer decisions. A further conclusion is that science will decline in the United States as the best scientists are lured to a more hospitable climate in France.

The intended audience is an American public who need to know that the decision-making process in our country is being changed from one based on scientific expertise to a very different system. The article could be seen to contain "anti-Trump bias" since the depiction is not flattering to Trump or his presidency. However the article contains accurate depictions of what is occurring, uses careful, non-inflammatory language, and largely allows the reader to draw their own conclusions about the long-term affect this will have on the country. So it seems like a fairly even-handed treatment to me.

"THE SYMBOL OF THE NORTH IS THE PEN; THE SYMBOL OF THE SOUTH IS THE BLUDGEON." — *Harper's Weekly*

Politics of Image



This cartoon was very difficult for me to understand at first. Because Keitt and Brooks are depicted almost identically, in top hat and tails, I had originally taken them to be a depiction of the same person – first speaking to those at left with his stick in the air, then menacingly turning to brandish the stick at the figure seated to the right. Then I read the description of this cartoon at the Library of Congress web site, and downloaded a very high-resolution version in which name labels for the figures can be read underneath. At this point I realized the cartoon depicts one scene with two different people brandishing sticks. I think it would be extremely difficult to tell what this cartoon was about without the aid of the summary provided. On reflection, that is probably typical of political cartoons.

Comedians like to contrast “evergreen” material, or jokes that are always funny, with “topical” material, which can only be used while the issues remain of interest to the public. I doubt political cartoons ever fall into the evergreen category.

I wonder why the Library of Congress describes this incident as “clearly biased toward the northern point of view.” The Southern guy indisputably beat the crap out of a Northern guy. Perhaps it is because the caption draws the conclusion that this incident typifies “The South” as violent and “The North” as reasonable, when it could be argued that there was plenty of violence and unreason to go around. However I don’t find it terribly biased to accuse the Southerners of “bludgery” right after an actual bludgeoning.

Lisa 2017 2-8 Dist by Wash. Post/MLA Group



Copyright Lisa Benson

This cartoon shows reactions to Betsy DeVos being appointed as Education Secretary. This is depicted as very unhappy news for the big bully, Unions, and good news for the children.

As a supporter of public education and organized labor, I think this is ridiculous. Teachers unions have not given teachers bully-like powers, to the detriment of students. And Betsy DeVos is almost universally disliked by public educators for her stance on moving to more privatization.

I wonder how people can entertain the idea that a lose for teachers is somehow a win for students. The two are not opposed.

This cartoon is coming at a very weird time in American politics when our political factions are extremely polarized. There is little agreement on what even constitutes facts, let alone workable public policy. In this political climate, unions are considered the “bad

guy” by Republicans, while organized labor has usually been considered a “good guy” by Democrats. In this context, Trump supporters will likely enjoy this cartoon and agree that what is bad for the unions is good for kids.

By depicting the kid as wearing a red baseball cap, the cartoonist is using a Trump symbol to depict all kids as being with Trump, or represented by Trump. This is probably to appeal to the intended audience of the cartoon, the Trump supporter.

By depicting the crying bully as Unions, the author is attempting to utilize a standard talking point, that Unions have too much power. However, considering that union membership is at record lows, and that workers are no longer sharing the gains of companies’ productivity, this ends up seeming more like bias than a dire reality.



What kind of economic systems work? Is capitalism the only system available? Does it have to be run like this? What is missing from our everyday understanding of economics? This article summary examines those questions.

Working Economics

In our group discussions, many topical issues were raised. This included discussion of celebrity suicide, classic debate over the moon landing, and all-important discussions of global warming. But perhaps the most important issue we raised was the economy. Whether the current boom is because of Trump, Obama or Janet Yellen, a bust is inevitably coming, because the economic system we are using today is unsustainable and unfair. What kind of economic systems might actually work, and what should we be working toward in the future? To examine this issue, I looked at three scholarly articles published within two years of each other on the subject of working economics.

The first is an article entitled, "Back to Materialism. Reflections on Marx's Conception of Labour, Praxis, Cooperatives and Libertarian Socialism," by Bruno Frère. Dr. Frère is a sociologist and philosopher who specializes in studying solidarity economics. In his examination of the philosophy of economics, he has discovered that while Karl Marx gets all the attention for some admittedly important ideas, his contemporary Pierre-Joseph Proudhon's ideas are neglected. Frère's intention is to educate readers of the International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society that

Proudhon's mutualist philosophy is more realistic and workable.

According to Frère, materialism has gotten a bad rap. One of the most prominent thinkers of the industrial era, Karl Marx, felt that the production of materials by the proletariat for the capitalists was "materialism," and that after the workers had a revolution, work at "materialistic" jobs would be taken over by machines so the individual would be free to pursue non-materialistic expressions of his nature. Ordinary labor performed with the hands, in Marx's view, is inherently toilsome and degrading.

According to Frère, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon had a clearer idea of the role of labor in human life. Proudhon felt that work with one's hands could be, not only one of the truest expressions of the individual, but also one of the truest expressions of collective identity as well. Proudhon's idea of working collectively is called "mutualism."

Frère's argument is that Marx and other utopian thinkers of the time were imagining a future for society based on nothing more than idealistic notions inside their heads, while Proudhon was espousing a practical philosophy. His evidence is that Proudhon spent years living and working among Canuts, or French silk weavers. Proudhon observed that the Canuts worked in collectives where all workers, masters and apprentices alike, made the same wage, and where all the equipment of the trade was owned in common. Additionally, all workers were trained in all segments of the craft so that the pleasures and drudgeries of the work could be shared. Proudhon would go on to write that the expression of the individual thrived through the practice, or *praxis*, of this cooperative effort, as masters produced great pieces of work and apprentices grew in skill and expression under their tutelage. Materialistic labor could be a source of human fulfillment. Frère believes Marx was simplistic to dismiss Proudhon's real-world experience with cooperative economics in favor of a dream of revolution (Frère 2017).

Another French social scientist, Robert Castel, has been examining the present economic conditions in France and around the First World, as he explains in "The Rise of Uncertainties." He says that workers began the industrial era totally exploited, but through a compromise intended to forestall revolution, capital and labor found a workable balance. For a time the worker was a member of a protected class with certain

rights. However, Castel argues that capitalism has entered a new, more aggressive phase wherein the protections for the worker are being eroded at the same time as the social safety nets are being weakened. As evidence for this change, he discusses the weakening of regulations that protect workers, while tough austerity measures are enacted which strangle social services. This means people can work hard, but still not get paid enough to survive, and work in “activities that fall short of employment,” (Castel 2016.) In the United States we might call this “the gig economy,” an endless series of hustles that come with no security, healthcare or retirement.

Castel hopes to explain to the readers of *Critical Horizons* that, rather than each person being an individual bootstrap-puller, the capacity to act as an individual requires social supports. While the current supports for the worker are being degraded, he does not feel we can turn back the clock to the systems that worked during the Industrial era either. He believes we will have to form a new compromise between capital and labor, and it would be best to begin this process now, to get ahead of history instead of behind it.

Lastly, as Jennifer Hinton and Donnie Maclurcan write in *Ephemera*, a journal of “Theory and Politics in Organization,” there is a vision for the future in which market economics can work, using models of organizations we already have today. In their article, “A Not-For-Profit World Beyond Capitalism and Growth,” they contend that the problem with modern capitalism is profit-taking. They argue that the “extractive nature” of profiteering means the economy must constantly grow (Hinton and Maclurcan, 2017). That this is problematic is evidenced by the widening inequality of our society and the widespread environmental devastation that has resulted. If the market is the “optimal force” for producing goods and exchanging services, then what can we do to circumvent the need for growth?

Hinton and Maclurcan suggest we could have “a purpose-driven market that uses all financial surplus only as a means to a greater end” (Hinton and Maclurcan, 2017, p. 151). The answer is a not-for-profit economy, where, like current NFP enterprises, there is a goal for each organization besides profit. The revenues could be

reinvested in the organization and into achieving their higher goals. What’s more, Hinton and Maclurcan argue that this process is already working. As evidence they point to figures that show that not-for-profits can be more efficient, earn more money, and work better with the environment than for-profit ventures. Hinton and Maclurcan point to not-for-profit companies from Brazil to Bangladesh as examples of successful businesses that create value for society and their workers. Their hope is that the success of this model just might make more people want to set up this kind of business, because it is the only way market economies can remain viable.

As a survey of these articles shows, thinkers from the 1800s to the present have observed our capitalist system and found it wanting. Castel’s article clearly shows that workers are losing in both weakening work protections and weakening social supports. But there are plenty of ideas for how it could be better. Frère shows that Marx’s contemporary John-Pierre Proudhon had practical suggestions for collective enterprises. And with Hinton and Maclurcan’s not-for-profit vision, they have presented a solution which requires only a small shift our perception of what our economy is for. We may live in a society built by and for market economics. But there may be better ways to do business. ☒

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Hinton, Jennifer and Donnie Maclurcan (2017). A not-for-profit world beyond capitalism and economic growth? *Ephemera: Theory in Politics and Organization*, 17(1): 147-166.

The “extractive nature” of profiteering means the economy must constantly grow. This creates widening inequality... and widespread environmental devastation.



Who Needs Therapy?

Primary Source Analysis - Trending on Instagram

Obsevation - What do you see?

This is a recent image which made the rounds on social media. This photo is of a row of therapy dogs waiting to greet students returning to school after the Parkland shootings.

Reflect - What do you think?

I think we are very lucky to have therapy dogs, but how much better would it be if we did not need them! According the principal, the dogs were so helpful for the Parkland students, they were kept on for an extended stay. I think it was the best they could do, but it’s like applying a bandaid to an amputation. Therapy dogs can only help so much, and do nothing to address the forces that ripped part of these kids’ lives away from them in the first place.

Question - What do you wonder about?

I wonder how we have reached a point where we cannot touch each other and need to hug dogs, because they can’t be accused of harassment. Therapy dogs are being used to help seniors in nursing homes because seniors crave any kind of affectionate touch. Caregivers provide much less physical contact than they used to, because they are at risk of being accused of abuse. I wonder where this is all headed.



Context: After completing the analysis of the image, put the image in context of the time period.

The ball-and-powder musketeers who framed our constitution did not know the firepower that technology would make available to our time. We live in an era where we manufacture high-powered weaponry and make it readily available to almost anyone. Then we have high-powered shootings. This picture makes plain the good intentions, but inadequacy, of today’s coping mechanisms.

Identify the author’s perspective (including bias, intended audience, etc.):

The photographer may have been trying to make these points, or may have just been charmed by a cute shot of a bunch of animals wearing bandannas. However I am sure that the editor who published this photo and the people who passed it around social media were trying to make a point, namely: too little, too late.

What do you want to know more about?

I would like to know more about the lives of these dogs. Are they getting everything they need too? Hope so.

POLITICS OF BRONIES



A SUMMARY AND AN ANALYSIS

If you have never heard of them, Bronies are males who like *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*, a TV show originally made for girls. (My 17-year old son is one and suggested the topic.)

Here is an article I would consider a Summary of the Brony phenomenon:

Grown Men Who Love My Little Pony Aren't Who You Think They Are

This article is by Wesley Yiin, in the Washington Post from July 18, 2016. The article describes how the Brony phenomenon got started on 4chan during the first season of *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*, and how at first people thought it was a bit weird, but later the creators of the show came to embrace the Bronies.

The burden of proof in this unusual case is on the author of the article to treat a subject that might seem slightly ludicrous with sufficient seriousness to portray it accurately, without scorn.

Since the article is in *The Washington Post*, one of our nation's long-standing papers of record, I find the source credible. Because he did background research and provided a history of Bronies, the author seems credibly knowledgeable on the topic.

Almost all articles about Bronies shaded from Summaries to Analysis in one respect, in that their intent was almost always to show that Bronies are okay and not freaky weirdos. It seems a tad defensive but perfectly understandable. In our culture we have traditionally expected men to be manly and to not appreciate girly things. Just the fact that Bronies can exist today shows we have come a long way, which I would sum up as the editorial slant of most Brony articles.

This article is a pretty straight description of what Bronies are and why they like *My Little Pony*, light on editorial. However the author does draw this conclusion: "To the uninitiated, sure, Bronies can seem a little out there. But ultimately, they're a subculture like any other no weirder than your average Trekkie." I would say your average Trekkie can be pretty weird, so that might constitute a logical error, but on the whole the article was on topic and did not have irrelevant premises.

Here is an article that attempts to explore the Brony phenomenon with more Analysis, by looking into the work of researchers who studied the Bronies:

Brony psychology 101: What 2 researchers discovered

This article is by Lauren Rae Orsini and dates from 2012 in The Daily Dot. I had never heard of this organization before, so I looked up their rating on Media Bias/Fact Check. It shows that, while they are left of center, their Factual Reporting rating is High. That is credible enough for this piece.

The burden on anyone drawing conclusions from scientific study is to show that the data supports their conclusions. The two clinicians claim to have tracked Brony psychology through a series of online surveys. According to the article, "The results were about what you'd expect. Edwards and Redden found that Bronies were slightly more introverted and more agreeable than non-bronies. They tended to be more tolerant of others and bullied less often."

Like the summary articles, the main intent of this Analysis article seems to be to show that Bronies are okay. Quoting the researchers, the article states: "We see so little data that raises an eyebrow," Edwards told the Daily Dot. "We're both trained to be concerned about pathology, but the data just doesn't show that this is a pathological group."

The researchers seem to be reaching a bit in their attempts to classify fans into five different types of Bronies. For example, comparing one extroverted type to Pinky Pie, an extroverted pony, seems a bit of a stretch, particularly if they continue the analogy to other ponies. However their sympathy for "secret" Bronies is noted, and it's certainly easy to understand, because Bronies are sometimes the recipients of very cruel and unwarranted criticism.

Just as an example of this, here is another article I came across while looking into Bronies:

Horror You Will Never Get Out Of Your Brain Again: Bronies

This article is by John Hawkins, from *Right Wing News* dated April 2012.

This author has practically no credibility and is ranked by *Media Bias/Fact Check* as having extreme far right bias and being a questionable source.

The intent of this author is to shame anyone who is not expressing sufficient masculinity, using loaded language to describe Bronies like "sissies" and "giggling schoolgirls."

In one flawed argument after another, the author unfavorably compares Bronies to soldiers serving in Afghanistan, implying that they are not only sissies but downright un-American.

For an unacceptable premise, this "author" also compares this fandom to *Star Trek*, but with this he-man twist: "Fandom, even potentially nerdy fandom, need not be destructive. For example, the original *Star Trek* had real merit. The character of Captain Kirk provided an example of true manhood..." This is a false premise because, as the researchers showed, there is nothing destructive about

Brony fandom. Also, because there is nothing particularly masculine about *Star Trek* fandom.

This publication uses every negative stereotype about the consequences of insufficient manliness to scare Americans into fearing The Brony. So it's no wonder that researchers and even mainstream news outlets are taking pains to show that Bronies are good folks and a legitimate fandom.

From: Alexander Lynn, classmate

When I first heard about Bronies, my response was much like the author of your third article (Hawkins). For a school assignment, I decided that I would watch a documentary about Bronies... which caused me to do a little research of my own. I found it very fascinating that on the surface it seems strange or deranged, but when you get to learn about each individual you just learn they have a passion for something - a lot like a sports fanatic, cinephile, or hobbyist. So when you understand it from that perspective it's really not that weird, it's just so counter-culture that it feels hard to embrace as acceptable. Really goes to show that when you take the time to analyze and learn about subjects vs taking what's on the surface you gain a better understanding and appreciation for the life and world around you.

From: Me in reply

I'm really glad you mentioned this, especially the documentary about Bronies. My husband and I were both a little dubious at first when our son told us he was into *My Little Pony*, mainly because it seemed to be for much younger kids. But we are both *Star Trek* fans from way back, and we found that John De Lancie ("Q" from *Star Trek: The Next Generation*) created a documentary about Bronies. Apparently he did some voice work for the show, for a character loosely based on "Q" from *Star Trek*. He was really surprised when he started getting fan mail from *My Little Pony* fans who were not little girls, and so decided to look into the phenomenon. We watched his documentary and, like him, have been impressed by the high quality of the show and the interesting and thought-provoking themes it covers.



JOHN DE LANCIE
"Q" AND "DISCORD"



FAKE

NEWS

A Real Problem



One sunny day in Washington, D.C., a gunman showed up at the Comet Pizzeria to save children from a pedophile ring run by Hillary Clinton. Of course, Hillary had nothing to do with the non-existent pedophile ring which was not being run out of the pizza parlor. The story was a complete fabrication. But the damage was done. Along with hundreds of other false stories based on nothing, this lie caused Hillary's reputation and her standing in the polls sink lower and lower. "Fake News" sank Hillary Clinton's chances to be the first woman president of the United States, and it continues to muddy the waters of our political and social discourse. To find out how long fake news has been with us and what the implications are for the future, I looked at a podcast on NPR by Shankar Vedantam, a New Media & Society article by C.J. Vargo, Lei Guo and M.A. Amazeen, and an editorial in The New Yorker called "The Fake News Fallacy" by Adrien Chen.

The NPR podcast dates from June 25, 2018. Shankar Vedantam interviews Andie Tucher, a professor of journalism at Columbia University who studies the history of fake news and how it affects our discourse. Tucher is currently writing a book about fake news, and has written other books about American media. As a professor and writer on the topic she seems credible, but her bio states that she was a political speechwriter for Clinton/Gore in 1992, so there may be some political bias present in her thinking. However her analysis seems spot on. According to Tucher, "fake news" is not new. The tactic has been around for a long time and is in fact integral to American journalism. The central questions Tucher explores with Vedantam are, "Should reporters think of their readers and listeners as consumers, or as citizens? Should the media give people what they want, or what they need?"

Tucher says these questions began to be asked as early as 1836, with the brutal murder of a prostitute in a New York City brothel. The shocking and lurid case was rendered even more so by the fact that there was a new newspaper in town. The new paper was part of a new type of journalism called "the penny press," directed for the first time at a wide, general audience. Previously, according to Tucher, newspapers had been published by political parties for openly partisan purposes, and written by editors about what they had heard. The new kind of paper introduced reporters, who went to investigate the news and ask questions about what happened, and a non-partisan approach that claimed to be "free and independent" and based on "the public's right to know" (Vedantam, 2018).

This new form of publication put the reader at the center, considering for the first time what they wanted to read. Reporting then changed to fit the demands of the readers (Vedantam, 2018). After the 1836 murder, competing newspapers presented very different slants on the case. The arrested suspect was an upper-class gentleman. The more conservative *New York Herald* was trying to appeal to a respectable readership which included the upper crust, and so their reporting depicted the arrest as a frame-up. However, for the working-class readership of the *Sun*, the sensational story of a prostitute killed by an upper-class gent was guaranteed to sell more papers (Vedantam, 2018), and so was put forth as such. Each newspaper presented the case differently based on what they thought their readers wanted to hear. According to Tucher, at the time this was considered a fair and democratic approach, a kind of early version of, "We report, you decide."

Vedantam and Tucher go on to discuss the "Wild West" days of journalism at the dawn of the 20th century, when there were no real guidelines for ethical reporting. New technologies like photography and the motion picture were supposed to set the record straight once and for all. But early photographs could already be manipulated, as evidenced by the "spirit photographs" created by William Mumler. Early motion pictures were very difficult to create, and so some of Edison's newsreels, purportedly of Cuba and the Spanish-American War, were actually staged in New Jersey for better results (Vedantam, 2018). So while the changing technology of the present seems to be creating fake news, Tucher says, it's just a familiar theme that repeats itself over and over. However, the consequences are more serious now, and Tucher expressed concern that the current rapid and relentless pace of fake news might even be dangerous to democracy (Vedantam, 2018).

By presenting the question, "Should reporters think of their readers and listeners as consumers, or as citizens?" I think Tucher and Vedantam effectively framed the interview to point to an obvious answer. The requirements of democracy demand an informed citizenry rather than just a satisfied consumer base. By describing "fake news" from the past, Tucher is showing us that human nature tends to treat news as a commodity, and that news-bringers stand to gain as much from sensationalism as from accuracy. Their concern about the current climate of rapid news consumption enabling fake news more than ever seems like a warning for our time, if a bit too late for Hillary Clinton.

The next article I examined was "The agenda-setting power of

fake news: A big data analysis of the online media landscape from 2014 to 2016" by Vargo, Guo and Amazeen. This article is highly credible as it was published in a scholarly *Sage Journal* and relied on a data-crunching examination of trends. The researchers looked at fake news since 2014 to see how it influenced the topics covered by other media.

Fake news, for this report, was defined as "news stories that have no factual basis but are presented as news" (Vargo et al., 2017). Researchers used agenda-setting theory and the "Network Agenda-Setting (NAS) model" to examine how fake news is changing the media landscape. One of the main problems with fake news, this study finds, is that the need to respond to it, fact-check it, and then report the findings, allows promulgators of fake news to set the larger agenda. When media speak frequently on a topic, this raises the *salience* of that topic in the public eye. That is, it seems to be of more concern, and therefore more important. Fake news can artificially raise the salience of issues (Vargo et al., 2017). Also of concern is the relationship between fake news and partisan media. According to the report, "Instead of valuing balance, fairness, and objectivity, partisan media often frame stories in a way to advance certain political agendas," (Vargo et al., 2017). The authors cite previous research by Rojecki and Meraz which suggests that there is a stronger connection between fake news and "conservative-oriented partisan media," and surveys which showed that self-reported Republicans were more likely to believe fake news than Democrats (Vargo et al., 2017). Because of this, these researchers hypothesized that conservative news cycles would be more affected by fake news. To their surprise, they found that liberal news cycles were also driven by fake news,

FAKE NEWS

A Real Problem

possibly because of the need to refute fake points that are spread in conservative media (Vargo et al., 2017). So according to the NAS model, while fake news has a limited ability to set the overall agenda, it can and does influence the partisan agendas toward greater divides.

Vargo, Guo and Amazeen conclude that in 2016, the ability of fake news to set the agenda had a significant effect on global politics and influenced partisan news outlets both left and right. However as someone who lived through the 2016 election cycle, I feel that they are soft-pedaling the obvious conclusion, which was that fake news was much more helpful to Donald Trump than it was to Hillary Clinton. In addition, Trump has since used the accusation of "fake news" to create a whole new way to avoid scrutiny for his actions, and I feel this is having a much greater deleterious effect on our democratic institutions than the mild effect the authors noticed from their study of the agenda.

For a somewhat different perspective, I turned to a piece written for *The New Yorker* by Adrien Chen called "The Fake News Fallacy." Chen is an online investigative reporter who has exposed a number of internet scandals in the past, and is working with groups to try to expose Russian propaganda. Chen invites us to consider Fake News from a more recent historical perspective. He begins by calling to mind the infamous "War of the Worlds" radio broadcast of 1938, where a science fiction drama was presented so realistically, the story goes, as to drive a national panic over alien invasion.

Presenting this as an early example of fake news, Chen explains that recent examinations of the event don't really support the "mass hysteria" trope. Rather, there were only a handful of isolated incidents (Chen, 2017). So why do we have an urban legend about a nation in panic over aliens? It seems the nation's newspapers were feeling the competition from a new medium - radio. According to the article, "Newspapers wanted to show that radio was irresponsible and needed guidance from its older, more respectable siblings in the print media" (Chen, 2017). The

papers were anxious to hype the problems of radio to encourage the F.C.C. to tighten their control, and their concerns were not without some basis. All over Europe, as Chen states, "authoritarian leaders were being swept to power with the help of radio" (2017). The new medium seemed both incredibly powerful and very vulnerable to abuse.

Drawing a parallel with our own time, Chen suggests that our fear of Fake News may be fear of the power that a new medium, the Internet, has brought to life. Like those of 1938 newspaper editors, our fears may be understandable, but overblown. To support this, Chen suggests that Google and Facebook have taken over the role of the F.C.C. as gatekeepers to the new medium, as demonstrated by the ire of conservatives. For example, Chen describes what happened when Facebook tried to address charges of disseminating fake news. Facebook planned to partner with the non-profit Poynter Institute to implement a form of fact-checking, only to be accused of "liberal bias" by conservatives who uncovered ties between Poynter and George Soros. Conservative media watchdogs are concerned that "this is about going after conservative talk on the Internet and banning it by somehow projecting it as being false" (Chen, 2017). However, as Chen says, with "a powerful, well-funded propaganda machine dedicated to publicizing any hint of liberal bias, conservatives aren't the ones who have the most to fear" (2017). Chen ends by suggesting that Google, Facebook and other Big Tech giants will have to rise to their new civic responsibility if they want America's trust.

Chen's reporting on the truth about the "War of the Worlds" invasion scare is a good introduction to the topic of fake news, but I disagree with his idea that we are living in a similar time with similar issues to confront in similar ways. In particular I reject his conclusion that Google and other tech companies will have to be trusted to rise to the public trust. No organization can have both profits and the public trust as driving priorities because they are sometimes in conflict. The responsibility for the public trust lies with the public as a matter of oversight, like many other important systems we regulate. Google and other tech companies should be accountable to the public for their part in shaping the media landscape.

Fake news may have turned the tide in the last presidential election, but its influence does not stop there. From its beginnings at the dawn of modern journalism to the continued effect it has on our politics today, fake news has the power to shape real events. In the past we updated our journalistic standards to combat misinformation, and we are challenged by new technologies to raise our public standards again. In the meantime, it is up to each of us as individuals to examine news with a critical eye on who is reporting it and what they have to gain.

After decades as the domain of mental illness, now psychology explores ancient concepts of well-being and the latest research to discover what makes for human thriving.

POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

Psychology became an important science because mental illness has been so perplexing. But there is more to understanding the mind than curing mental illness. There is also promoting mental healthiness. In a series of Ted Talks, three speakers discussed important discoveries about happiness and how to build it.



Meaning & Purpose

The first speaker was Dan Gilbert, giving a speech entitled "Why are we happy?" He opened with a comment about the evolution of the pre-frontal cortex. As we learned in our class lectures, the pre-frontal cortex is the seat of planning and forward thinking in the human brain. Gilbert calls it an "Experience Simulator" which allows us to do an amazing thing other animals cannot - imagine something before we try it (2004).

Gilbert then goes on to describe the life experience one year later for both a lottery winner and a person who has become paraplegic, and finds that, despite what our Experience Simulators might imagine, both are at about the same level of happiness. Neither great good fortune nor terrible misfortune have much effect on our personal happiness levels over the long term. It seems the Experience Simulator, while invaluable, is not especially good at its job. When questioned afterwards, people report that major events had less impact, less intensity and less duration than they had anticipated. In fact, Gilbert said, no matter how monumental life changes seem at the time, if they happened longer than three months ago, events have almost no impact on personal happiness (2004).

According to Gilbert, we are able to recover from ups and downs in life because we have a psychological immune system. This allows us to change our minds to be happier no matter the specifics of our outcomes. He calls this "synthesizing happiness." He says that "natural happiness" is what we experience on the rare occasions when we get just what we want, but the rest of the time we "synthesize" happiness from the results we have been handed, regardless of our preferences. The only reason this capacity to synthesize happiness is not recognized, he says, is because Madison Avenue doesn't want us to realize that more stuff will not make us happier (Gilbert, 2004).

POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

To demonstrate how we synthesize happiness, Gilbert described experiments where people had to accept their second choices instead of their first. In most cases, people ended up liking their second choices better than their first choices, because our Psychological Immune System finds a way to be okay with what is happening outside our control. In this way, choice is "the enemy of synthetic happiness," because people think they will prefer situations with lots of choices, when the truth is they will manufacture happiness from the option they get stuck with no matter what. Take heart, Gilbert says: our longings and our worries are both overblown, and what we are chasing is something we can make ourselves at any time (2004).

The next video was entitled "Flow, the Secret to Happiness" by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. This gentleman has been wondering what makes for happiness in life since the end of World War II. One thing he discovered early on is that money does not create happiness. It's true that when people are living in deprivation, giving them more resources will increase their happiness substantially. However once their basic needs are met and people have some resource security, adding more money at that point will not increase their happiness levels further (2004). Money only goes so far.

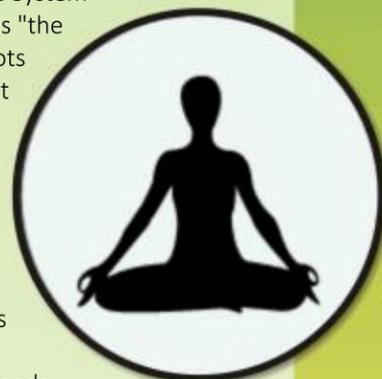
So then what does create happiness? Csikszentmihalyi says that the human brain is only capable of processing so much at once, and when we are fully caught up in a task that demands our complete attention, we have no processing power left over to be concerned with matters of self. Our body and identity "disappear" as our brains are engaged in the needs of the moment for the task at hand. Csikszentmihalyi called this state of being fully engrossed in an engaging task "Flow," and considers it one of the main sources of true human happiness (2004).

According to Csikszentmihalyi, there are seven conditions that describe the state of Flow. A person in Flow is 1) completely involved in the task they are doing, 2) feeling ecstasy, a sense of being outside regular reality, and 3) working with great inner clarity, knowing just what to do and how to do it. This comes from 4) knowing the task is doable with one's skill set, creating 5) a sense of serenity, unencumbered by worry, with steadily increasing ability to meet the challenge. This leads to 6) a feeling of timelessness, where one is focused on the present with no concern for past or future, and eventually to 7) an intrinsic motivation, where achieving the state of Flow becomes the goal of the activity (Csikszentmihalyi, 2004).

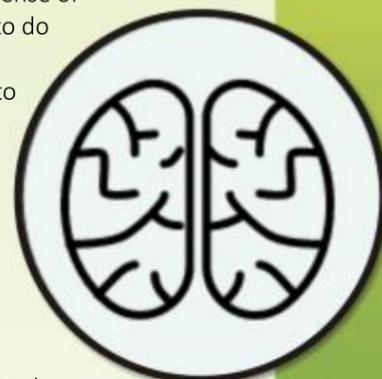
Csikszentmihalyi said the feeling of Flow is achieved when the challenge is higher than average and the skill set required to meet it is higher than average. Flow occurs in the intricate dance between growing challenge and advancing skill. He suggests that to increase happiness, we can increase the challenge of our tasks or the skills we have to meet them, to move more of our everyday life "into the Flow channel" (2004).

The last talk was delivered by Martin Seligman and was entitled "The New Era of Positive Psychology." He described the state of psychology today as "Not good enough," but with great optimism for the future. Seligman said that historically, psychology has been operating under a disease model, where the goal was to find out what is wrong with people who have mental disturbances, labeling this a game of "Spot the Loony." This focus is because 60 years ago, NO mental illnesses were treatable. Today, he says 14 of these are treatable, and two are curable, so the good news is that there has been progress in the science of mental illness. We have been able to "make miserable people less miserable" (Seligman, 2004).

However the disease model is not without its costs. Seligman says for one thing, this approach to psychology has created "victimologists" who have ignored the role personal responsibility. Furthermore, he says, disease-modelers have forgotten to improve the lives of healthy people,



Mindfulness



Mindset



Engagement



High Quality Connections



Resilience

and almost nothing has been done to explore genius and high talent. These lacks, Seligman asserts, led him and others to create Positive Psychology (2004).

The aims of Positive Psychology should be, according to Seligman, to be as concerned with strength as with weakness, to be as concerned with building strength as with repairing damage, making the life of ordinary people more fulfilling, and nurturing genius and high talent. Seligman describes Positive Psychology, similarly to Csikszentmihalyi, as "the science of what makes life worth living." He says we are scientifically studying different forms of happiness, creating an "opposite of the diagnostic manual of the insanities," classifying strengths and virtues (Seligman, 2004).

Most importantly, we have been able to study extremely happy people and discover truth about their happiness. It does not consist of "Hollywood happiness" as Seligman terms it, a kind of giggly good cheer we see in the movies. This is not enough for true happiness. He says researchers have explored various "interventions" throughout history designed to increase happiness, and have been able to test them for efficacy (2004). They have discovered three interventions that really work to build happiness into people's lives.

The first factor in happiness is termed a Pleasant Life. This means a life of enjoying the circumstances one is immersed in, which has some prerequisites. It helps if one is born into pleasant circumstances and has the skills and resources to maintain and savor those circumstances. Unfortunately, we tend to habituate rather quickly to even the most pleasant circumstances, soon longing for more. And for most, the circumstances are not very malleable (2004). So this part of happiness can be hard to influence, but luckily, it is the least important.

Another important factor in happiness is none other than Flow, as described by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi previously. The ancient Greeks named the state of flow "eudemonia," and Seligman says we can increase it by discovering our top five strengths and recrafting our work, love and play to allow us to use and develop those strengths in Flow (2004). Lastly, for happiness in life we need to have meaning. For this we need more than to know or even to develop our strengths. For meaning, we need to employ our strengths to contribute to something larger than ourselves (Seligman, 2004).

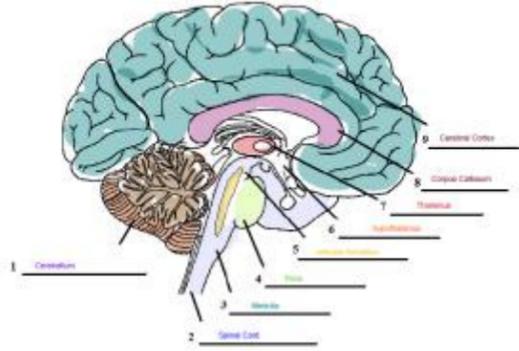
Thus, Seligman suggests, it is important to create these positive interventions, like teaching people how to have a pleasant life through savoring and mindfulness. This can be done with specific exercises like a Gratitude Visit, where we write a tribute to someone important in our lives and then deliver it in person. Even months later, a Gratitude Visit made people's lives happier (2004). Most importantly, researchers were able to compare activities that were "fun" with those that were philanthropic, and find that the happiness of fun quickly wears off, while the happiness of helping others lasts, adding to our own life satisfaction (2004).

Understanding that happiness is a product of our own making, that happiness can be found at the intersection of challenge and skill, and that happiness can be increased by specific interventions, is a great contribution that Positive Psychology has made to human advancement. It's also great advice I can put to use immediately in my own life. I appreciate the opportunity this series has given me to understand happiness and bring more of it to the world.

Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2004, Feb.) Flow, the secret to happiness. [Video file] Retrieved from https://www.ted.com/talks/mihaly_csikszentmihalyi_on_flow

Gilbert, D. (2004, Feb.) The surprising science of happiness. [Video file] Retrieved from https://www.ted.com/talks/dan_gilbert_asks_why_are_we_happy

Seligman, M. (2004, Feb.) The new era of positive psychology. [Video file] Retrieved from https://www.ted.com/talks/martin_seligman_on_the_state_of_psychology



One of the first important things we learned in *Introduction to Psychology* was brain anatomy. The assignment was to color this brain and label the anatomical structures. Students were invited to bring colors to class to complete the diagram. I decided to bring my colors and paint a giant chalk brain on the sidewalk outside of class. I also painted a big neuron.

My Big Chalk Brain

Structure	Function
1) Cerebellum	1) Coordinate voluntary Movement, balance
2) Spinal Cord	2) nerve pathway, simple reflex
3) Medulla	3) heartbeat and breathing
4) Pons	4) movement and sleep
5) Hypothalamus	5) controls arousal
6) Pituitary Gland	6) drives endocrine system, emotion and reward
7) Thalamus	7) relays messages between lower brain and cerebral cortex
8) Corpus Callosum (crosses hemispheres)	8) connects brain hemispheres
9) Cerebral Cortex	9) control and information processing center



Structure	Function
10) Dendrites	10) pick up signals from other neurons
11) Axon or cell body	11) contains nucleus and cellular organelles
12) Myelin Sheath (Gap between myelin)	12) Myelin coating can only be so long, these are gaps
13) Axon	13) conducts signals called action potentials to other cells
14) Myelin Coating (fatty coating)	14) insulates axon to transmit signal faster
15) Terminal Branches	15) meet at synaptic gap with next neuron
16) Left Hemisphere	16) Controls right side of body, language, science and mathematics
17) Right Hemisphere	17) Controls left side of body, creativity and art, music and imagination
18) Frontal Lobe	18) Problem solving, planning
19) Parietal Lobe	19) sensation, perception & movement
20) Occipital Lobe	20) visual processing
21) Temporal Lobe	21) hearing and speech

System Justification

Social Psychology

Psychology is about more than understanding the individual mind. It is also about understanding our collective attitudes, thoughts and actions. A recent issue of *Current Trends in Psychology* addressed this, with an article by researchers John Jost, Julia Becker, Danny Osborne and Vivienne Badaan, called "Missing in (Collective) Action," which brings important clarifications to existing models for understanding collective action.

Our society is rampant with inequality, racial injustice and authoritarianism. The authors marvel that people don't protest more, considering that we are a democracy and our right to protest is enshrined. They include a table showing very low rates for different types of protest in democracies across the Western world. However the authors detail several reasons why protest is hard to muster. For example, people often do not believe that protest can be effective, or may even be concerned that it is dangerous (Jost, Becker, Osborne & Badaan, 2017).

Up until now, the study of protest in social psychology has emphasized two ideas. One is the theory of relative deprivation. According to a simple Google search, relative deprivation theory is "a view of social change and movements, according to which people take action for social change in order to acquire something (for example, opportunities, status, or wealth) that others possess and which they believe they should have, too" (Chegg, 2018). The second idea is social identification, or taking a large part of one's identity from the social group. When people are angry, part of a group, and feel their actions will make a difference, they are inspired to protest. The synthesis of these reasons for protest is referred to as SIMCA, for the Social Identity Model of Collective Action. (Jost et al., 2017).

Limits of SIMCA

The SIMCA model is "elegant and insightful," according to the authors. However, they feel that

SIMCA is not telling the whole story, and overlooks factors that are "ideological" and "system-level." While they don't wish to discard the Social Identity model, they wish to fill the gaps with help from the "systems-justification perspective" (Jost et al., 2017). Additionally, they feel that the SIMCA model sheds light only on progressive action against the status quo, and a more complex model is needed to explain both this and the motivations of system-supportive protesters (Jost et al., 2017). For this perspective, the authors are focusing on system justification. This refers to "the motivation to defend and bolster the societal status quo," which "reduces moral outrage" against the system (Jost et al., 2017) that would otherwise lead to protest.

Three Barriers to Protest

According to the authors, system justification explains why people do not protest more. They found three main motivations that contribute to system justification. First of all, people have epistemic motivation - that is, they long for a sense of control and structure, and have a "need for cohesion" (Jost et al., 2017). This causes people to act to maintain the status quo. Secondly, people have existential motivation - they experience a "desire for safety and security" which relies on "the protective structures of the institutional order" (Jost et al., 2017). This may lead people to fear acting against the bulwarks of society. Lastly, people experience relational motivation, or the desire to maintain attitudes similar to the people who are close to them.

"Challenging the status quo can instigate relational discord," the authors warn (Jost et al., 2017). These factors help keep the institutions from experiencing a challenge.

High needs for epistemic, existential and relational assurance were correlated with political conservatism, and so, with system justification. What's more, these factors correlated with strong approval for "the conservative, system supporting Tea Party movement" and with disapproval for the "progressive, system-challenging Occupy Wall Street movement" (Jost et al., 2017).

The key component of SIMCA and the other models of protest, according to Jost, is emotion. However in addition to individual emotions, the authors recognize that there are emotions experienced in common by a group and expressed socially, which they refer to as "system-level emotions" (Jost et al., 2017). Moral outrage and backlash are examples of negative system-level emotions, but positive ones such as pride and joy exist as well. Negative emotions like moral outrage can produce protests against the system, but positive system-level emotions, like group satisfaction, can lead to insufficient social agitation for justice, or even "collective action aimed at preserving the status quo" (Jost et al., 2017).



System Justification, cont.

To demonstrate how this works, business students participated in an experiment where they were randomly ranked into an arbitrary social hierarchy. As might be imagined, the higher-ranked groups felt more satisfaction, but also more guilt. Also as expected, the lowest-ranked groups felt the most anger and frustration. However when primed with examples that produce a system-justification mindset, everyone, low and high status alike, expressed more satisfaction with their position, with less guilt for those of high status and less frustration for those of low. Clearly, system justification would support the survival of the existing order. Similarly, women who were exposed to system justification reasoning were less apt to support feminist challenges to the patriarchal status quo (Jost et al., 2017).

The authors believe the system justification model can predict "whether collective action is likely." They wish to expand the ideas of SIMCA to include the epistemic, existential and relational needs that contribute to system justification. Most importantly, they suggest the more expansive theoretical model can predict which form of collective action is likely to take place. For example, people who are dissatisfied, but high in system justification, may participate in dissidence, but are unlikely to engage in protest. Conversely, people in the advantaged group who are very satisfied and high in system justification may engage in system-supportive collective actions, like backlash against protest (Jost et al., 2017).

Jost and his colleagues suggest that we need a more comprehensive understanding of movements for social change. They believe the system justification perspective adds a needed angle to existing examinations of social movements, which not only lets us explore how attitudes affect efficacy, but opens the door for more, and more comprehensive, research.

Chegg.com. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.chegg.com/homework-help/definitions/relative-deprivation-theory-49>

Jost, J. T., Becker, J., Osborne, D., & Badaan, V. (2017). Missing in (Collective) Action. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 26(2), 99-108. doi:10.1177/0963721417690633

Across The Great Divide

**Psychology
Moral Judgment
and Politics**

The country today is divided along partisan lines, with conservatives and liberals each finding the other side to be, not just wrong, but dangerously misguided if not outright evil. Why are people so different? What in our psychology makes us have such different criteria for morality, and is there anything we can all agree on? In trying to find out, I watched three Ted Talks about moral psychology and what divides people into polarized political categories.

The first talk I watched was by moral psychologist Johnathan Haidt. He opened with a picture of Michelangelo's David, and a tale of two people approaching to behold the statue in person. The "liberal" is transfixed with the beauty of the human form, while the "conservative" is transfixed with embarrassment at the nudity. While this may be a stereotype, Haidt says, there is a lot of truth to it. Liberals score very high on a scale of openness to experience, while conservatives prefer to play things safe (Haidt, 2008).

Haidt explains that the openness-to-experience scale predicts everything from what books people like to read to what foods they like to eat, and whether they might like Ted Talks. Haidt then takes an informal poll of his Ted audience and notes that it is overwhelmingly liberal. This, he says, is a problem (Haidt, 2008).

What concerns Haidt is lack of moral diversity in our modern public discourse, where everyone can choose to listen only to information they already agree with. We are trapped in a "Moral Matrix," like in the movie Matrix - a false reality which is so immersive it's impossible to detect. He dares the audience to "take the red pill," to learn some moral psychology and break the spell (Haidt, 2008).

Haidt explains that the human moral mind is not a blank slate when we are born, but we have a "first draft" which experience re-writes as we go along. Haidt describes two Foundations of Morality that everyone has:

1. **Harm/care** - mammals are programmed to care for others, have strong feelings against harm
2. **Fairness/reciprocity** - as described by the Golden Rule and many religions
3. **In-group loyalty** - only humans can get big groups of non-relations to cooperate, and this comes from our tribal psychology, as evinced by teams and rivalries
4. **Authority** - this is not always about brutality; it can be with respect and love
5. **Purity/sanctity** - we can attain virtue by controlling what we do with our bodies (Haidt, 2008).

Haidt shows examples of this chart (at right) which look very similar for many different countries. No matter where you go, everyone cares about 1 and 2, but liberals care more. They don't care at all about 3-5, but conservatives care about those a lot.

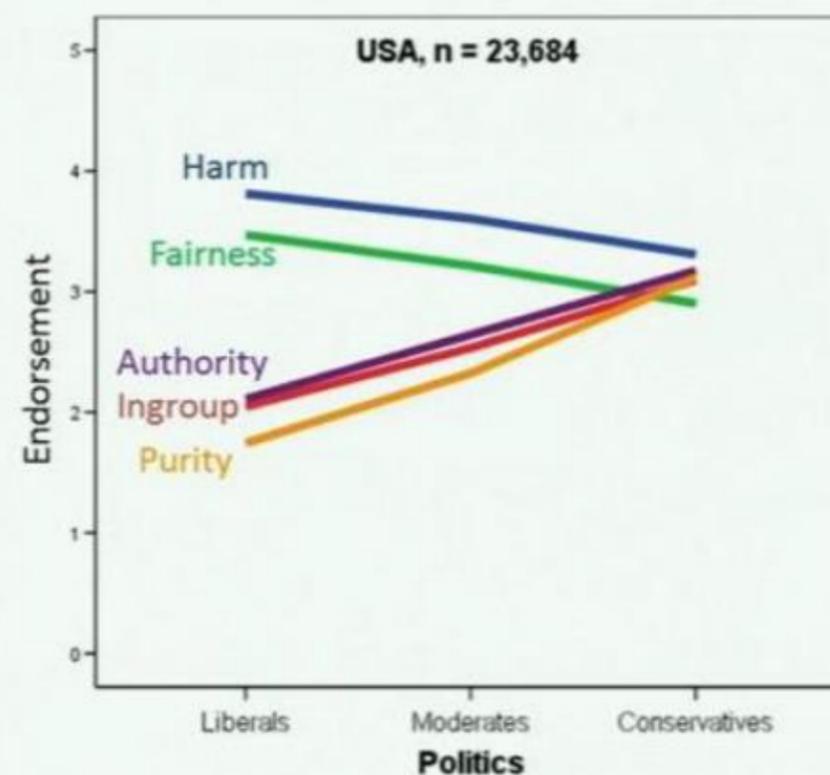
So, the disagreement everywhere is not about harm or fairness, because everyone agrees these matter. The arguments in our political culture are about 3-5 - authority, group loyalty and purity.

Liberals might wonder, Haidt says, what makes those other three foundations moral? He asks, "Aren't those just the foundations of xenophobia, authoritarianism and Puritanism?" (Haidt, 2008).

The truth that only conservatives understand, Haidt says, is that order in society tends to decay. The Commons Dilemma is the same issue. When people don't benefit directly from their own sacrifice, everyone has the temptation to free ride. Some punishment is needed to get cooperation. Haidt believes it takes our "entire moral toolbox," all five of the moral foundations, to suppress our selfishness and work in cooperative groups (Haidt, 2008).

So the source of disagreement between liberals and conservatives, according to Haidt, is that liberals reject

Liberals 2 channels, Conservatives 5



three of the five moral foundations. Liberals have noble motives, because 3-5 were traditionally disenfranchising to those at the bottom of society. Liberals want change, and justice for everyone, even at the risk of chaos. By contrast, conservatives want order even if there is a price to be paid by those at the bottom. As Edmund Burke says, "The restraints on men are to be reckoned among their rights" (Haidt, 2008).

So, Haidt concludes, both sides of the political debate have understanding to contribute, and form a balance. We need the moral humility to understand that everyone has a reason for what they are doing.

For my next Ted Talk I turned to David Pizarro, who opens with a story about poison, because humans are programmed to reject dangerous tastes. Even infants react to bitter flavor. This same reaction lasts into adulthood, Pizarro says, "whenever there is a threat of physical contamination of some sort" (Pizarro, 2012). This reaction

is for more than contaminants. It influences our moral beliefs and even our political intuitions. What is the force behind this reaction? It is the emotion of disgust.

First, Pizarro explains why emotions exist. They are meant to make us do the right things and keep us from doing the wrong things. Fear offers a protective benefit, and so does disgust. Pizarro says it is easy to elicit disgust in people, even easier than inducing other emotions. Across the world, disgust is similarly inspired by bodily excrements, by the appearance of disease, and by many sexual acts. Even Charles Darwin observed that he had a disgust response when a stranger touched his food, and his modern-day successor Professor Richard Dawkins gagged at a repulsive smell (Pizarro, 2012).

So it's not just that disgust is universal and evokes a strong reaction. It comes about through association because, even before we knew about germs, people had a sense of contamination. Association with disgust turned out to be a good way to convince people to avoid things (Pizarro, 2012).

Of course, some people are more easily disgusted than others. Questionnaires shows that the politically conservative are more easily disgusted, while liberals are "hard to disgust" (Pizarro, 2012). Even when controlling for factors like gender, age, income, education, etc., the results stayed the same. Even voting behavior corresponds to this predictable pattern - in regions with high disgust, Republican candidates get more votes. Across the world, in 121 different countries, this same effect can be demonstrated (Pizarro, 2012).

People who are disgust-sensitive are politically conservative and much more opposed to gay marriage, homosexuality, and sexual deviance. Not only that, but you can disgust people and then compare them to a group who



Jonathan Haidt
Social Psychologist



David Pizarro
Professor of Psychology

are not disgusted. When people are feeling disgust their attitudes shift to more moral conservatism. Odor, taste, film clips, images, even simple reminders to people to wash their hands, all have the same effect on moral judgement, making people more morally conservative (Pizarro, 2012).

So, Pizarro says, emotions influence our judgement. That's what they are for, to change how we think. With disgust, the real surprise is the scope of how much it affects. Disgust is a useful emotion, he adds, that changes how we feel during times when contamination seems possible. Even weirder is that it changes our politics too. Pizarro concludes that he doesn't know if we ought to be guided by our disgust, but it points to areas we can research (Pizarro, 2012).

The final video is entitled "How to Win a Political Debate in Five Easy Steps," and was filmed right in the middle of the 2016 presidential election. The speaker, Joshua Thompson, described a chaotic time, with controversies erupting one after the other, vitriolic arguments ending friendships all over Facebook, and candidates screaming insults in the media. Thompson said everyone's head was exploding, except for his - on the contrary, as a political junkie, he loved it. As Thompson says, we should not be afraid to have discussions with people who disagree with us (2016).

Thompson explains that it is important not to get stuck in ideology, because then the facts get lost. Facts do matter. Even more important, however, is that psychology matters! Thompson recommends we use psychology to craft a new approach to talking politics. Instead of being about making noise, this way is more about listening (Thompson, 2016). Thompson introduces his strategy as, "How to Win a Political Debate in Five Easy Steps." He then points out that there is a problem with this approach already. "Win" is the wrong word, and the wrong mentality. Politics is a sum-game, he says, where there can be win-wins as well as win-losses. So, he changed the slide to read, "How to Debate in

Five Easy Steps" (Thompson, 2016), effectively lowering the bar by a good bit.

To make his point, Thompson tells the story of his online encounter with a gentleman he calls "Facebook Guy." This person was decrying the hashtag #LOVEWINS, which represents support for gay marriage. Thompson said he considered ignoring it, but, as a gay man and a political junkie, of course he wasn't going to ignore it. Facebook Guy was saying that marriage equality was hypocritical, and consisted of "persecuting people for their sincerely held beliefs," and could quite possibly mean the end of world as we know it. "A troll?" Thompson mused. "Oh yeah." His response consisted only of two hashtags, which Thompson displayed on screen: #FACEPALM, #LOVEWON (2016).

This, Thompson says, is using cognitive psychology for the first step in his process. People will pay more attention when they are aroused, so "Go ahead push some buttons," he recommends (Thompson, 2016). He said emotion affects our attitude which determines our involvement level, which determines how much attention we pay and how much can then be learned (Thompson, 2016).

Now that the other person is paying attention, this leads you to Step Two. It's time for logical, fact-based argument. It's a technique commonly used in advertising, where you get the attention, and then give facts. In this case, Thompson provided facts about the ways gay marriage helped many people and the ways it did not harm or even affect Facebook Guy (2016).

Then Thompson describes Step Three, Making it Personal. He said that next you need to provide something that people can relate to, so they will imagine how it would feel to be in those shoes. An argument people can connect with will change attitudes. He asked Facebook Guy to imagine how it would feel if something he had no control over denied him basic equality (Thompson, 2016).



Joshua Thompson
Head of WWU Political Psychology Lab

Step Four, according to Thompson, is the Appeal to Morality. Thanks to psychology, this no longer requires a religious basis. Instead, we can turn to Moral Foundations Theory. This theory, Thompson claims, is derived from study of motivation, psychology, cultural anthropology, sociology, and biology. Thompson then introduces The Five Dimensions of Moral Psychology, and what do you know, these are the same five foundations as Jonathan Haidt discussed in his Ted Talk. Harm/care and fairness/reciprocity were on one side, while loyalty, authority and purity were on the other (Thompson, 2016).

The first two Thompson described as the Individualizing Foundations, having to do with caring and social justice. The second three are the Binding Foundations. Just as Haidt had suggested, these are the traditional values that work to maintain group cohesion. Most notable for Thompson is that everyone is concerned with one of these at high levels, and that is Harm/care. So, Thompson recommends for Step Four we can appeal to this sense that everyone has. To do this, he related to Facebook Guy the story of Edie Windsor, a partner in a same-sex marriage who was denied many rights when her marriage was not acknowledged across state lines (Thompson, 2016).

So, Thompson says, get people riled up, hit them with your logical argument, make it personal, appeal to their sense of

morality, then get to Step Five: be authentic, honest, and open-minded. Recognize that differing views exist, and are valuable, and that the views of others are as valid to them as ours are to us (Thompson, 2016).

According to Thompson, in the face of these Five Steps, Facebook Guy did not change his mind, but he did finally agree to go pray about it. Thompson counts it as a victory that Facebook Guy was willing to consider the matter further. In conclusion, Thompson emphasized, don't be afraid, engage, use psychology, and listen to people. And VOTE!! (Thompson, 2016).

These Ted Talks each deal with the moral psychology that makes liberals and conservatives differ on so many views. In a time of increasing political polarization, understanding the psychology behind the philosophies of both sides will hopefully help us learn how to reach each other across the divide.

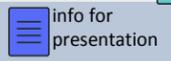
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How does media affect change, influence perception, or otherwise drive the narrative on this Topic?

Outline

Introduction: Scope of Inequality 

Thesis: Media reinforces systems of inequality through Scroogeism, through keeping up with Kardashians, and through media concentration/capture.

Under the Affluence - "Scroogeism"

I. Driving the Narrative on Inequality

- a. Scroogeism
- b. Poor are abhorred
- c. Rich are adored

The Poor: Oxygen Thieves The rich: 1% Preppers

Culture of Poverty: The Zombie Lie Valorizing the Rich

II. Influencing the Perception of Inequality

- a. American Dream and Mobility
- b. "your wealthy mind"
- c. Keeping up with ...who?

"your wealthy mind" ie Anyone can be Wealthy

kid's movies validate existing structure

III. Affecting Change on Inequality

- a. lackluster coverage
- b. media concentration
- c. media capture

Media Yawns

Tax Cuts Work!

Final Project

Assignment: Visual Thesis Statement (30 points)
 Assignment: Annotated Resource Set (50 points)
 Assignment: Final Project Draft (40 points)
 DUE DATE: 7/22

 The Spirit Level inequality hurts everything 

 Why it matters and why most economists didn't notice

 Pareto Efficiency

 Social Media for Activism

Not caused by skill-loss or robots   Media Illustrations

 humans have strong egalitarian preferences  Comedians

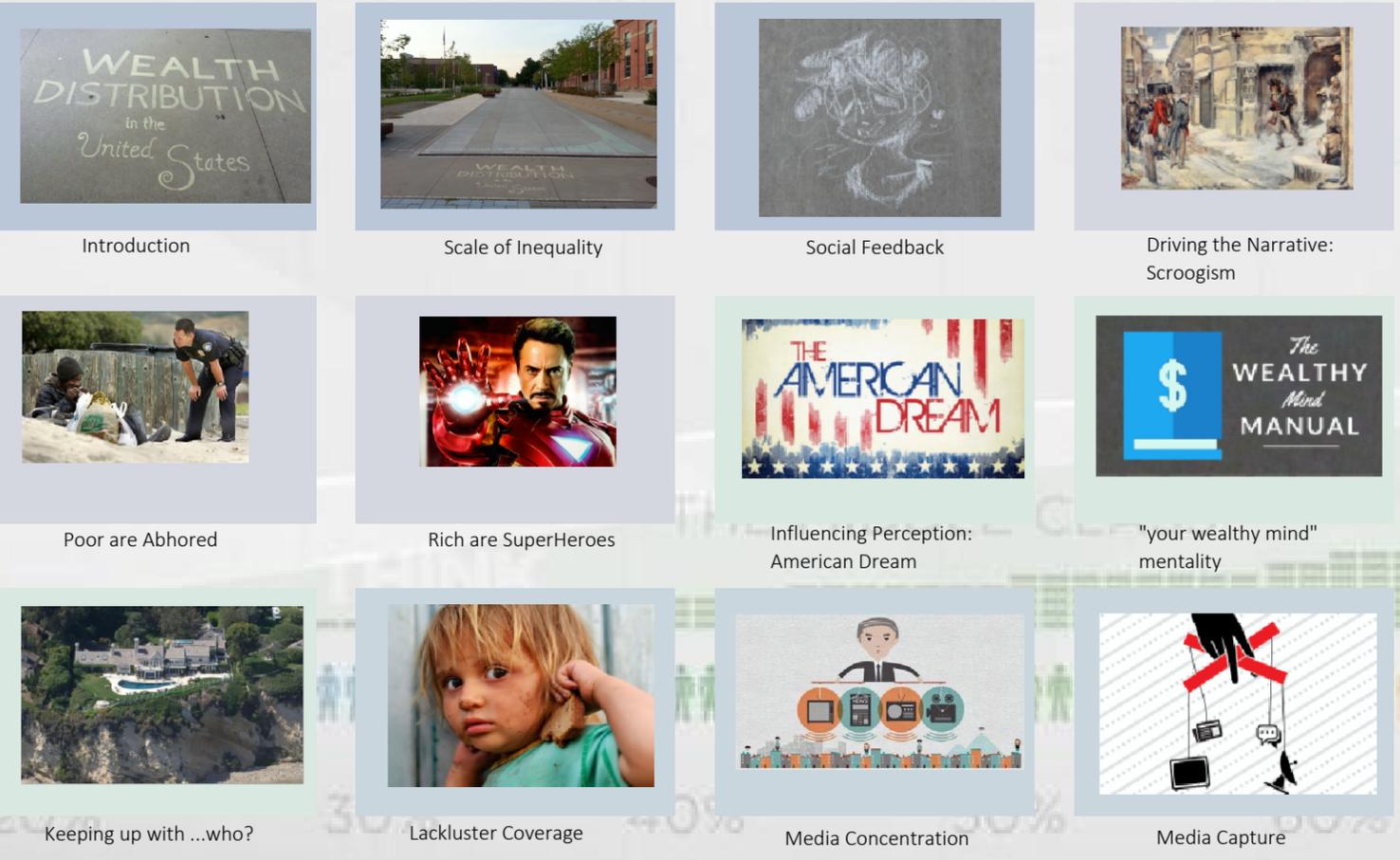
Relation to Savings??  THE REPORT SAYS:  Savings Strike?

"Visual Thesis"
 all research data organized by topic
 click on comments to see data

The final project for *Critical Thinking* was to explore the media treatment of a specific topic. I chose economic inequality. The assignment was to explore the narratives created by our media, and create a social media experiment to try to change the dialog.

For the paper, I read a number of articles about media and inequality. I also used the information to create a multimedia presentation. For the experiment, I created a giant chart about wealth inequality in the U.S. on my college campus in sidewalk chalk.

Storyboard Draft



Introduction

Scale of Inequality

Social Feedback

Driving the Narrative: Scroogeism

Poor are Abhorred

Rich are SuperHeroes

Influencing Perception: American Dream

"your wealthy mind" mentality

Keeping up with ...who?

Lackluster Coverage

Media Concentration

Media Capture

Wealth Inequality

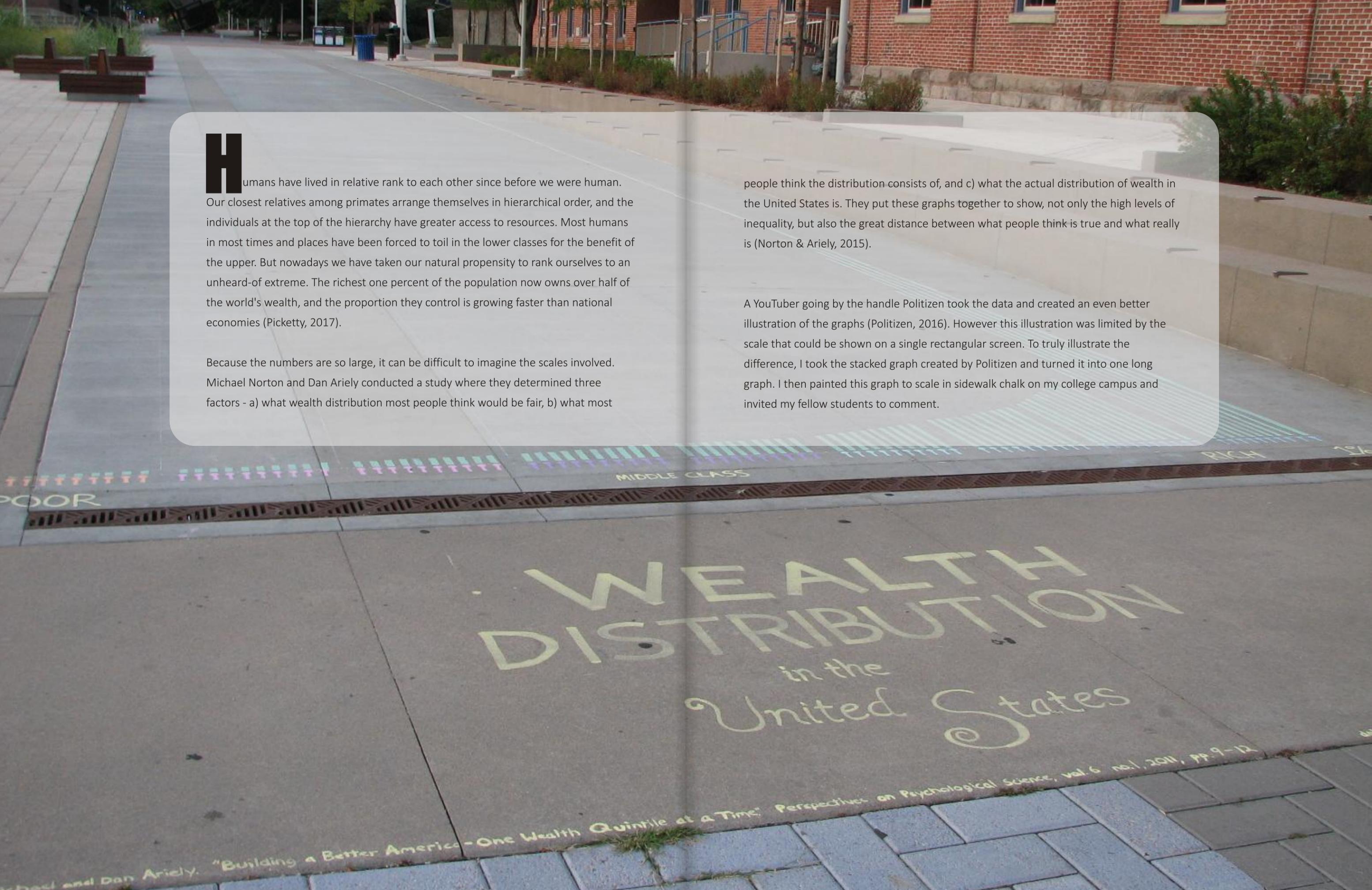


Humans have lived in relative rank to each other since before we were human. Our closest relatives among primates arrange themselves in hierarchical order, and the individuals at the top of the hierarchy have greater access to resources. Most humans in most times and places have been forced to toil in the lower classes for the benefit of the upper. But nowadays we have taken our natural propensity to rank ourselves to an unheard-of extreme. The richest one percent of the population now owns over half of the world's wealth, and the proportion they control is growing faster than national economies (Picketty, 2017).

Because the numbers are so large, it can be difficult to imagine the scales involved. Michael Norton and Dan Ariely conducted a study where they determined three factors - a) what wealth distribution most people think would be fair, b) what most

people think the distribution consists of, and c) what the actual distribution of wealth in the United States is. They put these graphs together to show, not only the high levels of inequality, but also the great distance between what people think is true and what really is (Norton & Ariely, 2015).

A YouTuber going by the handle Politizen took the data and created an even better illustration of the graphs (Politizen, 2016). However this illustration was limited by the scale that could be shown on a single rectangular screen. To truly illustrate the difference, I took the stacked graph created by Politizen and turned it into one long graph. I then painted this graph to scale in sidewalk chalk on my college campus and invited my fellow students to comment.





1%

2%

middle class

upper classes

poorest 20%

WEALTH DISTRIBUTION
in the United States

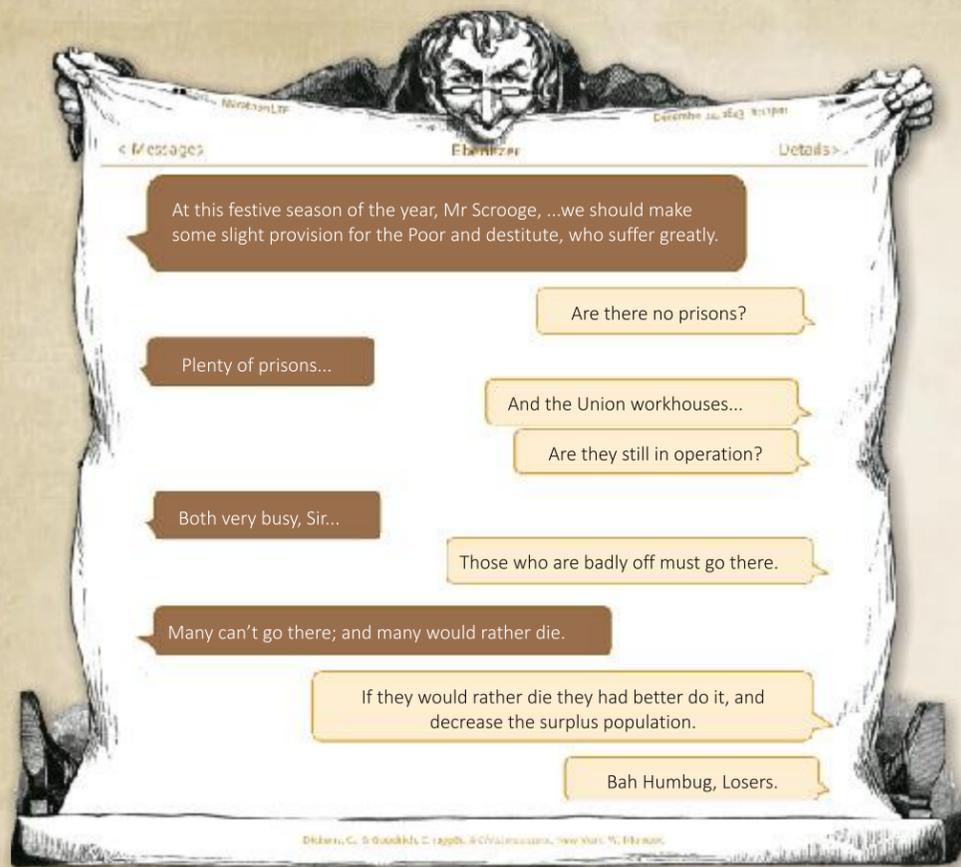
Michael and Dan Ariely. "Building a Better America - One Wealth Quintile at a Time." Perspectives on Psychological Science, vol. 6 no. 1, 2011, pp. 9-12.



Then, I asked my fellow students to weigh in on the issue.



Like most social media experiments, the results were mixed.



My sidewalk experiment was an attempt to create an alternative form of social media. The results were fairly shallow. But nothing could be deeper than society's need to address inequality. This topic is important because the media drives the narrative through "Scroogeism," because the media influences perception with tales of the American Dream, and because media denialism of inequality is helping to perpetrate the problem.

Driving the Narrative on Inequality

Charles Dickens noticed the great disparity between the rich and the poor in his time, and wrote his famous book *A Christmas Carol* about the rich miser Ebenezer Scrooge to expose the unfairness of it all to the public. Different attempts have been made to address the inequities over the years, but today we seem to be embracing the same kind of cultural acceptance of poverty that they did in Dickens' time - a new Scroogeism (Wise, 2015).

One way the media reinforces wealth inequality is by presenting a very specific narrative about the relationship between the classes in society. To maintain the separation, we adopt the attitude that everyone is getting just what they deserve. In *Under the Affluence*, Tim Wise explains that this attitude has been with us since before the dawn of Industrialism. Beginning in the 16th century, the common areas of England were claimed and fenced by the wealthy in a process called "enclosure," forcing the poorer farmers from their ancestral livelihood into towns to beg (Wise, 2015).

The public relations campaign to punish and demonize the poor was begun, and included public whippings for paupers and forcing the poor into workhouses, where conditions were deliberately kept horrible so that people would take any work at all to stay out of them. This was justified by characterizing the poor as naturally dirty, stupid and so lazy that nothing else could convince them to work. (Wise, 2015).

Today's culture carries the same narrative, greatly aided and abetted by the media.

Influencing the Perception of Inequality

One of the most treasured beliefs in America is that we are a meritocracy, that anyone who will work hard and play by the rules will become a success. While there are times when there is some truth to this for a few, the vast majority of poor Americans will not be able to rise above the class of their parents. However the idea that wealth is deserved is cultivated in our society even from a very young age. Strieb, Ayala and Wixted conducted a study of the highest-grossing children's movies, and found many depictions showing that characters end up in the class they deserve, or rise through the classes by displaying great merit (Strieb, Ayala & Wixted, 2016).

This same Horatio Alger success story is presented to adults, often as advertising for get-rich-yourself schemes. For example, a web site offers advice on how to ignore the complaining of the poor in order to cultivate a guilt-free, "rich" mind set: "Many [of the annoying

poor] forget that most rich people ALL had to EARN their wealth. One reason why people with a poverty mindset say "being rich is evil" is simply because they are jealous. That's crab mentality in action: they would rather badmouth rich people and bring them down instead of working to be as successful as they are" (Yin 2016). We have a perception in this country that inequality is deserved, partly because so many voices try to convince us there is an easy path to wealth for those that will but try.

One of the worst developments in exacerbating inequality is the incredibly high social standards that are presented as normal. In the 50's the term "keeping up with the Joneses" referred to the new consumer habits of conspicuous consumption, where people felt compelled to own items owned by their neighbors. However people in our modern culture are far more isolated, spend more time watching television, and are subjected to lavish displays of every kind of extravagance being enjoyed by reality celebrities. So today the social pressure is not to keep up with one's neighbors, but with celebrity trends, as exemplified by a show literally called "Keeping Up with the Kardashians" (Pritchard, 2013).

This is part of why inequality itself creates such suffering. It is sometimes pointed out that all but the very poorest Americans are unlikely to literally starve, and usually have a certain level of material comfort, so perhaps they should simply enjoy what they have got and not expect better. But as Richard Wilkinson points out in *The Spirit Level*, humans do not work that way. As humans, we compare ourselves to each other and strive to find a meaningful place for ourselves within the ranks. Finding ourselves at the bottom, unable to win at competitions with others and enjoy the same kind of rewards, is crushing to the human spirit (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2011). This may be why inequality, rather than absolute poverty, is associated with every kind of negative outcome in society from lower life expectancy to lower education levels to higher crime (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2011).

Affecting (Or Preventing) Change

One important way the media is affecting change on inequality in our country is by preventing it. A public will only be motivated to change conditions they perceive and understand, and the media in our country is working to be sure that people don't know the extent of

the problem. According to an article on the website for Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting, a large study from 2010 showed the gap between the classes growing larger, with accentuated discrepancies for people of color, and yet no one really paid attention, least of all the media (Hollar, 2010).

This may be in large part because of media concentration. As media companies are acquired by larger and larger conglomerates, they begin to have an editorial slant that supports the interest of wealthy conglomerates (Galston & Hendrickson, 2018). With insufficient competition, dominant firms remain at the top of the marketplace with little pressure to cover their own rise to dominance.

Conclusion

Inequality is an inescapable reality. Humans are not equal in abilities and interests and opportunities, and there is no way to change that. But our society does not need to be THIS unequal. The current situation is a result of policies we have chosen, not least those by the media to perpetuate the status quo. As we have seen, the media narrative encourages Scroogeism, perpetuates a vanished American Dream, and is serving as a poor watchdog. We can hold them to a higher standard, and take media into our own hands to raise awareness about inequality in America.

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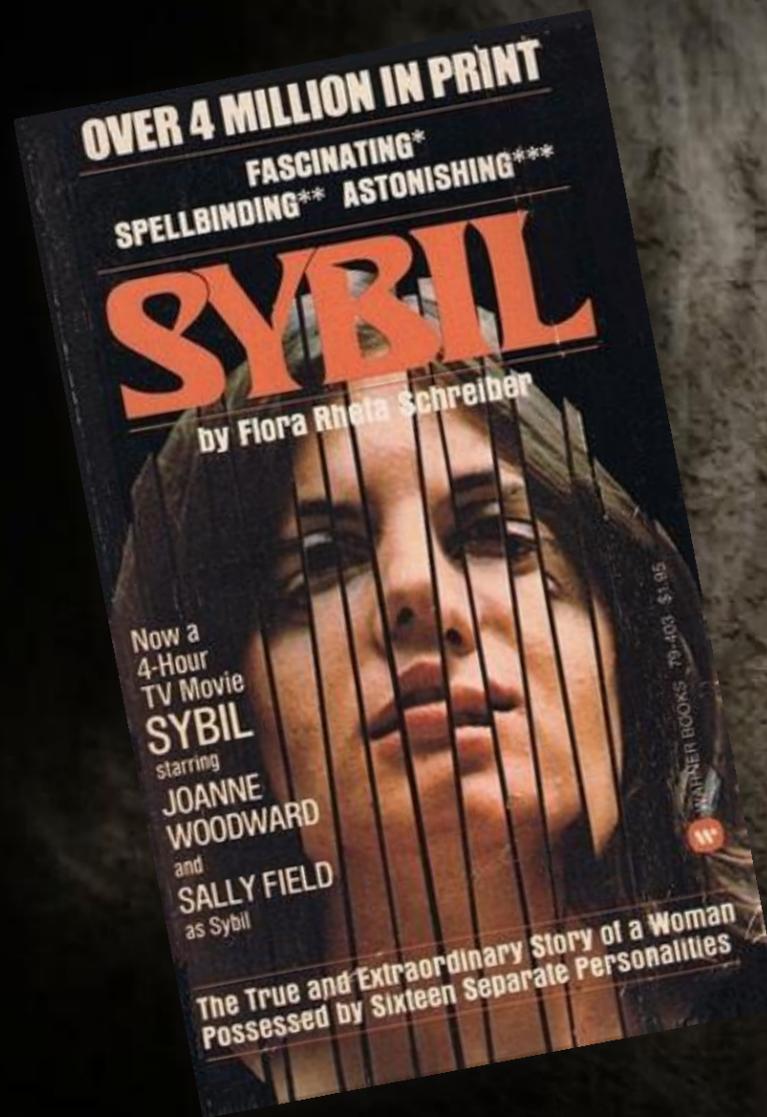


The REAL Wall

Around the world, inequality is growing faster than economies.

Repressed Memory

Metaphor or Myth?



In the 1970s the book *Sybil* introduced a new kind of mental illness to the public consciousness. As a small child, so the story went, "Sybil" had been so horribly abused by her mother that she had repressed all memory of the abuse. The trauma had instead manifested itself in the adult Sybil as a plethora of separate and distinct personalities. When the best-selling book based on her story was turned into a hit TV movie starring Sally Field and Joanne Woodward, multiple personality and repressed memory both became extremely common and widespread diagnoses (Nathan, 2012). At the time, child abuse was just being recognized as a widespread and damaging phenomenon, and Sybil played into our society's worst fears.

Then the repressed memory craze took an even darker turn with *Michelle Remembers*, a *Sybil*-style psychiatric horror story featuring even more outrageous repressed memories - a childhood of torture in occult rituals, complete with infant sacrifice, cannibalism and, finally, the summoning of Satan himself. This brought a flood of similar complaints in what became a national moral panic about Satanism (Munger, 2016).

The Satanic Panic was made possible by the therapeutic "recovering" of repressed memories. But can memories of trauma really be repressed beyond recall, lurking in the unconscious and causing mental health problems? Can the memories later be

recovered with hypnosis and other psychoanalytic techniques? Despite the Satanic Panic, "recovered memories" appear to be a psychological misconception, because there is little evidence to suggest this actually happens, and plenty of evidence which shows other, more reasonable explanations.

When researching sources for this topic, I discovered that, despite the claims of some therapists and patients, there is almost no empirical evidence to support the idea that traumatic memories are repressed. Most studies show the opposite - that people who experience trauma are more troubled by the *inability* to forget what happened to them (Geraerts and McNally, 2007). In "Unconscious Repressed Memory Is Scientifically Questionable," the authors report no success at finding experimental evidence to support the claim that people are capable of "motivated forgetting," or irretrievably repressing unwanted memories (Patihis, et. al., 2014). The idea seems to have spread through pop culture on the basis of self help books, training seminars and special weekend clinics (Ofshe & Watters, 1996). So there was never any scientific basis to the idea of repressed memory in the first place.

Additionally, many of the supposedly "recovered" memories, like those from *Michelle Remembers*, stretched the limits of credulity. In therapy, Michelle "remembered" stabbings, a car

accident, and a long absence from school, events which should have been verifiable in the public record, but were not. Michelle and others sometimes remembered the completely impossible, like being assaulted by relatives who were not around during the years in question, or even by supernatural beings (Munger, 2016). If such things could not have happened, how did people end up with memories that they did?

It turns out to be easier than one might think to instill false memories. Elizabeth Loftus demonstrated this experimentally and explained her research in "The Formation of False Memories" (1995). Loftus was already known for her work on memory with her famous "car accident" experiment, showing how memory of an accident was changed by the language used to describe it (Loftus & Pickrell, 1995). After seeing people embellish their memories with lots of false details, she wanted to see if entirely false memories could be implanted in people's minds.

Loftus had students at the University of Washington recruit pairs of people for her study - a subject, and an older relative who could remember the subject's childhood. The subjects in the study were 3 males and 21 females ranging in age from 18 to 53. The participants were told the experiment was a study of memory, and each was provided a booklet describing several incidents from their childhood, provided by the older relative. The

booklet had a paragraph at the top of each page describing the childhood incident, with space below for the participants to fill in the story with details from memory (Loftus & Pickrell, 1995). Unbeknownst to the subjects, one of the "memories" described in the booklet, of getting lost in a shopping mall as a child and being helped by an older woman, was a creation of Elizabeth Loftus and her researchers. The older relatives had provided plausible details, like the name of a local mall, but the rest of the story was made up (Loftus & Pickrell, 1995).

After completing the booklet the subjects were asked to appear for a pair of interviews. At the first interview, they were prompted to recall as much as possible about each of the events in their booklet. They were sent along home with instructions to try to remember even more for the next interview. At the second interview, the subjects were again pressed to remember as much as possible about all the incidents in their booklets. Lastly, after the second interview, the subjects were debriefed, where the researchers apologized for the deception and explained why it was necessary. Participants were told about the attempt to create a false memory and asked to guess which of the memories had been the false one (Loftus & Pickrell, 1995).

The results showed that about 75% of the participants did not recall the false memory. But, a quarter of them did, some insisting, even after they knew the mall story was not true, that they could remember specific details about it. Additionally, Loftus describes other experiments where researchers attempted to implant even more outrageous memories, like knocking over a punchbowl at a family wedding. Again, on repeated interviews, about a quarter of the participants could be counted on to start adding details to the false story, even if they did not remember it at first. Loftus suggests that the repeated interview format creates inherent social demands which some subjects then try to meet. (Loftus & Pickrell, 1995). The results of this study were consistent with Elizabeth Loftus' hypothesis that false memories could be implanted.

The Satanic Panic and the repressed memory craze had real-world consequences. George Franklin, a mild-mannered sheriff's deputy, served several years in prison for the murder of his daughter's childhood friend. There was no evidence of his involvement and he had never been considered a suspect when the murder took place. But, many years later during

Repressed Memory...?

memory recovery therapy, his daughter "remembered" seeing him kill her friend. Recovered memories broke up families and sent several people to prison (Newman, Klemfuss & Loftus, 2013).

However the tide began to turn when some of the accusers started to suspect the memories they recovered had been false. For example, according to Newman, Klemfuss and Loftus, in the 90's a woman named Elizabeth Gale was in treatment in Illinois when her therapist helped her "recover" memories of being subjected to satanic ritual abuse. Considering it later, Gale decided she had been led to believe this by her therapists, and was awarded \$7.5 million in damages for her malpractice lawsuit (Newman, Klemfuss & Loftus, 2013).

Meanwhile, another researcher to look deeply into the phenomenon is R.J. McNally. He describes a series of experiments in which he tests various hypotheses about repressed memories. McNally began looking into memory repression when he solicited for subjects who had been victims of Childhood Sexual Abuse (CSA). He found that several people volunteered for this study who had no memory of CSA. When asked why they volunteered, they explained that they did not remember CSA, but because of various psychological distress symptoms, they suspected they might have repressed CSA in their pasts. This led McNally to create a set of subject categories for exploring the possibility of repressed memories in the laboratory (McNally et al, 2005).

To perform his experiments, McNally used classified advertising to recruit both men and women, and then divided the respondents into four different categories - 1) people who felt they had experienced CSA but had no memory of it, 2) people who experienced CSA, forgot it, and then remembered later, 3) a continuous memory group, with those who experienced CSA and always remembered it, and 4) a control group who experienced no CSA at all (McNally et al, 2005). These groups were administered psychological assessments of their propensity to exhibit false memory using the Deese/Roediger/ Mc Dermott (DRM) paradigm. The subjects were exposed to lists of words with varying emotional content related to CSA and asked to remember them. McNally hypothesized that if the repressed memory theory was true, subjects with the ability to repress distressing memories would score worse on remembering words related to CSA. In fact, what he found during his experiment was



Shirley Mason, the real "Sybil," was never able to live a normal life.

that all three groups reporting CSA recalled more of the trauma-related words than they did of neutral words (McNally et al, 2005). This experiment, along with most of McNally's other experiments on these four types, suggested no natural ability to suppress memories.

As the malpractice suits began to multiply, recovered memory therapy stopped being popular and the Satanic Panic was over as quickly as it had begun, lending credence to the idea that it had been much ado about nothing. Today, research into recovered memory continues, but has its limitations. People who sign up know they are involved with studies of CSA and this can affect their responses. Additionally, the ability to recall or forget lists of words, even emotionally loaded ones, may not directly correlate with the mechanisms of memory suppression. Despite these limitations, the lack of hard evidence proving conclusively that repressed memories are real, and the ease with which false memories can be instilled, strongly suggests that the idea may be no more than a psychological misconception. Like the stories of Sybil and Michelle, "repressed memories" may be, at best, a metaphor for the dark depths of the human mind.

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Critical Thinking in 21st Century Media

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Introduction to Psychology