INKLINGS
Research and Rhetoric from the Suffolk University First-Year Writing Program

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SUFFOLK UNIVERSITY'S FIRST-YEAR WRITING PROGRAM
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Dear Reader:

For many years, students in Suffolk’s First Year Writing (FYW) courses have produced incredible work—work that is thoughtful, insightful, creative, and persuasive—and that work, after the semester ends, has sometimes languished in desk drawers or sat, inert, on computer drives. We are delighted to finally give some of these essays the audience they deserve. Inklings was founded to honor the hard work of our FYW students and the professors who pushed them to do their best. We received many submissions from our WRI 101 and WRI 102 first-year writing courses, and we selected 11 of the strongest essays to showcase outstanding student work here. Our only regret is that we were able to publish such a small portion of the deserving submissions. Regardless of acceptance in Inklings or not, we celebrate all of our student writers in WRI101 and WRI102 classes, and we are thankful for every student who submitted their work for consideration.

The essays that appear in this collection were written during the 2022-2023 school year for assignments in WRI 101 and 102 classes. They were self-submitted by students and chosen through a blinded selection process by a panel of English and Writing Professors. They have been only very lightly edited and formatted to preserve the students’ voices: we see these as samples of real first-year writing student work rather than perfectly polished professional products: please read them as such.

We would like to thank all of our Suffolk First-Year Writing program instructors for their work with students in the classroom and for encouraging student submissions. We would also like to thank Amy Monticello and Quentin Miller for their support of this project; Rich Miller, Jason Tucker, and Amy Monticello for their help judging our submissions; and our student research assistants, Sophia Hernandez, Catherine Barnum, Macarena Torti, and Hannah Baptiste, for their assistance with the research and design of this issue. We’d also like to thank Elizabeth Finnen for her assistance with this publication.

We see Inklings as a celebration of excellent first-year student writing at Suffolk, as well as a reflection of the dedicated instructors leading our writing courses. We hope you enjoy the first issue!

Nick Frangipane and Erin Trauth
Co-editors and FYW Instructors,
Suffolk University First-Year Writing Program
Youth and Trauma in 

Derry Girls

1st Place Essay
Student: Olivia Windisch

Student biography: Olivia Windisch is a Political Science-Law and Public Policy major from Londonderry, NH. Olivia wrote this essay for Professor Frangipane’s class. Regarding Suffolk’s first-year writing classes, Olivia said: “my favorite part of First-Year Writing II was the opportunity to research topics that I found interesting. In order to create meaningful writing, it is essential that you feel passionate about your topic. I am thankful that my First-Year Writing II class gave me a chance to grow as a writer and researcher.”

“Youth and Trauma in Derry Girls”

In the show Derry Girls, created by Lisa McGee, the Catholic-Protestant conflict is viewed through the lenses of adolescents growing up in Northern Ireland. Throughout the series, the main characters Erin, Clare, Orla, Michelle, and James are experiencing their teenage milestones during the conflict of The Troubles. As Catholics living in Derry, the main characters are exposed to the tragedy that the conflict has created across their small town. However, they overlook the incidents that occur as minor inconveniences while their main focus is growing up and experiencing teenage milestones. This show strongly represents how teenagers are able to overcome their surroundings to develop friendships, relationships, and teenage memories. From exploring their sexual identities to attempting to succeed in their education, the characters are fighting to develop a sense of normalcy that overcomes the violence surrounding them. The way the girls approach the conflict is often in a humorous sense and while this may seem like a lighthearted way of addressing the conflict, it is really a response to the fear and trauma that the girls are scared to accept. By acknowledging that the events that happen around them are serious and alarming, they will be accepting the fact that they are also in
danger. The show *Derry Girls* portrays that youth overlook the violence occurring in their country as a response to trauma occurring around them.

To the main characters, the conflict occurring around them often comes across as a disruption of their daily lives. In Season 2, Episode 3 of *Derry Girls* the characters are planning on attending a Take That concert in Belfast. When Erin's mom is having her reservations about the girls attending, Erin says “No one will ever come here because we can't stop killing each other!” (“The Concert”). This comment shows the nonchalant way that the girls talk about The Troubles. Although there are violent acts occurring around them the girls often view The Troubles as a hindrance to their teenage fun. As mentioned in the article “Trauma of the Troubles” by Andrea DenHoed, “The Troubles seem almost incidental to the daily lives of the characters of *Derry Girls*... Mostly they deal with typical teenage comedy issues... For them, the Troubles are often just an inconvenience causing traffic jams and graffiti.” The girls use their daily lives as a way to distract themselves from the trauma that they keep deep in the back of their minds. It is easier for the girls to view The Troubles as an inconvenience rather than a threat because they don't want to allow the situation to overtake their important teenage milestones.

In another episode of *Derry Girls*, the girls are excited to take part in a Friends Across the Barricade trip to bridge the divide between Catholic and Protestant children. While the girls tell their parents that they are invested in the core mission of the trip, their true intentions are to meet Protestant boys from the Londonderry Boys Academy. Throughout the episode, Erin and Michelle are focused on finding boys within the group to create romantic relationships with while Clare wants to find a “fully protestant friend” to compete with rival Jenny Joyce (“Across the Barricade”). Throughout the entirety of the episode, the core values of the Friends Across the Barricade are overlooked until Clare reaches a breaking point when participating in a group activity. The fear that is deeply ingrained in the back of the girls' minds comes out as Clare fears she will be dropped by a Protestant boy during an activity [in which they are rappelling down the side of a cliff]: “He's trying to kill me! He wants to kill us all, all of the Catholics” (“Across the Barricade”). This moment in the series shows that although the girls often ignore The Troubles, they have a deep trauma-driven fear that they choose to ignore for their own mental protection.

Clare's character often starts to show her fear before the other girls in the group; she's the first to tell the others when something is worrying. Clare's perfectionist tendencies and fear of authority are a culmination of anxiety about her surrounding environment. As the girls navigate their school and look toward their futures they have to prepare for the challenges that lay ahead. When the girls
take an exam that determines their academic futures Clare reveals her fears about their future: “Passing those exams was our only chance. We're girls. We're poor. We're from Northern Ireland. We're Catholic, for Christ's sake!” (“The Night Before”). The girls rarely speak about how their backgrounds will affect their future, but throughout the episode, they exhibit a panic that hasn't been seen very much during the series. They attempt to break into the school to get their results before the rest of their class.

Though this panic is displayed in a humorous way that keeps the viewer entertained, the core meaning is deeper than just kids being worried about passing an exam. The girls are aware of their circumstances, as Clare mentioned they are Catholic, poor, and from Northern Ireland. They recognize that these traits could be a hindrance to their success in the future and want to make sure that they can overcome them. In the article “‘Derry Girls': And Now Their Troubles are Ended” by James Poniewozik, an important theme of Derry Girls is addressed: “Above everything looms adulthood” (Poniewozik). As teenagers, the girls are allowed to focus on themselves and growing up with the fear of their future in the back of their minds, but, like any teenager, reality creeps up on them when they least expect it. They are fearful that their time of overlooking the conflict that surrounds them will come to an end when they become adults. The girls use their adolescence as a bubble to protect them from reality. Once The Troubles become more than an inconvenience or a traffic jam, they will face their trauma.

The first view of the girls and their families' outlook on The Troubles is represented in the first episode when Orla’s mom, Sarah, is concerned about missing her tanning appointment due to a bomb threat on the bridge: “It’s gonna play havoc on my buildup” she says, completely moving past the fear that might cause someone when they’re alerted about a bomb on a bridge that they regularly cross (“Episode 1”). The creator of the show, Lisa McGee, grew up in Northern Ireland during The Troubles and based the show on her own experiences. In the article “How the Creator of Derry Girls Found Humor in a Troubled Time” Anna Russell mentions that “I think there’s sort of layers of trauma that we haven't even looked in the eye at home.” McGee acknowledges that there is an unspoken trauma that looms over the town of Derry throughout her childhood even until today. McGee acknowledges that there she also focused on her adolescence and growing up and often saw The Troubles as a disruption to daily life. In the article “Damaged Youth: Prevalence of Community Violence Exposure and Implications for Adolescent Well-being in Post-conflict Northern Ireland” McAloney says, “Young people in Northern Ireland are exposed to high levels of violence, both indirectly and directly, and this may have a significant impact on their subsequent development, mental health, and well-being in the important developmental stage of adolescence and
McGee acknowledges this as trauma that hasn't fully been comprehended by the people in Northern Ireland. The trauma that the young people are experiencing during this time is affecting their long-term development over time so although they are overlooking it as teenagers, they will inevitably have to face it as they get older.

As Erin Quinn wrote in her diary: “It’s fair to say I have a somewhat complicated relationship with my home town” (“Episode 1”). While their home of Derry is home to an ongoing conflict and unrest, it is also home to their families and childhood memories. The girls have a tight-knit group that they use as their support system to work through their typical teenage issues, but also as a way to escape the reality around them. They turn their attention to creating little issues that distract them from the conflict, although often The Troubles follow them in their daily lives. When the girls were on the bus to Belfast on their way to the Take That! concert, Michelle brought a suitcase full of vodka for the trip. When they realized that their school headmaster Sister Michael might catch them they claim that the suitcase isn't theirs. This leads to the bomb squad investigating the suitcase and the girls running off to avoid being caught as the owners (‘The Concert’). Even when they participate in teenage activities the consequences can be much more detrimental due to the climate around them.

In the show Derry Girls the main characters are navigating their adolescence while growing up during a dangerous time in Northern Ireland. The girls frequently avoid acknowledging the conflict around them as a serious threat and think of it as a disruption to their daily lives. As they are growing up their main focus is their friendships, romantic relationships, and having typical teenage experiences. The girls view The Troubles as a disruption in order to repress their fear and trauma surrounding the topic. To avoid truly experiencing the emotions and allowing the fear to ruin the fun, they choose to avoid thinking about it. If they spend their time worrying about the conflict they will legitimize the repressed fear and trauma that they want to avoid. The main characters rarely acknowledge their circumstances in a serious light throughout the series and instead joke about them as a way to lightheartedly confront their fears. The show Derry Girls shows the lives of a group of teenagers who avoid confronting the conflict surrounding them as a way to repress their true emotions and concerns for their families and futures.

Works Cited


"Breaking the Chains: Overcoming the Harmful Effects of Black Masculinity Stereotypes"

After a long class lecture, Amari was ready to go to his dorm and relax for the end of the night. It had been a long day; he deserved it. As he approached the elevator, he stood by a woman who was also waiting. Had it been any other day, Amari would have smiled and made conversation, but his exhaustion was overpowering. Instead, he nodded at her. Her reaction was unexpected, as she seemed disturbed, afraid even. Slowly, she scooted away from him, lengthening the gap between them. A tight fist began to form around her bag, and she stood facing forward, rigid. Amari sighed, as he was familiar with this sort of interaction. Finally, the elevator doors opened, but when gestured to let the woman go in first, she simply said “I'll take the next one.” Again, Amari sighed, “suit yourself” and entered. The woman's reaction left Amari unsettled, but what could he do? This woman was not the first, nor would she be the last. As a Black man, this was his reality and there was nothing he could do to change it. The reputation the media created preceded him, and he was judged before he even spoke. The media's narrative...
depicts Black men as inherently violent and dangerous, while White women are seen as weak and vulnerable. Such stereotypes not only erase the diverse experiences of Black men, but also have long-lasting effects on their daily lives, which include increased stigmatization, discrimination, and violence.

The stereotypes surrounding African American men are often reinforced in films, particularly known as "Hip-Hop films." The increased exposure of Hip-Hop "into Hollywood was met with both concern and enthusiasm" because of the possible exploitation of the Black experience and the chance for White audiences to "experience black life" (Boylorn 146). Hip-hop's popularity in Hollywood both reinforced and challenged stereotypes against Black men. The commodification of the Black experience often reinforced societal perceptions of Black men as dangerous and hypermasculine and reduced the complexities of Black life to easily marketable tropes. On the other hand, Black audiences finally had access to films featuring Black actors, providing representation that had long been lacking in Hollywood. Additionally, White audiences were able to experience Black life without engaging with it personally, reinforcing the notion that Black men were objects to be observed rather than people to be understood. Hip-Hop films, like Boyz in the Hood, upheld stereotypes against Black men while simultaneously providing representation, highlighting the significance of challenging these tropes and creating nuanced portrayals of Black masculinity in media and culture. Boyz in the Hood follows the lives of Black men growing up in South Los Angeles: Tre, a boy whose father and girlfriend help him stay out of trouble; Doughboy, a charismatic young man involved in gang culture; Ricky Baker, a young father and high school football star; and Furious, Tre's father, a positive mentor for Tre and his friends who tries to keep them on the right path in a neighborhood filled with violence and crime.

The film portrays three different types of Black men: the hypersexual, the violent gangster, and the progressive Black man. These stereotypes are not unique to this particular film but are prevalent in media and culture at large. One character in Boyz in the Hood who embodies the stereotype of the violent gangster is Doughboy. He grew up in poverty and violence, eventually becoming involved in gang culture. While he is often portrayed as a thug, he is also street-smart and charismatic, demonstrating a complexity beyond stereotypes. Another character in the film is Ricky Baker, who represents the hypersexual stereotype of Black men. He is a teenage father and talented high school football player with a lifelong goal of making it big and leaving his hometown. In contrast to these two characters, Furious is a positive role model for the main character, Tre. Furious emphasizes the importance of education and personal responsibility. He represents the progressive Black man stereotype, who is often held up as a model of Black masculinity.
Contrary to Furious's advice both Ricky Baker and Doughboy choose paths that lead them to live short lives. Tre, however, ends up moving out of South-Central Los Angeles and into the suburbs with his father which reinforces the narrative that only progressive Black men can be successful in life. In these movies, the progressive Black man always wins, whereas the other characters do not have the same fate. Such an ending pushes the narrative that only Black men like Tre win in the end. These movies often lack nuance, leading people to believe that there is only one way a Black man should live. Moreover, if a Black man seems like he fits the hypersexual or gangster category, his future is dim. This is as if to say such a man could not turn his life around or change.

The rhetoric surrounding Black men has real-world consequences, from limiting opportunities to endangering their lives. Oftentimes suspects are described as “tall, Black, and male,” pushing this idea that all criminals look like Black men and all Black men are potential criminals. One must recognize that Black men are human just like everyone else. As Jalen Wright explains, “we are not violent, at least most of us. Also, Black men work hard. Unfortunately, the media only sees us as gangsters, athletes, or rappers, but there are so many more types of Black men out there. We’re just regular people.”\(^1\) Wright’s quote emphasizes the misrepresentation of Black men in the media, and how this has contributed to perpetuating negative stereotypes. He argues that these stereotypes are not reflective of most Black men, who are hardworking. Moreover, he emphasizes the need to recognize the diversity within the Black male community. There are many Black men who are doctors, lawyers, teachers, and business owners, and their contributions to society should be acknowledged and celebrated.

The media’s portrayal of Black men as one-dimensional characters propagates damaging generalizations that contribute to the systemic oppression and destruction of Black bodies in America. In Ta-Nehisi Coates’s book, *Between the World and Me*, he asserts that “In America, it is traditional to destroy the Black body – it is heritage” (Coates 103). Coates’s statement is a powerful critique of the systemic racism that has pervaded American society since its founding. It acknowledges that this is not a recent or isolated phenomenon, but rather a part of a long-standing tradition of oppression. By recognizing this, we can begin to understand the deep roots of racism in America and work towards creating a more just and equitable society for all.

Black men are often unfairly stigmatized based on their appearance and cultural tastes, but many argue that this is not solely the fault of the media's portrayal. "The Case for Respectability Politics" by Danielle C. Belton suggests that a person's attire and music preferences can contribute to negative perceptions

\(^1\) From a personal interview, conducted in-person on April 30, 2023.
regardless of media influence. Furthermore, while the media can contribute to harmful stereotypes, it is not the only source of these biases. Respectability politics is a way for Black people to navigate and potentially combat negative perceptions and biases that exist within the broader societal context. Belton argues that people are often judged on their appearance and behavior, and that how one presents themselves can impact how they are received, both by people of the same race and people of different races. While this idea may offer a way for some Black men to navigate systemic racism and discrimination, it is not the perfect solution and may reinforce harmful stereotypes. Respectability politics often requires conforming to White norms, causing the erasure of diversity of experiences and cultures within the Black community. By placing the burden of combating negative perceptions on individual Black men, rather than addressing the source of the issues, respectability politics can further stigmatize those who do not fit into these narrow expectations. Moreover, focusing on tiny issues like the way Black men portray themselves steals the spotlight from the greater picture: systemic racism and discrimination.

The negative portrayals of Black men in the media have resulted in damaging stereotypes that continue to impact their daily lives, including facing greater levels of stigma, discrimination, and violence. However, there are ways that we can work towards solving this problem. We can practice social justice in our daily lives by challenging biases and assumptions and advocating for marginalized communities like Black men. Engaging in community-based initiatives that promote social justice is another way to make a positive impact. While it may be difficult to challenge the deeply ingrained stereotypes that exist in our society, it is not impossible. By remaining educated and taking consistent steps towards change, we can work towards a more just and equitable society for all. It's important to acknowledge that feeding into biases may offer short-term gratification and satisfaction, but in the long run, it only reinforces false assumptions and perpetuates harmful stereotypes. To create a world where Black men are no longer subjected to damaging stereotypes, we must all take responsibility for challenging these biases and promoting social justice in our daily lives. By doing so, we can work towards a future where everyone is valued and respected regardless of their race or gender.

Amari threw himself on his bed and let out what seemed to be the hundredth sigh of the day. Even though his interaction with the woman at the elevator was short, he could not help but replay the encounter in his head. He thought about how the woman had eyed him with such fear and how she made a negative assumption about him based on the color of his skin. But as he continued to ponder over the interaction, he began to see the humor in it all. The woman’s ignorance was not his problem. She did not know who he was, nor was she willing to learn who was beneath his dark skin. He was more than what the media painted
him out to be. He knew that he couldn't change the color of his skin, but he could use his experiences to better himself and for those who would come after him. This was not going to let this bring him down, but rather use it as fuel to make a difference. As he slowly drifted off to sleep, Amari could not help but smile. He had a long road ahead of him, but he was ready for the journey. This encounter was only the beginning.

Works Cited


Humanity’s inherent fear of death and insatiable desire for eternal life has been a point of contention for thousands of years, discussed in literature as old as *The Epic of Gilgamesh* and attempted by ancient people like Chinese Emperor Qin Shi Huang. It seems to be human nature to seek mastery over life. Now, more than ever, immortality is thought to be a feasible goal. As the scientists behind the digitization of human consciousness and enhancement of the human body are receiving massive funding and support, the popularity of the biohacking lifestyle steadily rises. But the path to immortality may not be as safe or simple as some project. There are numerous pitfalls to consider: the risky tactic of biohackers, the inequalities that transhumanist technologies would create, and the chance we have to forsake the giftedness of life. The quest for immortality is one that can be foolish at best, and harmful at worst.

One would only need to look at humanity’s oldest piece of literature, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, to see how much we desire immortality, and for how long this wish has persisted. Written around 4,000 years ago, this story chronicles the quest of Gilgamesh to overcome death after he witnesses his companion Enkidu die. Though he ultimately does not achieve physical immortality, he gains a kind of symbolic immortality through the existence of his story. Whether or not the tale is true doesn’t matter; the important thing to take from this piece of writing is how humanity always has chased eternal life, even when there was no realistic way to reach it. Jumping forward in time, one can observe parallels in the life of Qin Shi
Huang, the first emperor of the Chinese Qin dynasty. He too sought to prolong his life, sending men to hunt for the so-called Elixir of Life. They never found it, and the emperor’s life was cut short by this quest as his court doctors prescribed lethal doses of mercury sulfide, believing it would be the key to his immortality. In the 20th century, solid scientific efforts were made in the study of aging, which led to the discovery of the human growth hormone. This substance was used by bodybuilders to increase their physical capabilities and was also thought to reduce the effects of aging. Potential dangers unknown, people were eager to indulge in the fantasy of a longer life. The excitement around it led to quick commodification by entrepreneurs, which eventually gave way to the modern market for such products, where billionaires are investing tons into the research of any possible life-extending measures.

There are a number of entities working for immortality in the 21st century, as discussed in the essay “Silicon Valley’s Quest for Immortality and its Worrying Sacrifices” by James S. Horton and Nicholas K. Priest. One of the major contenders is the crowd known as “biohackers”: people that are trying to extend their lifespan by “augmenting [their] daily habits to alter [their] physiology” (Horton & Priest 3). These biohackers are implementing everything from unique dietary supplements, to dosages of infrared lights, to drinking coffee served with butter. Specific companies have formed to offer commercialized biohacks to these consumers, such as Gwyneth Paltrow’s “Goop” and Dave Asprey’s “Bulletproof,” claiming that use of certain ointments, juices, and vitamins can slow aging, cure disease, and improve all aspects of health. Both the Goop and Bulletproof websites give clear, commodified instructions for how those interested in a change can “discover what better feels like” (“About Us”). With an estimated market size of over 15.4 billion USD, the biohackers certainly act as though they have the secrets of life exposed (Grand View Research).

Biohacking methods range from simple everyday lifestyle changes like calorie reduction and taking cold showers, to odd and expensive options that are seen only in high-profile settings such as the Bulletproof coffee shops, which feature “magnetic furniture, grounded floor panels and elevated yoga” (Horton & Priest 3). Some biohackers even advocate for outright dangerous choices like “regular use of prescription and illegal drugs, such as the psychoactive narcotic MDMA…and the narcolepsy nootropic modafinil” (Horton & Priest 3). Though some of these may be more common than others, even the simplest techniques can prove dangerous. The example given in “Silicon Valley’s Quest for Immortality” is a great one, where the authors discuss cold showers that biohackers believe greatly boost the immune system’s capabilities. However, they are naive to the possible dangers of this habit, as the essay states that “low temperatures can also constrict your blood vessels -
increasing blood pressure - and increase your susceptibility to infection” (Horton & Priest 4). So, as much as some may think a cold shower provides only benefits, there are obvious counteractive risks. This is a common thread found among other biohacking tactics. Horton and Priest go on to say, “A biohacking practice may yield a net gain in health when you’re young, but as you age there’s a good chance the balance will shift towards a loss” (4). At that point, biohacking begins to seem foolish, because isn’t old age the time that one is trying to defeat in the first place? Biohackers frequently do not acknowledge the compromise that must be made with their lifestyle: “that every gain comes with a tradeoff. Research has shown that we can extend life, but at a cost in ability to fight infection” (Horton & Priest 4).

Additionally, even though companies place legal disclaimers that “these products are not intended to diagnose, treat, cure, or prevent any disease” on their websites, it is well-known that the majority of people buying these products do so with the belief that they will accomplish exactly that. With all of this considered, it seems as though the biohacking community should not be nearly as popular as it is.

Another modern group to consider is the transhumanists: people who see the future of humanity as being intricately connected to machinery and tech, even more than we currently are. Already, people can replace damaged or lost appendages with prosthetics in order to gain their use again; why not go one step further and replace everything with ageless machinery? The mindset of transhumanists, as they blur the line between humanity and technology, is well summarized in the article “No Death and an Enhanced Life: Is the Future Transhuman?” by Robin McKie: “Failing organs would be replaced by longer-lasting high-tech versions just as carbon-fiber blades could replace the flesh, blood and bone of natural limbs.” Elon Musk's Neuralink is another form of this, where he seeks to connect a computer interface directly to the brain. Additionally, running with the belief that the human brain is functionally similar to a computer, there are some who hope to completely digitize human consciousnesses, allowing one to “live” endlessly in a virtual plane. This concept can be intimidating, especially when we begin to consider an entirely post-human existence, but this is what many transhumanists are working towards: immortality via technological or digital means.

However, it is seen that people in support of these movements often fail to realize or admit the full risk of the things they are endorsing. The major thing to recognize is the inequalities that come as a result of new technologies. In his essay “Staying Human,” author Dinesh D'Souza discusses many of these in detail. He explains that throughout history, the development of radios, television, telephones, and cellphones have all had a similar experience with consumers, where they “began as expensive toys for the rich and afterwards became cheap enough for
ordinary people” (D’Souza 3). With these entertainment-focused technologies, there is not a huge issue because they are just luxuries that do not directly affect one’s ability to live. But, in the case of the lifesaving and life-extending technologies that may come from the transhumanist movement, the gap between those who can and cannot afford them becomes concerning. D’Souza confronts this as well, stating “Democratic societies can live with inequalities conferred by the lottery of nature, but can they countenance the deliberate introduction of biological alterations that give some citizens a better chance to succeed than others?” (3). Many transhumanists and scientists see this inequality as inevitable and therefore acceptable, exhibiting their lack of concern for the future of society. This point of view is further enforced by the people behind these movements: the extremely wealthy.

An article by journalist John Harris titled “If the super-rich want to live forever, our planet is truly doomed” goes over a number of these rich individuals and companies that are currently funding the hunt for technology to extend human life, saying “Google founders, Larry Page and Sergey Brin, and the Trump-supporting venture capitalist, Peter Thiel, show what happens when such ideas meet big money. The same goes...[for] the Amazon founder Jeff Bezos.” Elon Musk’s Neuralink company is yet another example, along with many others. When it is the rich that are putting the funds into developing these technologies, of course they will push back against the harmful inequalities that they could result in. They are driven to secure immortality for themselves, and then to sell it exclusively to the highest bidders with no regard for those that cannot afford it but may need it just as much. Transhumanist supporters’ ignorance of these facts is problematic for the movement as a whole, because when you are planning for the future, it is absolutely crucial to consider the dangers of the path you choose.

This leads into the next issue with the quest for immortality. No matter the method of reaching that goal, is the quest itself well-intentioned, or is it tainted with greed and selfish desires? Horton and Priest would agree with the latter, stating outright “the technology-driven ultra-rich are adopting these new approaches in an attempt to extend their own lives” (1). When the funder’s priority is themselves, the outlook for the movement overall is not so good. Looking closer into the problem, Brian Green from Santa Clara University wrote “A Dispatch from the ‘Transhuman Visions’ Conference,” where he documented some of what he observed at a very early-stage transhumanist meeting back in 2014. Specifically, he says that of the approximate 300 attendees, “Some were there because they were deeply concerned about the health of their loved ones, and they saw transhumanism as the chance to save their lives” (Green). With this evidence it becomes clear that even early on, the main audience of these technological advancements was those
who are truly in need of it, seeking to prolong or save the lives of those most important to them. Compare this with the goals of the rich, which are entirely self-serving, and it paints a disheartening picture. When you take into account the slim chance that those in need of such technology will actually be able to afford it at the insane price point it is sure to have, the image becomes even darker.

The biggest justification that is given in favor of investing in immortality research is the idea that, as John Harris says in his article, “age [is] a curable disease, and our final end [is] something that could be indefinitely postponed,” but can such a claim really be proven true? At least for our current society and economy, death is something of a necessary evil. Over recent years, we have seen companies pushing the retirement age to be older and older as the average life expectancy climbs higher. This leads to the dilemma of a workforce full of elderly people that are physically or mentally incapable of doing the work, but financially incapable of retiring. Harris expands upon this, asking “what would be the social and cultural consequences of literally pathologizing old age? If we lived much longer, would we also be expected to work indefinitely?” Massively extending the lives of even a small percentage of people could have catastrophic socioeconomic consequences, not to mention what would happen if we were able to immortalize people completely. Thinking of aging as nothing but a disease to be cured is ignorant and utterly unrealistic.

Overpopulation is another obvious element to consider. Currently, in 2023, Earth has a population of about 8 billion, and that number is steadily rising. In his book *How Many People Can the Earth Support?*, Joel E. Cohen speculates on the carrying capacity of our planet. He says “Conventional agriculture cannot grow enough food for 694 billion people; not enough water falls from the skies. The finiteness of the earth guarantees that ceilings on human numbers do exist” (Cohen 2). Though it's impossible to determine the capacity at this point, many experts believe there must be one. Even at this stage, issues such as pollution, global warming, starvation, and homelessness plague us. All of these problems and more would be severely exacerbated if humans could live forever. No death would mean an uncontrolled growth in our numbers, and we would inevitably hit that population ceiling. We only have one planet, so how would we cope with it being completely tapped of resources? Until we have solutions for these problems, chasing immortality seems like a deadly idea.

A post-human future is another possibility that should be discussed when speaking on the topic of immortality. With the lofty goals that developers have in areas of artificial intelligence and digitization of the human brain, it is thought that people may reach a point where we exist in a state beyond what is currently considered to be a physically human entity. This may be achieved by our organic
bodies becoming completely made up of artificial, fabricated parts, or by computerizing all human consciousnesses into a digital utopia. Whatever form such a future may take and whether or not it is even possible remains to be seen, but ultimately it is important to keep in mind the consequences of this possibility- the consequences of losing our humanity.

In a similar vein, a major concern is brought up from a philosophical perspective; there may be something dangerous about tampering with our mortal nature in this way, forgoing the giftedness of life and striving to exert God-level control. Michael Sandel, an American philosopher, wrote an article entitled “The Case Against Perfection,” in which he analyzes the moral dilemmas of tampering with our natural gifts, and argues against doing so. He says, “To appreciate children as gifts is to accept them as they come, not as objects of our design” (9). Though this is in reference to genetic engineering and designer babies, it relates directly to the idea that the elements of luck that determine who we are and what we are capable of are inherently valuable. Sandel expresses that while we may believe this quest for immortality is a natural next step, “the ethics of willfulness and the biotechnological powers it now enlists are arrayed against the claims of giftedness... bioengineering and genetic enhancement threaten to dislodge it” (9). He rightly fears that by enhancing our lives with unnatural means, we are ignoring this foundational principle of giftedness. Whether one’s circumstances are viewed secularly as part of a genetic lottery or religiously as God’s creation, it is intended that we live as we are born and die as we age. To transcend humanity or live forever would be to swear off nature and go directly against this belief in life’s giftedness.

Connecting the historical record of dangerous and failed attempts at immortality with the modern reality of biohackers and transhumanists incites a significant worry, especially with the steadily growing popularity of these movements, as evidenced by their market values and the big names behind them. Chasing immortality in this way, with little to no regard for the consequences that may come as a result, is foolish and dangerous. We have already observed some of the harm produced by certain biohacking methods. It is easy to see the issues that would arise in a transhumanist future, and the true intention of those behind these technological endeavors can be called into question as one considers whether they are seeking to improve human health and happiness, or are corrupted by selfishness and greed that bleeds into the movements themselves.

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“Electric Cars Are Not Here Yet”

In the future, I envision a world not run by the greenhouse gasses we have been abusing for most of our industrial history, but one that thrives off of renewable energies for all processes. A hope for a cleaner environment has to start soon, or else we may end up like the dystopian future of Pixar’s *Wall-E* before we know it. Transportation is one of the heaviest producers of CO2 in the past years, accounting for “37% of CO2 emissions from end-use sectors in 2021” (International Energy Agency), so it’s only natural this would be one of the most integral aspects to cut down on. One way that people think they are helping the environment is by ditching their gas-powered cars and switching to electric vehicles. The recent rise in electric vehicles is staggering; merely 11 years ago, 120,000 electric cars were sold in 2012 alone. Now, those numbers account for only one week of sales in 2021 (International Energy Agency). With the recent rise in electric vehicles, the reason most consumers are shelling out for the higher costs is because of the zero tailpipe emissions that electric vehicles produce, instead being operated through the massive battery underlying the entire vehicle. This massive battery also eliminates the heavy costs at the gas station, instead needing to be charged either at home or at a designated electric car charging station. In an effort to help the environment, consumers believe purchasing a clean energy alternative is the difference that needs to be made to help protect the planet. On the surface, their efforts are well-placed, yet once you dig deeper, the true environmental cost of buying an electric vehicle is closer to that of a gas-powered car, where long-lasting effects from the internal battery and non-renewable charging are to blame.
The Present

A very common misconception when it comes to electric vehicles involves how they run. The average consumer doesn't typically understand how an electric vehicle works. From the perspective of the everyday worker, it truly only matters if the vehicle operates its basic functions, such as driving, heating, air conditioning, and powering electronics. How EVs (Electric Vehicles) work is through the massive lithium-ion battery underlying the interior of the car itself. In contrast to how normal gas-powered vehicles run, their battery is only a small component opposed to the internal combustion engine that gas-operated vehicles utilize (Dunn). The CO2 production for gas-powered vehicles is through the engine that burns the fossil fuels directly into the atmosphere. EVs simply emit zero tailpipe emissions in the hands of the consumer; the true damage is caused through production of the battery. All processes that envelope battery manufacturing, such as extracting, processing, and transporting the raw materials all produce emissions before the battery is even developed. Manufacturing the cells themselves is also known to require significant energy derived from fossil fuels after all the materials are compiled (Anair).

One of the leading electric car brands, Tesla, has solely produced electric cars through various models since 2003. A study conducted through MIT recorded the amount of CO2 that is produced through the manufacturing of a Tesla Model 3 battery, discovering that one battery can range “between 3,120kg (about 3 tons of ) and 15,680kg (about 16 tons) of CO2” (Crawford). The production of the battery and the electricity that powers the entire vehicle are derived from fossil fuels to partially power EVs in the United States (Anair).

While the production of the batteries has immense ramifications on the environment, there is an underlying moral dilemma that the general public is seemingly unaware of before purchasing an EV. There exists a staggering amount of controversy surrounding the use of child labor within these companies. When we use lithium-ion batteries, they largely include the material of cobalt, which is sourced from the Democratic Republic of Congo. A study conducted through the Geneva Center for Business and Human Rights found that these major auto manufacturers are doing too little to ensure their resources are mined ethically. 80% of the entire world’s cobalt is collected from mines in the Congo, and 20% of that is through the means of children, due to their small size and adaptability to fit within small tunnels (Department of Labor). Tesla's board of directors rejected a proposal requiring the company to provide a detailed report on their material sourcing in August of 2022. Tesla denied a statement from the Geneva Center for a response on the issue (Ohnsman). Through the study, it was concluded that while companies may not receive cobalt directly from Congo, there is a staggeringly high
chance that the cobalt they have in production is sourced through child labor. Through this hefty and costly toll that battery manufacturing reckons upon the environment and morality, EVs as a whole have lifespans that only range for a maximum of eight years, as opposed to gas cars which have been proven to last decades beyond their manufactured date.

From the perspective of the customer, when the electric car battery dies it is disposed of to the nearest auto-body repair shop and is never heard from again. For their car that is now lacking a battery, consumers have the option to get their car battery replaced for free, as is required by law, providing an alluring deal for consumers to stay with electric because of this warranty (“Electric Vehicle Benefits and Considerations.”). If the car battery is somehow damaged through faulty malfunctioning before the eight years have been reached, one can still pay a hefty fee, ranging from 5,000 to 20,000 dollars for a completely new battery. While it is known to be somewhat rare, total battery pack failures have been noted to take place, meaning that some batteries are disposed of before eight years (Wiesenfelder). What matters most to the car company supplying these batteries is that the consumer receives their replacement with a satisfaction guarantee, but what these companies overlook is the cruel fate that the batteries are then sentenced to after their usage ends. Once the car batteries have been depleted, they are dumped into landfills where they secrete toxins, such as heavy metals, into the atmosphere from their decaying shells. This issue permeates all electric car batteries, from common manufacturers such as Toyota or Nissan. However, the problem becomes worse when referring to the likes of Tesla. If a Tesla battery were to be pierced too deep within the landfill or even while still functioning in a car, it is known to short-circuit, combust, then release the aforementioned toxic fumes (Morse). Releasing dangerous chemicals into the environment, especially with a high prevalence centralized into one landfill, can become strongly toxic in such a high volume. All of these fumes can come back into our human environment and be exposed into the food chain if mixed with water, soil, or air, and overall contribute to the depletion of the Earth’s ozone layer. To create a fully renewable EV, there needs to be strides in battery recycling to avoid the mass amounts of materials and waste dumped carelessly into our environment.

Electric vehicles as a whole are required to run off of these batteries to function. All people who drive pure electric bypass the need to fill up their cars at gas stations, believing that this is where they’re saving the environment the most without using fossil fuels. For EV drivers, the alternative is electric car charging stations. An important distinction to understand about car chargers is that each station is not created equal. There are different levels to the car chargers and their stations. Level 1 car chargers are usually supplied in one’s home or can be offered
at public spaces for free. They are the weakest level of charging and provide an absolutely miniscule amount of charge to the car. The range of level 1 chargers can extend from 3-5 miles per hour that the car is placed in the charger. They can be plugged into a regular wall outlet for general ease of use (Moloughney). Then there are level 2 chargers, which provide 12-80 miles per hour of charging. These can also be used in one’s home, albeit at a high cost to one’s monthly bills, or they can be found in public areas for a price, but their prevalence is not frequent within America. The highest form of charging are level 3 chargers, which can power one’s vehicle 3 to 20 miles per minute. To charge the car within these requires hefty voltages and also a fee. They are only found in public spaces and are the only option that can come close to the ease and timeliness of refueling your car with gas (Moloughney). When recharging the car through any of these stations in America, you are charging your car with electricity that is powered through fossil fuels such as gas and coal: but how can that be? All of these stations are set up through the grid, a source of energy located beneath the ground powering thousands of devices, and the grid largely uses natural gas and coal because it is cheap, abundant, and accessible (Martin). When someone charges their car, they are essentially using a very similar amount of fossil fuels for a much less efficient purpose. To create a fully renewable EV, there needs to be strides in technology that powers the vehicles through other means, rather than fossil fuels.

Electric car charging stations are the only way for people to recharge their vehicle, and this is a major hindrance for long road trips. An interesting perspective on car chargers and their viability through long road trips was tested by Joan Lukey. Lukey detailed a report of her journey throughout the East Coast finding if car chargers were prevalent enough to sustain the trip. An app designed to help locate charging stations is not regularly updated, which led her to some unattended and unsupplied stations throughout America. When Lukey was not within a good distance of any active EV charging stations, she had to employ the use of her personal level 1 charger at a hotel overnight, to which she was only able to charge 30 miles over the span of 9 hours. Her personal research concluded with her stating, “…EVs are, for now, best suited to local outings and easygoing long trips where the journey can be the destination” (Lukey). Electric vehicles are not viable for long-term road trips in the present, but this may one day be an issue of the past as we look towards the future of EVs.

The Future

Electric Vehicles are touted in the general public as a sustainable alternative to gas-powered cars. A truly sustainable car is not here yet; however, with recent advancements in technology, that day might soon become a reality. The battery
pack that powers the car is mined unethically and is developed through burning copious amounts of fossil fuels. Recently, there have been multiple companies where their mission is to solely recycle and repurpose used batteries by extracting the raw materials. A company founded in 2017 by a former Tesla executive, Redwood Materials, is making large strides into the battery recycling industry. Their goal is to recover dire materials necessary to repurpose the battery, such as the cobalt, lithium, and nickel. The company itself has raised more than $1 billion from investors through partnerships with common car manufacturers Ford, Toyota, Volkswagen, and Volvo (Chokshi). Panasonic, an electronics manufacturer, has publicly stated they would be using the recycled batteries for their electronics in future products. Looking forward into the future, Redwood Materials announced in December of 2022 that they would be building a new recycling plant in South Carolina, being supported by a $3.5 billion investment. Other than Redwood Materials, another company known as Li-Cycle, founded in 2016, breaks down batteries and manufacturing scrap as well. Li-Cycle uses a safe chemical solution to ensure the batteries don't combust, and then harvests and separates the materials to reuse the components elsewhere (Browning). Both of these companies are prime leaders in the battery recycling industry. Their efforts are being noticed by electronic companies and they've received billions of dollars in capital for future investments to hopefully grow a new sustainable recycling industry.

If we were to make the battery component of the electric vehicle fully sustainable, the average car charging station would still be powered by crude oil and gas. While the average car charger burns fossil fuels to power the electricity, there have been advancements in the use of hydropower to offer a sustainable alternative. Hydropower is the use of fast-running water to produce electricity or power machines using kinetic energy. In sections of the country such as Washington State, hydropower has reduced the carbon footprint of EVs by 61% when compared to a coal-heavy state such as West Virginia (Moseman). The largest EV market in Europe, Norway, has car chargers that are fully powered using hydropower, giving the country as a whole a miniscule carbon footprint. While the use of hydropower for car chargers is the most ideal, the bigger problem for chargers is that they are not frequently spread throughout the country. This, in turn, makes EVs infeasible for long road trips. As of February 2023, the Biden-Harris administration aims to change that fact. President Biden has made ambitious goals in the fields of expanding the versatility of Electric Vehicles and combating climate change. One of these changes is through the introduction of a network of 500,000 electric vehicle chargers along America's highways, costing $7.5 billion ("Fact Sheet"). There are currently three million EVs on the road, and over 130,000 public car chargers across the country. Electric Vehicles are projected to make up 50
percent of new car sales by 2030, so the infrastructure to sustain them is growing as well, but is not here yet.

Electric Vehicles will one day be the fully sustainable car that much of the general public believes them to be now. There have been numerous strides in ensuring the recycling of used batteries provides stable longevity for the market in the foreseeable future. Disregarding the environmental hazards of EVs, there aren't even enough chargers throughout the country to sustain the rapidly expanding industry yet. There have been immense amounts of money funneled into the production of chargers, so soon this will no longer be an issue. With the concerning and fast-approaching effects of climate change creeping ever so closer, the transportation industry is in dire need of a change to reduce its 37% of CO2 emissions it has on the environment as whole. While that day is not here yet, there may soon be a future where personal transportation goes green, and climate change will cease to exist.

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Feminist Generational Gaps and Mother-Daughter Relationships in *Gilmore Girls*

Student: Olivia Windisch

Student biography: Olivia Windisch is a Political Science-Law and Public Policy major from Londonderry, NH. Olivia wrote this essay for Professor Frangipane’s class. Regarding Suffolk’s first-year writing classes, Olivia said: “My favorite part of First-Year Writing II was the opportunity to research topics that I found interesting. In order to create meaningful writing, it is essential that you feel passionate about your topic. I am thankful that my First-Year Writing II class gave me a chance to grow as a writer and researcher.”

“Feminist Generational Gaps and Mother-Daughter Relationships in *Gilmore Girls*”

*Gilmore Girls*, created by Amy Sherman-Palladino, has captured the hearts of generations since its debut on the CW network in 2000. The series depicts the lives of witty and sarcastic Lorelai and Rory Gilmore. The iconic mother-daughter duo live in the fictional town of Stars Hollow, Connecticut where they balance their relationships and the everyday obstacles that life throws at them. Lorelai, a single mother who chose to raise her daughter alone, has a parenting style that resembles a friendship more than a typical mother-daughter relationship. Throughout the show, Lorelai is seen balancing her single motherhood with the help of the town and financial support from her parents. The CW show, *Gilmore Girls*, is a post-feminist television series in which the female main characters exhibit contrasting stages of feminism and lifestyle choices that have been formed through generational differences.
Lorelai Gilmore’s relationship with her parents is complicated, as mentioned in the first episode of the series after she asks her parents for a loan to help pay for Rory's private school tuition at Chilton (“Pilot”). Lorelai's choice to move away from her parents and raise Rory without their help is the main focus of many of the arguments between Lorelai and her parents. As stated by scholar Daniela Mastrocola in the article “Performing Class: ‘Gilmore Girls’ and a Classless Neoliberal ‘Middle Class,’” Lorelai acts as though she isn't connected to her parent’s wealth, but is still receiving financial support from them. Without financial help from her grandparents, Rory could not attend Chilton. Once the girls reconnect with their grandparents they still act as though they are average middle class and fail to acknowledge Rory’s privilege in attending a private high school. Lorelai's strong independent attitude stems from her need to prove to her parents she can become successful without them and without following their plans for her life. Lorelai often refuses to ask her parents for help and only asks when she is completely out of options or if someone else asks for her. This stubbornness is one of her downfalls as a character, but it also makes her an independent woman who learns how to take care of herself and her daughter without the help of others.

The line between friend and mother is blurred throughout the series and the boundaries that are set between Lorelai and Rory are difficult to identify. The two engage in witty banter throughout most of their conversations, resembling the friendship between two teenage girls rather than a mother and daughter. In the article by Eugenie Brinkema, "A Mother Is a Form of Time: Gilmore Girls and the Elasticity of In-Finitude," Brinkema argues that the relationship between the two is strange and even compares it jokingly to incest. Although it is fair to say that Lorelai and Rory’s relationship is unconventional and unique, being compared to incest is inaccurate. Lorelai's unconventional parenting style creates a close bond between her and Rory that they prioritize over all of the other relationships in their lives. The closeness that the two share benefits them because, for a long time, they only had each other. Lorelai's age also plays a role in the relationship between the two. Generationally, Lorelai is close to Rory and can relate to her on a level that an older parent wouldn't be able to.

Some academics like Stacia M. Fleegal argue that Rory and Lorelai’s relationship stems from the unhealthy relationship Lorelai has with her mother, Emily. The theory that Lorelai’s relationship with her daughter stems from Emily is supported by strong evidence throughout each season of the show. Lorelai never wanted to follow her mother’s rules or lifestyle choices; no matter what Emily said throughout the show, Lorelai always had a snarky remark to follow up. Later in the series, moments between Emily and Lorelai reveal Emily's desire to have a relationship with her daughter like the one she has with Rory. Emily says to Lorelai,
“Why can’t we have what you and Rory have?” To which Lorelai responds, “Rory and I are different, Mom.” Emily replies, “You’re mother and daughter, we’re mother and daughter, it shouldn’t be that much different” (“There’s the Rub”). This exchange in Season 2 Episode 16 of the show reveals a generational gap between parenting norms. Emily states that she wasn’t “taught to be best friends with her daughter” and that she was told she needed to protect her. Lorelai says she and Rory are “best friends first and mother and daughter second.” This is one of the first times within the show that Lorelai acknowledges her and Rory’s parental code: the one which dictates their lives. This episode is particularly important to understanding the dynamic of generational gaps between the family. Within this gap is the difference between Lorelai’s post-feminist lifestyle and Emily’s more outdated mindset. Post-feminism refers to the more modernized mindset that emphasizes being an independent and individual woman.

Emily Gilmore criticizes most of how Lorelai lives her life from the decorations in her house to the relationships she pursues. A large factor in Lorelai and Rory’s lifestyle is the small town they live in called Stars Hollow. The town takes on a family role for the girls and is the center of their world. Lorelai attempts to keep Emily away from the town for as long as she can because she feels as though her mother taints everything she encounters. This is the opposite in Lorelai’s relationship with her daughter. Rory and Lorelai share everything from the clothes they wear to every detail of their days. In the article “It Takes a Classless, Heteronormative Utopian Village: Gilmore Girls and the Problem of Postfeminism,” by Danielle Stern, the impact of the town on the girls’ development is associated with post-feminism. The generational gap between Lorelai and her mother is exhibited largely throughout the town. Emily’s world consists of her large house and husband, both of which she spends most of her time tending to, while Lorelai works in her town to earn a living.

The values that Lorelai and Emily hold as a priority are vastly different. While Lorelai’s lifestyle exhibits post-feminist and independent attributes, Emily values more traditional pre-feminist traditions. The places that Emily and Lorelai call home impact the way in which they display different forms of feminism. Lorelai’s independence is one of her most dominant character traits that is associated with the post-feminist culture she raises Rory around. Emily reveals multiple times throughout the show that she feels lost without her husband and feels as though her most important duty is to be there for him. Author Francesca Gamber states that Gilmore Girls represents the “third wave” of feminism. Gamber also suggests that Lorelai and Rory embody the same wave of feminism opposite from that of Emily. Lorelai also demonstrates that she doesn’t feel like she is in a hurry to get married and doesn’t find her sense of purpose through a partner, again unlike her
mother. The multiple waves of feminism are widely demonstrated through the generational gaps.

The concept of the different ideas of purpose between generations is also brought up in the newer spinoff of the show called *Gilmore Girls: A Year in The Life*. In the article “Mourning and Melancholia: Conflicting Approaches to Reviving Gilmore Girls One Season at a Time” by R. Lizardi, the author analyzes how the characters have evolved over time. In this newer version of the show, the generational gap between Lorelai and Emily is still very apparent. Emily’s husband Richard has passed away and left her to pick up the pieces: “I don’t know how to do it: live my life” (“Winter”). Emily reveals to Lorelai that for her whole life, she has dedicated everything to her husband and she doesn’t know what to do with herself now that he has passed on. Although the process of grief isn’t linear, it is clear throughout the spinoff that Emily is experiencing a loss of herself as well as the loss of her husband. The spinoff of the show exhibits the change of time by adding in new iPhones and adding in timely pop culture references, but the generational differences between the girls and Emily are still a main theme.

The passing of Lorelai’s father was also difficult for her to comprehend. Her complicated relationship with him led to her having a hard time remembering the good moments she had with him. Despite their complicated relationship, Richard demonstrated his love for Lorelai whenever she needed it. He always stood up for her when she needed it and was often the mediator when she and Emily were fighting. Rory doesn’t have a father figure who is consistently in the picture, so Richard took on a father-like figure for Rory. Although a father doesn’t need to be a part of a functioning family, Lorelai does wish that she could give Rory a father, even if she doesn’t mention it often. Lorelai’s inability to keep Rory’s biological father in the picture is one of her biggest internal struggles which Emily and Richard often judge her for.

The relationship between Lorelai and Rory in this newer series resembles the relationship they had in the past, but there is a clear difference that stands out. Rory and Lorelai told each other everything in the original series and one of their cardinal rules was that they shouldn't keep secrets from each other. In the new series, Rory is having an affair with one of her old boyfriends, but is keeping it a secret from her mother; she also goes as far as creating a fake name for him. This aspect of the show is a major difference from the original to the spinoff and shows that there is a gap forming between their relationship. Rory is an adult now, and the show highlights that by adding that she has parts of her life that she doesn’t share with her mother anymore.

Although Lorelai and Rory are similar, Lorelai makes it clear to Rory that she doesn’t want her to take after some of her personality traits. Emily also encourages
Lorelai to parent Rory in a way so that she won’t make the same mistakes that Lorelai made at a young age. Gamber mentions that Lorelai wants her daughter to be more emotionally intelligent than she was at a young age: “When it comes to love and relationships, I don’t necessarily want you to be like me,” Lorelai tells her (“P.S. I Lo…”). Even though Lorelai tells Rory she doesn’t want her to be like her, it is clear that Rory picks up on Lorelai’s unhealthy emotional habits. Unlike Gamber’s theory, it can be argued that Lorelai is hypocritical because she constantly demonstrates unhealthy relationship habits in front of Rory. Their friendship-type relationship exposes Rory to a more raw and unfiltered mother who displays her flaws more often than the “typical” mother. This relationship has benefits for Rory so she can have a closer relationship, but it also forces her to grow up faster than the average child.

In the article “New Feminist Television Studies: Queries Into Postfeminist Television,” by Mary Beth Haralovich, the author argues that Gilmore Girls is a pre-feminist television show. Haralovich argues that due to the fact that the setting of the show takes place in a “small town utopia.” Although it is true that the town of Stars Hollow resembles a utopia, this factor is arguably minuscule in comparison to the character’s story arc throughout the series. Lorelai is an independent woman who demonstrates post-feminist traits and teaches them to her daughter as well. Haralovich’s argument doesn’t consider the personality traits of the characters. It is reasonable to state, however, that the generational gaps between characters demonstrate both pre-feminist and post-feminist traits. Lorelai’s independent and unconventional lifestyle is a testament to the depiction of post-feminist themes in the series.

The most consistent fight between Lorelai and her mother is the fact that Lorelai never married Rory’s biological father, Christopher. As previously mentioned, Lorelai’s independence is one of her most dominant character traits and at the age of sixteen, she did not want to marry Christopher. Haralovich argues that another trait of a pre-feminist TV show is that the main female character must always have a male love interest. It can be argued that Lorelai was never solely chasing after a man throughout the series. Although male love interests were important to the plot of the episodes, the way Lorelai managed her romantic relationships was in a post-feminist manner. Lorelai never made the men in her life a priority; she always made sure that her desires and her daughter came first. Lorelai dates multiple people throughout the series but always stays true to what she wants. Lorelai’s final and “meant to be” love interest, Luke Danes, shows that Lorelai wanted to choose a man who wouldn’t change the person she was at heart. Luke had the same priorities as Lorelai and treats Rory as his own daughter. Lorelai was never just chasing a man for the security of it or for the purpose of having
someone, she was looking for a partner who would support her and her lifestyle. Lorelai’s ability to say no to relationships that didn’t fulfill her is a post-feminist trait in itself.

Some argue that the relationship between Lorelai and Rory is strange and too close, such as Yusra Jaleel of The Courier newspaper. Jaleel criticizes Lorelai for leaving her parents house at a young age, arguing that it put Rory at risk for a difficult childhood. Even though some of Lorelai’s earlier parenting decisions were questionable, it isn’t possible to deny that Lorelai is a loving mother who wants the best for her daughter. The goal of Lorelai’s parenting style was to be the opposite of what she had with her mother growing up. She wanted her daughter to feel comfortable going to her with anything and be open to sharing details of her life. Lorelai’s parenting style is a product of her unhealthy and destructive relationship with her own parents. Lorelai and Emily love each other, but their lack of ability to show empathy and care toward each other leads to many of the show’s conflicts. Lorelai’s fear of judgment from her mother ultimately ends with a lack of communication. The lack of communication is exactly what Lorelai wanted to change between her and her own daughter; Lorelai created an environment where Rory wouldn’t feel as though she would be judged for her mistakes.

The complicated and fast-paced lives of the girls in the show Gilmore Girls show the generational gaps between Emily, Lorelai, and Rory. The show depicts the differences between Emily’s pre-feminist mindset and Lorelai and Rory’s post-feminist and independent lifestyle. Lorelai and Rory have a close best friend-like relationship that is the center of the series. The relationship that they have is the product of Lorelai’s strained relationship with her own mother. Lorelai wanted to make sure that her relationship with her daughter was vastly different than the one she has with her mother.

Emily and Richard Gilmore are integrated back into Lorelai and Rory’s lives after Lorelai asks for a loan. This entrance into their lives gives the viewers the opportunity to witness the generational differences between Emily and Lorelai. Lorelai’s independence is the opposite of what Emily’s main focuses are. Emily’s life revolves around her husband and she exhibits pre-feminist characteristics while Lorelai and Rory are depicted as post-feminist characters. The show Gilmore Girls strongly illustrates the generational differences between pre-feminist and post-feminist characters through mother-daughter relationships.
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Student: Laura Martone

Student biography: Laura Martone is a Law major from Wakefield, MA. Laura wrote this paper for Professor Frangipane’s WRI-102 Class. For Laura, the best part of Writing 102 was “collaborating with classmates through the writing and editing process.”

“SVU educating USA”

“Bottom line: rape kits can bring justice, and justice for so many survivors can bring healing, testing rape kits is vital to keeping rapists off the streets, and yet hundreds of thousands of these kits don’t even make it to the crime lab,” said Mariska Hargitay, who portrays lead detective Olivia Benson in the infamous crime drama Law and Order: Special Victims Unit (Alter). As evident by the large number of untested rape kits, the justice system does not care enough about sexual violence. Through the power of education and media, perceptions and priorities of the public have started to shift. One could argue that Law and Order: Special Victims Unit has pioneered educating the public and working on the issue of the national rape kit backlog through the power of media. In fact, “Recent studies point to legal reforms and changing official attitudes as evidence that the performance of the criminal justice system has improved with respect to rape cases” (Hansen 945).

The influence of media truly starts when the popularity and audience grow; more numbers reached means more power and access to educate and influence the nation. Law and Order: Special Victims Unit, hereafter referred to as SVU, has been an extremely popular series for over twenty years, often outperforming its parent show. Law and Order itself was the original and then the Special Victims Unit was created as the first spin off and quickly became the more popularized of the two. This procedural drama focuses on the heinous crimes against children as well as numerous domestic and sexual violence cases. In the late nineties, when the show aired, this topic was predominantly untouched by mainstream media. This could have been a main factor in the rise to fame, though another unique aspect of
the show was that a lead detective and assistant district attorney were both women. Another unique part of the show that enhances its draw to viewers is that *SVU* is one of the most “onsite filmed” shows in television history, meaning a lot of the gritty, New York City street moments are genuinely filmed on the dirty, bustling sidewalks of Manhattan, as opposed to a lackluster set dropped in a Hollywood lot, yet another uncommon facet of the show that likely helped propel the series to an infamous status. Though the filming occurs thousands of miles from Hollywood, the typical industry concept of exaggerating, adding a rosy lens and a skewed perception of reality does occur in *SVU*.

There are several ways the show can improve on truthful police representation. There has been criticism that the show leans towards a pro-police agenda. As well as largely misrepresenting the reality of police interest in pursuing and prosecuting these cases, “Investigations...found that police eliminated rape complaints from official counts because of cultural hostility to rape complaints and to create the illusion of success in fighting violent crime” (Yung 1197). As evident by these crass actions, police in reality often do not want to facilitate justice in these types of cases. This is to demonstrate that *SVU* is an idyllic utopia, not a true reality of the police force’s intentions. It is important to know that the influence and education of the general public is one objective. Influencing the view and knowledge of the nationwide police force is an entirely different, more difficult task.

One aspect of the show I personally do not appreciate is the occasional scene showing violent attacks too vividly or the disrespectful prolonged shots of the dead. Through the retelling and honoring of their stories, we can help restore justice, there is no need for the gory details. Through having the uncomfortable moments, we learn to face that reality is always uncomfortable. Learning to deal with and understand these uncomfortable moments may be a vital element the show teaches us about reality. Keep in mind the audience should understand parts of the show aren't real nor a true representation. The viewers need to strain credulity and not see the show without flaws or exaggeration. It is possible that the hyperbole nature helps *SVU* grow, and the popularity is the platform from which education and knowledge reach out. Through the widespread recognition of the show, it has an educative power, bringing more knowledge to people about issues at hand.

One topic the show brings to educate the public is child neglect. In Season five, Episode sixteen, “Home,” starts out as a scene with a small child scrounging chicken out of a trash can. This turns into a case and discussion on neglect, and emotional and physical abuse in a homeschooling environment. “Nationwide, the closest estimate is one million [homeschooled kids]... Going to school provides kids with more than an education. It is a safety net that catches medical, psychological, developmental problems, and child abuse,” says the concerned and curious administrator while talking about the child’s case with detective Benson and Stabler (“Home”). This fact is something the majority of the public may not have known prior to watching this episode, and any viewer is now more knowledgeable about the benefits of schooling. This is supported by the assertion that “using familiar television shows and films can make the concepts presented more intellectually accessible” (James 143).
Another more familiar concept aimed to educate the nation during SVU episodes is sexual assault. “It doesn’t matter what you do,” Detective Stabler says in season twelve episode thirteen, “Mask.” In this scene Stabler is comforting a sexual assault survivor who also happens to work as an exotic dancer, “I am a stripper, okay?” she says. The detective sternly reassures her, “It’s not an invitation to be sexually assaulted” (“Mask”). It is vital that the public knows that regardless of a career as a dancer, escort, or any type of sex work does not take away a person’s autonomy nor consent. As stated by a fellow researcher, the general public’s understanding of what SVU is showcasing, the notion that sex workers have the right to consent, is immensely fundamental to diminish the presence of sexual violence within our society. The concept of victim-blaming based on the survivor’s looks, clothes, and career has always existed. Now we see this shifted more so towards males as society doesn't often see men as victims; they are the assumed aggressors. Media is a powerful educational tool that can reach the entire nation to help change perceptions. SVU has been a model example, highlighting the media's strength, as evident by the notion that “this movement changed legal definitions of rape, challenged myths about victims and offenders, and introduced standards of procedural fairness in criminal proceedings” (Corrigan 922). As television continues to play an important role in learning about sexual violence, another main focus of the educative power within SVU is that rape kits, as well as their testing and preservation are vital.

Rape kits, technically called sexual assault examination kits, are essential to all victims and survivors, their justice, and their closure. This applies whether a survivor is male, female, or nonbinary. The public’s interest is important as we are all likely to be affected by domestic or sexual violence, either directly or a close friend or family member can impact us. For example, “More people are sexually assaulted in the US each year [627,700] than the entire population of Vermont [626,562]” (Crockett). With statistics like this, the issue of sexual violence is a prevalent one in society, an impact to everyone around us friends, coworkers, family. Imagine if a natural disaster occurred in the state of Vermont and all its population were harmed; how much aid and assistance would be sent out? While we have more than that amount of sexual assault survivors each year—yet where is the outcry for them?

The rape kit backlog is a nationwide issue that is dealt with in numerous episodes of SVU. In Season Twelve, Episode Three, “Behave,” the episode deals specifically with a serial rapist and untested rape kits that let this violent offender to run rampant. In the beginning scenes of the episode, we see detective Benson meet our victim, Vicki, and later accompany her during her sexual assault examination. As the scene continues through the motions, we see the victim’s continued ordeal of assault. Vicki, portrayed by nineties icon Jennifer Love Hewitt, slowly undresses behind a paper and metal curtain, and her clothes are taken for possible DNA. She continues talking through her testimony, reliving her assault as she explains what occurred. The Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner, commonly called a SANE nurse, then runs a luminol light test over Vicki’s body, attempting to find traces of semen, blood, or anything with the possibility of DNA. Photos are taken of her bloodied gashes with glass shards at the top of her skull. The nurse continues to aid the victim as the shattered glass pieces are cautiously picked from
her scalp. As the torment continues, oral, vaginal, and anal swabs are gently obtained, though Vicki harrowingly cries out that she is being hurt during these collections. After the swabs are taken, a cervical exam is necessary to check for proof of trauma and STIs. After a few hours, the examination finishes up as Vicki continues to explain the attack to Detective Benson (“Behave”).

The ordeal of a sexual assault examination is often retraumatizing to the victims. Further infuriating the matter is that the information gathered in such an extremely personal exam can be so easily cast aside. This scene is exactly the type of education that can make progress in real life, as it demonstrates and normalizes what sexual assault survivors go through. This normalizes and familiarizes the experience so that any human, man, woman, or non-binary person can feel as comfortable as possible if they were ever in the situation themselves. Society needs victims to feel heard and respected as their reporting and speaking up benefits us all. “Acts of sexual violence build on another. While most experts we spoke to acknowledged that rape might cause more harm to a victim than verbal assaults, they pointed out that sexually violent acts or behaviors build on one another” (O’Neil 10); this is why reporting is deeply essential; it even matters with the trivially small verbal incidents. The normalization within media can connect to most people watching as sexual assault, unfortunately, is common. The more ease we can extend as those around us come forward, the more survivors can know they are never alone, and the more we can encourage reporting. Benson herself always speaks to how important it is to speak against your attacker to bring closure regardless of outcomes.

As Benson continues to investigate this serial rapist, she calls other jurisdictions where Vicki had been attacked by the very same offender. As the detective passionately shuffles through a mess of incompetency, it becomes clear if any of these other cities had simply utilized their own rape kits and run the DNA from these kits, this rapist would not have been able to victimize and retraumatize more women. Staggeringly, “estimates of the total number of untested DNA samples from sexual assault crimes range from 169,000 to 500,000” (Hansen 949). As hundreds of thousands of pieces of evidence are left behind, so are the victims. With every rape kit that goes untested, there is a perpetrator left to roam free. It is a shame kits are not always regarded as the essential evidence they truly are. Any direct evidence should have urgency to all police forces. If a bloodied knife was found at a murder scene, potentially containing DNA of the killer, there would be outrage if that evidence was never tested. We desperately need even more media focus on these untested kits in order to help enact reform and eliminate the nationwide backlog.

As previously mentioned, the lead detective, Olivia Benson, is portrayed by the talented Mariska Hargitay. She has used her fame and notoriety, provided by SVU, to work on eliminating the rape kit backlog in our society. This proves further that SVU is on the frontier of using the media’s power to influence society in a positive way. Hargitay also started the nonprofit organization, the Joyful Heart Foundation, which focuses its resources on ending the rape kit backlog as well as supporting survivors. As an SVU star from the show, she extends the platform and notoriety of the show to her organization. Thankfully, she is using her platform to further education on and improvements to the backlog crises.
Law and Order: Special Victims Unit and the main character, Olivia Benson, have had a real-life impact on improving policy and procedure on processing sexual assault kits. SVU has had a lasting imprint on my life, inspiring me to embark on the journey of becoming a lawyer. As a child of the nineties, there were not many other media outlets showcasing female lawyers. Now, in 2023, the problem of untested rape kits remains, and I am an adult envisioning a law career to help end the backlog issue. As I've researched, there are clear suggested action points, such as adding more hotline information in episodes, which could prompt more reporting. Also, numerous episodes of SVU can be used to educate the workforce to help train professionals that assist in investigating the cases, or anyone working with survivors. Though there seems to be a clear urge to sweep things under the rug, ending in a mountain of untested rape kits. “Every two and a half minutes, someone is sexually assaulted in the United States” (Hansen 943); that is why Law and Order: Special Victims Unit and its proven education and impact on the societal issue of rape kit backlogs are deeply significant to society.

Works Cited


Derry Girls: It’s Us Against the World

Student: Syeda Tabassum

Student Biography: Syeda Tabassum is a Marketing major from Dhaka, Bangladesh, and wrote this paper for Professor Frangipane’s WRI-102 class. Syeda’s favorite part of WRI-102 was the professor’s enthusiasm.

“Derry Girls: It’s Us Against the World”

“Nobody's going to hand us nice things. That doesn't mean we shouldn't have things!” Michelle bursts out in exasperation in the middle of an argument with Clair (Episode 2). In a town where militarization, political conflict, and displacement were the norm, four girls set out to maintain peace and achieve their dreams by the sheer force of stubbornness and conviction. Even though there were little to no jobs available in Derry, Michelle implores her friends to get any jobs they can so that they can save money for the summer. As a generation of young women who have lived their entire lives in the midst of chaotic political disputes and oppressive overpowering unionist protesters who wanted to claim Northern Ireland as a part of Britain, the girls portrayed in the show “Derry Girls” had to adapt to an unorthodox way of life to survive. A unique context is presented in the show by juxtaposing the realities of female adolescent growing pains against the backdrop of revolution as it tells the narrative of a group of friends growing up in Derry. For the girls of Derry Girls, that means realizing that fear and bomb threats are just a part of daily life. By the end of its first season, Derry Girls demonstrates how young women, as victims of trauma, are able to savor various stages of grieving the freedom that they always wanted, in order to find redemption. The three-season series called “Derry Girls” was originally released in Britain, portraying four girls who are constantly entangled in witty banter and unfortunate events. The show was meant to be a typical teenage sitcom reflecting the author’s personal experiences during the tail end of a substantial Irish war. But the show stoked a deep emotional reaction among many Irish residents who lived through adverse conditions during the nationalist conflict in Northern Ireland. Set in the small town of Derry during the 1990s, a time when Northern Ireland was facing tumultuous occupation, Derry Girls resonated with many survivors of violence as they reminisced their personal
struggles and familial life during the ethno-nationalist conflict. The ravaging era was later referred to as “the Troubles,” when English protestant reformists were pushing for acquiring Londonderry at full force. Practice of sectarian violence lasted for several decades in Northern Ireland, involving mass threats, political discrimination against Irish Catholics, as well as English military deployment. This subdued warfare in the nation and caused thousands of deaths in addition to the displacement of many Irish residents.

The girls of Derry Girls, Erin, Claire, Michelle, and Orla don't seem to take heed to the ongoing conflicts, indicating a very strong detachment from the revolutionary culture that they are growing up in. While their parents are much more aware of neighboring state news and local politics, all four friends depict avoidant tendencies when it comes to war-related topics. In the show, we see the sisters at school trying to casually remind the girls that they are at a disadvantage during this war. To add to that, Catholics were largely outnumbered by a greater number of Protestants who were also from traditionally wealthier backgrounds. However, the girls are not able to fully comprehend whether being Catholic makes them inferior in the eyes of the Protestants, and continue to go about their day. In another episode, as the quartet make their way to school, the audience sees them encounter a military checkpoint that stops their bus in the middle of the street. Not only does Michelle revert back to making lewd remarks, she is able to completely squash any lingering anxieties her friends might have been experiencing. Instead of engaging with authority, the girls' primary reflex in response to harsh tyranny seems to be to emotionally withdraw from their circumstances.

Even though it's easy to regard their irreverent hijinks as a sign of being unaffected by the military overpowering citizens on a daily basis, their trauma eventually manifests itself through cryptic outbursts. The article, “Trauma Of The Troubles,” provides some insight into the reason behind this behavior, “In times of war, nations often take psychological refuge in the notion that the fighting is necessary to protect some stable normalcy at home” (DenHoed 13). We see tell-tale signs of conflict throughout the season, the very first being James joining an all-girls school for the fear of hostility towards Englishmen at other schools. Moreover, the girls are seen constantly participating in misconduct, sneaking out of their homes, and disobeying their parents. Erin's general lack of trust for any sign of disruption or unfamiliar persons becomes evident when she assumes that a female Ukrainian refugee was a prostitute, even though she had found no explicit evidence. Because they study at an all-girls catholic school, Erin and her friends have limited interaction with boys and the outside world at large. Our four main characters are the crux of an embodiment of deeply ingrained discriminatory norms that have existed in Derry for many decades. Being teenagers in a time of violence would inherently be an alienating experience, which may be directly related to the confrontational mindset that Erin exhibits.

In this context of a disrupted nation, the role of women was subjected to much scrutiny. “Nationalist discourses use female icons to emphasize female chastity, suffering and self-sacrifice, thereby idealizing the notion of 'good' wives and mothers” (Stapleton 2073). Not only were they encouraged to remain tolerant,
placid, and highly virtuous while their husbands tackled political debates, they were also expected to forgo their personal contentment for the betterment of society. We see this ideology materialize in various episodes when Erin's parents constantly chastise her for being loud.

Erin's interactions with her parents reveal a more realistic aspect of life during the Troubles. Despite the barriers that are presented to them, the girls try to voice their opinions, partake in donations, and communicate with their parents. As the older generation, the parents are much more concerned due to the looming bomb threats and are seen mourning their close relatives. Compared to the girls who have become unhinged by the way they have experienced childhood, the parents seem extremely tired from the decades of violence they have experienced. On the other hand, a wartorn society is the only reality that Erin and her friends have ever known. It's not so much that they don't sympathize with news of threats they receive regularly, but their nonchalance is more likely driven by their inability to make real change. The article “Trauma of the Troubles” narrows down on the issue, “Young people are profoundly affected by conflict yet are continually excluded from conflict-related decision-making” (Dixon, 314). To live in such times of struggle is to live a paradoxical life where "normal" becomes whatever one has been forced to adapt to. Even though Erin and her friends try to negotiate with the authority figures around her, they are met with harsh criticism and more unanswered questions on every front.

As the show progresses, the audience is able to catch a glimpse of the very real anxiety that all four of the girls are carrying within themselves. While studying for an exam, Clair bursts out exasperated, “Passing those exams was our only chance. We're girls. We're poor. We're from Northern Ireland. We're Catholic, for Christ's sake!” (Episode 3). In the midst of upholding responsibilities, it can feel impossible to regulate emotions in a coherent manner. However, by the end of the show the girls are able to realize the various ways of self-expression that allowed them to reconstruct their unhealthy patterns. For Clair, it's through her obsession with succeeding in exams, for Erin it's with her flimsy fansies on boys, for Michelle it's in dangerous stunts, and for Orla, it's her step aerobics. As a generation of growing young-adults, they represent hope for a society that's free of unionist shackles and one that is able to practice religious freedom. Time and again, the four girls barrel through their traumatic experiences by confiding in one another. Projecting pain onto a canvas for opportunity instead of inflicting more suffering onto each other ultimately aided the girls of Derry Girls in reclaiming their experience during the troubles.

All in all, Derry Girls demonstrates how a group of girlfriends overcome the discrimination they faced during the Troubles in Northern Ireland. Even though conflicts related to the revolutions were ever present in these girls' daily lives, the Derry girls seem to have blind faith in their quest for peace and equality. The show captures an authentic picture of what it was like to live in Derry at the time. The heroines of the show are a remarkable group of spirited and headstrong young women that represent hope for a generation which can build a better society than the one they grew up in. Derry Girls is a timeless ensemble comedy that voices the
unsaid feelings of Irish residents that survived the conflict, and serves as a gentle reminder to the audience that the key to overcoming oppression is to adhere to the community that you surround yourself with.

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Voting Age Should be Lowered to 16

Student: Mary Miro

Student Biography: Mary Miro is a Political Science major with a minor in International Relations from Marlborough, MA. Mary wrote this essay for Professor Trauth’s class. For Mary, the best part of WRI-102 is “having an outlet to write about topics that interest me and can educate others.”

“Voting Age Should be Lowered to 16”

In the United States, citizens are given the right to vote at the age of 18. Hitting the polls and getting the “I voted” sticker feels really rewarding, so why not grant the same right to those under 18 when the same problems also affect them? With issues such as mass shootings at schools, abortion rights, and minimum wage, recent debate has called for the United States to lower the voting age to 16. There have been local governments that have reduced the voting age to 16 or 17 in local elections (Oosterhoff et al. 1574), but why stop there? It is reasonable to allow 16 to 17-year-olds to vote when many of them work taxable jobs, and the creation of the United States was built upon “no taxation without representation.” Research suggests that 16-17-year-olds are mentally developed enough to vote (Oosterhoff et al. 10), which suggests how the common stereotype that young people are too “immature” or “not ready” to vote does not coincide with research. In addition, many other nations have reduced the voting age to 16-17 and have had positive results (Eichhorn and Bergh 12). If there are such promising results, then why has the United States not reduced the voting age? While, historically, the voting age has held at 18 for several decades for reason outlined in the 26th amendment, the voting age in the United States should be lowered to 16 years old because 16-year-olds are being directly affected by the problems that occur in this country, other nations have had positive results, and it has been proven that they have the intellectual capacity.
Because 16-year-olds are being directly affected by the problems that occur in this country, they deserve the right to vote at an earlier age. This particularly applies to Generation Z because they are different from other generations. They grew up with technology, spent some of their adolescence during a pandemic, and many were born after 9/11. What makes this generation of youth drastically different from others is their exposure to a variety of issues that motivate them to go out and vote. According to Penny Rue, Vice President for Campus Life at Wake Forest University, Gen Z is the most diverse generation in American history with “52 percent white, 14 percent black, 22 percent Hispanic, and 4 percent two or more races” (Rue 7). Being the most diverse generation means a better understanding of racial inequality and prejudice, and the motivation to raise awareness in order to create social change through means such as voting. Mass shootings, especially school shootings, have become a normalized problem and Gen Z has become victims to these violent acts. While Gen Z has a lower voter turnout than other generations, they are a group to be reckoned with. Exit polls during the 2022 midterms reported by Caleb Clayton and Hailey Trimpey, who are affiliated with Ohio Northern University, determined every 1 in 8 voters was a Millennial or Gen Z (Clayton and Trimpey 2). Gen Z proved to the US how they can show up to the polls in this recent midterm. The “red wave” that Republicans were expecting was ultimately unsuccessful due to youth voter turnout (Clayton and Trimpey 3). Through problems such as racial inequality and mass shootings, it is better understood how lowering the voting age would create productive results as many Gen Z-ers are aware and impacted by the issues around them. Lowering the voting age will also increase youth voter turnout as it is shown within the recent midterm that young people are voting at historic rates. Problems that have not only impacted teenagers, but the rest of the US, will be targeted if the voting age is lowered to 16.

Many other nations have lowered the voting age or originally had the voting age at 16-17, and have had positive results. In a report by Jan Eichhorn from University of Edinburgh and Johannes Bergh from Institute for Social Research in Norway, research was conducted in countries all over that lowered the voting age to see the impact it had on society. In Argentina, Austria, Brazil, Ecuador, and Nicaragua, it is argued that 16-17-year-olds have had a higher turnout than 18-19 year olds because they are voting in a time of their life where they are in high school and they are able to learn the habit of at a quicker pace (Eichhorn and Bergh 513-514). The increasing voter turnout among Gen Z in the US will be even higher if 16-17-year-olds can vote. In addition, through research of countries in Latin America and Austria, it was determined that 16-17-year-old voters have a higher trust in democracy and politics (Eichhorn and Bergh 515). This is important within the United States as so many members of Gen Z have a lack of trust among politicians, given that many of the problems they are facing are not being addressed, and being able to vote at the ages of 16-17 could alleviate the mistrust. It is also worth mentioning that the overall public opinion about the voting age in countries that lowered the age rose. After Scotland lowered the voting age, support for lowering the UK voting age went up to 60% (Eichhorn and Bergh 515). Through
the Scotland case, it could be argued that the discontent that the general public feel in the United States can potentially be reduced. There is so much evidence from other nations that demonstrates that lowering the voting age will bring benefits, so what has stopped the US?

While adults argue that 16-year-olds are too “immature” and “childish” to vote, a team of researchers published in the American Physiological Association determined that 16-17-year-olds possess the intellectual capacity to vote. Benjamin Oosterhoff from Montana State University, Laura Wray-Lake from UCLA, and K. Paige Harden from University of Texas Austin aimed to figure out the difference in public opinion on lowering the voting age between adults and 16-17-year-olds, and tested those opinions based on their reasoning and complexity. The results reported that 34% of 16-17-year-olds would want the voting age to be lowered, adults reported 18% (Oosterhoff et al. 1579). The drastic number between young people and adults demonstrates how young people have such reassurance in themselves to participate in the electoral process, while adults still have that preconceived notion of how young people are. In terms of measuring the complexity behind their reasoning, the study revealed that 16-17-year-olds are just as mentally competent as adults. There are even subgroups where young people have “higher integrative, elaborative, and dialectical complexity compared with adults across ideology” (Oosterhoff et al. 1581). This report is not the only one that has found that young people have the mental capacity to vote. The research cites other credible research, such as the Census Bureau, that has found “the average performance of 16- to 17-year-olds is higher than the average performance of people over the age of 65, who currently make up more than a quarter of U.S. voters” (Oosterhoff et al. 1575). If there is such compelling research to motivate lowering voting, then why has it not happened? The main reason is shown through the low 18% approval rating among adults. That discontent is shared through many politicians, who have the power to change the policy. There needs to be change within attitudes among adults, especially politicians, towards young people as they have proven to be an effective force within politics.

Within the academic community and public life, opposition to lowering the voting age centers on issues of maturity, the alternatives to voting by incorporating civic education, and the potential to skew results; however, these arguments do not touch upon the fact that 16-year-olds deserve to vote because they should be granted the right to participate in their government. For starters, researchers have argued that entrusting 16-17-year-olds to vote is not wise due to the fact that “that the brain is still developing until the mid-twenties” (Davenport 1). As previously mentioned, the argument that these young kids are not mature enough is extremely flawed as research backs up the point that young kids are mentally intellectual enough to vote (Oosterhoff et al.).

The maturity of young kids is often called into question mainly because adults often underestimate Gen Z and the impact they can hold. Arguing that instead of lowering the voting age to combat low youth turnout there should be more civic engagement across schools (Davenport 1) is a somewhat valid stance,
but the combination of civic engagement and lowering the voting age will increase voter turnout. It is shown through other nations that have decreased the voting age and a comprehensive civic education, such as Austria and Scotland, has resulted in an increased turnout (Eichhorn and Bergh 516). The question on whether young kids are going to vote correctly or favor one party over the other is extremely dismissive. Adults rarely realize the social problems Generation Z encounters. Many of these kids have signed themselves into a ton of debt to get a college education, seen their friends lose their lives from school shootings, or be at risk to lose their reproductive rights at such a young age. These issues are just the tip of the iceberg that motivates Gen Z into creating change and using their right to vote. It is also important to note that voting in the US is not compulsory. Young people and adults do not have to vote if they do not want to, so the fear that young people are going to vote “incorrectly” is invalid considering that the people who are going to vote, including young people, are the ones that care about the issues at hand and as a result will vote with meaning. Giving young people the right to vote does not make it become delegitimized, but rather it becomes an honorable act. Voting becomes a power for people of all generations as a way to participate in their government, and it should be an honor that young people want to be a part of the democratic effort of voting.

The United States should lower the voting age to 16. This is crucial to all the young Americans out there who need to get their voice out and generate social change. Generation Z has shown the United States and the world that they plan to create change through protests and an increased voter turnout, so by lowering the voting age there will be even more young Americans hitting the polls in an effort to make a difference. It is not too late to figure out how to fix the dire issues that are troubling all Americans, and including younger voters will allow for another demographic to be heard on these issues. Lowering the voting age has been around in other parts of the world, and it has had immense benefits to both 16-year-olds and society (Eichhorn and Bergh). In addition, research has backed up the point that young people are intellectually and mentally capable of voting (Oosterhoff et al.). The stigma that surrounds adults, especially politicians, towards youth voting needs to change. Adults have to realize that 16-year-olds are capable of voting, and they are simply hindering a whole age group from participating in their government. Voting is crucial in maintaining a democracy, and 16-year-olds should be a part of the narrative that allows for ordinary citizens to raise awareness on issues.

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Space has been a mysterious fascination for thousands of years, captivating scientists, historians, philosophers, mathematicians, and more. The blanket of the Earth is full of wonders that are hard to comprehend, the childlike wonder for exploring its vast constellations, holes, stars, and the unknown. Famous tales from ancient Greece to the modern day, fascinated by the possibilities and answers, space has too many problems. Because of this, it has led many to wonder about the role of space in the world and how it can help civilization. Questions have arisen about people, whether we can come together, learn, and conquer the unexplored—or will greed and selfish interests lead to the destruction and exploitation of space? But with something as big and mysterious as space, it is safe to think that humans would be able to come together and cooperate for the interest of humanity. The benefits outweigh the negatives. While there are arguments for and against space colonization, there are many ways it can help improve people's lives on Earth, like utilizing helpful education and learning opportunities, improving access to resources and jobs, and helping defend Earth against environmental and natural disasters can let society on planet Earth improve, advance, and thrive.

The idea of space colonization, as said earlier, has been the wonder of many people for a lot of human history. Because of this, many have thought about exploring and living in space. The idea seems feasible, as humans have been to space before. According to the Aerospace website and National Geographic, starting on October 4, 1957, the first object was launched into space. Sputnik 1 was created by the former Soviet Union. Almost four years later, on April 12, 1961, a
man named Yri Gagarin became the first person to orbit Earth in a ship called the
Vostok1. Finally, the first person on the moon was an American named Neil
Armstrong on July 20, 1969. Since then, there have been several more missions
from other countries and individuals to go to space. There have also been
unfortunate accidents and lives lost, most famously the Space Shuttle Challenger,
which exploded on January 28, 1986, killing all seven astronauts that were on the
ship. Still, humanity has persevered and learned from these experiences, and
improved the technology of launching civilians into space, like Jeff Bezos in July
2021. This brings hope that in the future more will be able to not only go to space
but live there.

Of course, there are opponents to the idea of space colonization. Some claim
that it is too expensive, and not feasible and that humans will not be able to
compromise over space colonization and just use it for profit. These are legitimate
concerns, and acknowledging them and learning how to avoid potential problems
can help make space exploration fair, safe, and beneficial for everyone.

Going to space would be a massively beneficial educational tool. The best
way to learn something is to experience it yourself. Seeing the full sky is not
something that many people today can do. Many factors in the modern world cause
the sky to be covered or blocked by different types of pollution, most notably light
pollution. Going to outer space would allow an uninterrupted view of the many
stars and cosmic entities in the sky. Today, however, it is possible to engage
students and young adults with the subjects of space and astronomy by using new
and modern technology like the Hubble and James Webb space telescopes. The
James Webb telescope, according to Jeffery Kluger from the Time website and Lisa
Grossman from the ScienceNews, since its launch on December 25, 2021, has been
able to produce images from as far away as 13.6 light years. A light year is how far
light can travel in a year. To put that in perspective, one light year is 5.88 trillion
miles, or 9.46 trillion kilometers according to NASA. But, classes that focus on space
and astronomy are usually not available in smaller schools or underfunded schools,
limiting the number of people who can learn about space. Two professionals,
Edythe Weeks, a professor from Webster University, and Ayodele Faiyetole, a
multidisciplinary researcher focusing on space and the environment working at the
EarthSpace Organization, say that devoting more time and resources to space
colonization or space exploration would help more public and private schools
develop classes like space studies. It “can be added to all curricula in all schools and
universities worldwide... linked to all disciplines - humanities, arts, law to name a
few” (Faiyetole and Weeks). These new classes could help educate and expose
children and young adults to different aspects of space. Teaching students about
space can increase interest in science-related careers to focus on new technologies
and innovations that would benefit society, like satellites that could monitor
droughts and rainfall to help agriculture and food insecurity.

Colonizing space can bring resources to improve life on Earth. The Earth has
many natural resources essential to human life. Ores, food, and water have been
harvested, collected, and used for thousands of years. But international problems
and the finite number of resources, as well as the environmental impact of
harvesting these resources have led some to consider getting them from space. For
example, Ruida Xie, Nicholas James Bennet, and Andrew G. Dempster, from the
Australian Centre for Space Engineering Research, have done extensive work
researching and studying possible space exploration and colonization. They think
that asteroids have many valuable resources, like metals and ores, water, and
building materials. Furthermore, Shriya Yarlagadda authored a study from the
Harvard International Review, stating that asteroid mining would have a positive
environmental impact, as it would prevent the need for traditional methods of
mining in the ground “that release toxic chemicals such as lead and arsenic into
waterways and contribute to acid mine drainage” (Yarlagadda). This asteroid mining
would be environmentally friendly, provide jobs, and help bring resources both to
Earth and to other space exploration projects. Space colonization will help asteroid
mining, as the close proximity and permanent settlements on other planets would
allow for easier and cheaper access to asteroids. The shorter trips needed to reach
asteroids would be safer and faster for people working in the field of space mining.

Space colonization would further allow the exploration and practice of safe
and cost-efficient asteroid mining methods. An example of a method to mine
asteroids is optical mining. According to aerospace engineer Joel Sercel, the CEO
and president of the TransAstronautica corporation in addition to NASA, optical
mining is done by encasing an asteroid in a containment bag, and using
concentrated sunlight to drill holes that can “excavate, disrupt and shape an
asteroid” (Sercel). Optical mining can bring resources to both Earth and colonies in
space, allowing for the development of the space economy and further advancing
the construction and habitation of humans in space. Further studies have
researched other ways to harvest resources from asteroids, like using microwave
energy to break rocks and mining by hand. There are many ways to harvest ores
and resources from asteroids, and space colonization would help to expedite these
processes and make it easier. Mining asteroids and other space rocks would help
advance technology to benefit humankind.

Space colonization can help us understand and prevent dangerous
environmental problems on Earth. There have been many deadly environmental
issues like forest fires, tsunamis, hurricanes, and more. Humans have worsened
these problems by cutting down forests, overfarming, and ignoring climate change.
But space colonization would help. According to the UN Office for Outer Space Affairs, technologies like remotely sensed data help monitor water cycles and air quality, information about the weather, and the state of ecosystems. By colonizing space, humans would be able to use these technologies and observe the Earth from space easily. Researching tools to inhabit other planets can be used on Earth as well. Space colonization allows for more ways to help our environment thrive.

Colonizing space allows humans to develop technology to protect the Earth from asteroids. An article by the Washington Post and a research article with contributions from 11 different scholars, researchers, and scientists proved that an asteroid sixty-six million years ago and 9 miles long, hit the Earth in the Yucatán Peninsula, located in Southeastern Mexico, causing three-fourths of the plant and animal life on Earth to die. Furthermore, the asteroid's collision with the ground caused a tsunami that had waves more than a mile high. (Range et al.) Ever since the first discovery of this event, people have been trying to focus on the prevention and detection of asteroids to reduce the chances of an asteroid hitting the Earth to zero. But with the introduction and implementation of space colonization for humans, the risk of asteroids would be reduced. Gonzalo Munevar, an author and professor at Lawrence Technological University, states that “space technology might allow us to change the orbit of those comets or asteroids most in danger of colliding with Earth.” If the Earth had access to reliable tracking systems, being able to spot and possibly deflect asteroids to move their trajectory would help avoid a potentially fatal impact. Colonizing space would help us learn more about asteroids and bring more attention to the potential hazards that they bring, as well as the threat to human life. The ability to control asteroids and other objects in space could be the next step in human advancement to help the legacy and history of civilizations live on.

Space colonization seems like a very distant accomplishment, and while that is partly true, researching possible ways to explore space safely and ethically, as well as learning about other habitable planets or places is the next step to colonizing space. Furthermore, funding space exploration and research missions can help expedite the preparation for colonizing space.

As you can see, space colonization is eventually going to happen, and has several benefits, like helpful education and learning opportunities, improving access to resources and jobs, and helping defend Earth against environmental and natural disasters. Humanity has a long way to go, but the potential rewards that space colonization brings are not to be ignored. Colonization should happen to help not only humanity but help planet Earth.
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What does it mean to be human, have emotions, and perceive the great big world around us? The concept of digital immortality raises fundamental questions about the nature of human consciousness and identity. While scientists and billionaires are fascinated by the possibility of living forever in a digital world, the consequences of such a scenario are far-reaching and complicated. The movie *Don’t Worry Darling* highlights potential issues with creating a digital version of oneself. In the film, the characters are disconnected from their true identities, and their experiences in the virtual world are different from their real lives. The virtual city “Victory” recreates life in the ’50s and is home to many newlyweds. While men are obliged to leave that reality every day to work in the real world and pay for their “stay,” their wives are unaware of what happens to them when they “cross the virtual-real border.” The film shows that the women’s brains are permanently connected to a computer. Similarly, when humans upload their minds to an artificial brain or computer, they will risk losing their subjective experience of consciousness, not proven to be physical. While a machine may capture neural connections, it cannot replicate the human experience that makes each of us
unique. Therefore, it is not possible to transfer this subjective character to a machine, so after the process, one's artificial brain will have everything except phenomenal consciousness.

From discovering electricity to editing genes and developing Artificial Intelligence, science has always been responsible for multiple findings and inventions that lead to the proliferation of knowledge. However, consciousness is a pesky exception. Scientists have tirelessly studied the human brain and its neural connections, but it cannot be affirmed that consciousness is a physical process. Metaphysics is the branch of philosophy that studies the fundamental abstract nature and abstract concepts like consciousness, mind, being, knowing, time, and space that cannot be defined solely via objective studies of material reality. The problem of consciousness is a hugely debated and studied topic between scientists and philosophers who walk into the unknown to find a resolution to this mystery. Before discussing the quest for digital immortality and how phenomenal consciousness affects it, a few terms must be defined. In The Norton Introduction to Philosophy, Gideon Rosen divided consciousness into four major types, which will be discussed below. Thomas Nagel, an American philosopher, famously wrote in his book What Is It Like to Be a Bat? that consciousness is “what makes the mind-body problem really intractable” (qtd. in Rosen 356). Hoyt Edge's article discusses how consciousness is seen in the branches of philosophy and parapsychology. Hoyt mentioned, "A central issue in the development of parapsychology and one of the most persistent problems in philosophy is the mind-body problem” (1). However, Nagel and Hoyt were not referring to a generalized form of consciousness, as might be assumed at first glance. There are several types of consciousness, including phenomenal consciousness, which Nagel referred to in his book. Explaining a few other types of consciousness is essential to fully understanding phenomenal consciousness.

The first type is conscious awareness, which is to be fully awake and aware of one's surroundings. Being watched is an example of conscious awareness. The second type is self-consciousness, which is the awareness of oneself. While conscious awareness is a state where someone is aware of their surroundings, self-consciousness is a state where they are aware of themselves. The third type of consciousness is the state of being awake after a period of unconsciousness. The fourth type of consciousness, which is the focus of this paper, is phenomenal consciousness. It gives our experiences their qualitative character, making them feel unique. It is difficult to define and even more challenging to explain, which is why it has been a subject of intense philosophical debate. With a clear understanding of the different types of consciousness, it is possible to fully grasp the importance of considering phenomenal consciousness in the branches of
science and philosophy and why it has to be considered in the research to aim for digital immortality.

Phenomenal consciousness is a term introduced by philosopher Ned Block (qtd. in Rosen 353), and it refers to human experience concerning subjective sensations, perceptions, and feelings. Also known as subjective consciousness, phenomenal consciousness is a profoundly personal and unique human experience not measurable by others. It can be generally defined as a “form of state-consciousness: it is a property which some, but not other, mental states possess. More specifically, it is the property which mental states have when it is like something to undergo them” (Carruthers 1). In other words, phenomenal consciousness is connected to subjective phenomena. The nature of phenomenal consciousness, how it arises from the brain, and whether it is physical is a topic of much debate and investigation in philosophy, science, and psychology. According to German philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, mental phenomena cannot be fully explained since, even though we could enter inside a machine made to think, perceive, and sense, we still would not observe anything that would explain thinking, feeling, and perceiving (qtd. in Rosen 353). This kind of consciousness is to be discerned from others mainly because it has distinctive subjective feelings named qualia, explained in greater detail below. Scientists do not have a physical explanation for phenomenal consciousness because every subjective phenomenon is connected with a single subjective point of view. Therefore, those aiming for digital immortality must consider that phenomenal consciousness might be the x-factor to discern an individual's organic brain from an artificial one. According to the Australian philosopher David Chalmers, the problem of consciousness can be divided into “the easy problem” and the “hard problem” of consciousness. The easy problems can be explained thoroughly by known scientific methods, such as the difference between awareness and sleep. On the other hand, the hard problem is “the gap between the physical world and phenomenal consciousness” (Chalmers qtd. in Rosen 386). This problem is directly related to the run for digital immortality, which will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

Philosopher Frank Jackson argues that there are qualia in phenomenal consciousness, preventing it from being physical. In one of Jackson's most famous works, “Epiphenomenal Qualia,” he explained that there is more to human experience than just the physical processes that underlie it (qtd. in Rosen 366). Qualia are subjective experiences that cannot be reduced to physical descriptions and, thus, present a challenge for those who want to explain consciousness as a physical process. Jackson proposed the thought experiment “Mary's Room” to explore the nature of qualia. (qtd. in Rosen 368). According to the philosopher, qualia refers to subjective, first-person experiences that cannot be reduced to
third-person descriptions. Qualia can be proven by an argument Jackson named as “knowledge argument.” Like consciousness, knowledge can be divided into several kinds. There is propositional knowledge (or factual), where it defines things that can be true or false; personal knowledge, meaning one knows the person or place that is referring to; and procedural knowledge, or knowledge-how when one can do what one learned.

Jackson’s knowledge argument for qualia claims that “one can have all the physical information without having all the information there is to have” (qtd. In Rosen 369). Assuming physicalism leaves something out related to phenomenal consciousness, in that case, physicalism is hardly explained since it argues that all things must be physical. Still, it is impossible to prove it yet since some characteristics of consciousness were left out. In the case of “Mary’s Room,” Jackson imagined a scientist named Mary who had a complete knowledge process involved in color perception but had never actually seen colors herself because she lived in a black-and-white room. He argued that when Mary experienced color for the first time, she would learn something new that cannot be explained in terms of physical or neurobiological processes. This subjective experience of color is an example of qualia and is what makes each person unique. Individuals would have to give up their organic bodies and authentic selves to an artificial brain connected to a computer.

American psychologist Robert Epstein argues that the human brain does not function as a computer, unlike what many scholars might think. As Epstein wrote in his paper “The Empty Brain,” “We are organisms, not computers” (9). Therefore, we are not made for this technology that futuristic scientists are developing. Even though digital immortality promises “Preserving and transmitting your ideas is one-way immortality—allowing communication with the future. Endless experience and learning is two-way immortality—allowing you, or at least part of you, to communicate with the future in the sense that the artifact continues to learn and evolve” (Bell & Gray 1), the digital avatar created will not be human and will not continue evolving as such since their main human trait, their phenomenal consciousness, was left behind.

The quest for digital immortality interests many scientists and billionaires, who view it as the ultimate achievement for humanity. One prominent figure in this field is Elon Musk, whose company has been developing electronic brain implants. According to Éric Fourneretis, an assistant professor in philosophy at the University of Lille, “the implant could help people with disabilities, improve our cognitive abilities and even lead to a form of digital immortality” (1). The potential benefits of such technology are vast, and it could lead to a world where we can preserve our consciousness beyond our physical bodies. However, downloading ourselves into
computers and living in the metaverse has potential risks which must be handled. If society becomes too reliant on digital immortality and fails to move forward, it could delay the progress of human civilization. Therefore, it is crucial to approach the concept of digital immortality with caution and ensure that ethical and moral principles guide its development. Digital immortality could lead to asphyxiation of society and ultimately threaten the advancement of civilization.

Musk and other individuals and companies pursuing digital immortality face a daunting task. Achieving digital immortality would be a fantastic opportunity and a significant scientific milestone. However, not considering the complexities of phenomenal consciousness may pose a significant threat. In science, this is referred to as the “technological singularity,” a concept developed by the American computer scientist Raymond Kurtzweil and it is “a future period during which the pace of technological change will be so rapid, its impact so deep, that human life will be irreversibly transformed” (7). By pursuing digital immortality without considering the puzzling question of phenomenal consciousness, we could lead ourselves toward an unforeseen and troublesome future. It is important to note that Artificial Intelligence (AI) is becoming increasingly ubiquitous and essential to our daily lives. Thus, AIs should be seriously considered when discussing digital immortality. Transferring consciousness to machines means letting go of organic bodies. While it does not necessarily mean that AIs would dominate the world, as portrayed in science fiction movies like “The Matrix,” “Transcendence,” and “I, Robot,” it does pose a significant threat to the essence of what it means to be human.

The concept of digital immortality may seem intriguing, but it also raises a crucial question. Is it worth sacrificing the essence of being human to live forever in the virtual world? While the idea of being reunited with loved ones in a digital form might seem appealing, it would be at the cost of losing phenomenal consciousness. Phenomenal consciousness is what makes us unique and different from each other. Our individual experiences and emotions, such as the joy we feel while listening to our favorite song, the comfort we get from hugging our parents, or the happiness our pets bring us, are all the products of phenomenal consciousness and our *qualia*. If we lose that, what would be left of us? James S. Horton and Nicholas K. Priest raise an important point when they argue that an artificial copy of our brain, no matter how accurate, can never truly replicate the complexity of our souls. “The organic brain has forever been the vessel of our soul. An artificial copy may go as far as capturing your entire network of 100 trillion connections, but would it truly be you?” (Horton & Priest 6). It would be like a cheap replica that failed in some critical aspects. It would be living in a metaverse and experiencing life in the
third-person point of view, not the first. While digital immortality seems mesmerizing, we must carefully weigh its consequences before chasing it blindly.

As we move towards the possibility of digital immortality, we must prioritize the research on the role of phenomenal consciousness in the human brain and the concept of consciousness in general. Including this component in the research would allow for more understanding of what it means to preserve human consciousness in a digital form. The potential non-physicality of phenomenal consciousness raises fundamental questions about the nature of human consciousness and the universe itself. Scientists must acknowledge that the current understanding of consciousness is insufficient and must continue to study the complexity of human consciousness. The research may lead to a new understanding of the physical nature of consciousness and the development of new technologies that can replicate the essence of human consciousness. The benefits and risks must be considered, and digital immortality must be approached with foresight. For example, it may allow people to continue to exist beyond death. Still, it may also lead to losing what makes us human, such as our ability to experience emotions and feelings in the physical world. Would that be worth it?

In conclusion, it is crucial to prioritize the study of phenomenal consciousness to understand better what it will be like to preserve human consciousness in a digital form. Frank Jackson’s qualia are the subjective experiences that make consciousness unable to be proven physical, thus, affecting the run for digital immortality. Phenomenal consciousness is the x-factor that scholars still have yet to understand to acknowledge and find a way through it to achieve digital immortality and more scientific milestones.

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Now ten years after its initial airing and eight since its cancellation, NBC’s *Hannibal* maintains a stranglehold over Queer media fans. Its recent popularity has ebbed and flowed in the wake of Netflix acquiring it and then removing the series from its platform. The series initially captured attention with admittedly grotesque and graphic violence that made it home on NBC a wonder. However, as the show gained traction it quickly became clear to Queer fans that the series had heavy-handed Queer themes. While it took until season 3 for it to be explicitly spelled out to other audiences, for Queer fans it simply confirmed what they already believed was in front of them. The reveal in Will Graham’s question of “Is Hannibal in love with me?” (Season 3 Episode 12) boosted the series’ popularity in the Queer community and the handling of a complex Queer romance. It also raised questions of how villainous Queer characters are handled in American media. Conversations have sprouted in the years since the show’s cancellation about the Queer media tropes it employed and the transforming relationship between horror and Queerness. Through employing these narratives, NBC’s *Hannibal* depicts a nonconventional Queer romance that uses an amalgamation of horror tropes to convey how Queer identities have been ostracized in American media.

To set the scene, NBC’s *Hannibal* is based on Thomas Harris’ famous *Hannibal Lecter* trilogy, with most audiences being familiar with Anthony Hopkins’ depiction of the cannibal psychiatrist in *Silence of the Lambs* (1991). The television show takes its main inspiration from Harris’s *Red Dragon* (1981) and the first book in the trilogy. That novel, being the only appearance of the television show’s protagonist Will Graham, where the FBI agent is shown to have a strangely friendly relationship with Dr. Lecter. He captures Lecter’s attention both for being the man responsible for his
capture, but also for his purely empathetic abilities, allowing him to think like serial killers and thus being the only person to fully understand him. However, as seen in *Silence of the Lambs* (1991) and *Red Dragon* (1981), the focus of Lecter’s attention is on FBI trainee Clarice Starling. Notably, show creator Bryan Fuller who previously worked on NBC’s *Heroes*, was unable to procure the rights for Clarice Starling, so to both include her and to further fold in Will Graham, Fuller fused her into Graham.

Considering how the absence of Clarice Starling would drastically change the trajectory of the Hannibal series, Fuller elected to explore relationships and stories that were previously fan speculation. This was expressed in an exploration of gender and sexuality that in the novels was rejected as they leaned deeply into heterosexuality and vague misogyny cushioned by the brow-raising actions of male characters. Fuller voiced, “I think there’s something so fascinating about Hannibal Lecter as a villain, where he’s a bit of a dandy, wears three-piece suits and has a certain aesthetic. There’s something that I like about his gentlemanly qualities without having the traditional straightforward villain…” (Smith 2013). In many ways, the television series version of Hannibal Lecter comes across as more sympathetic and realistic. His sexuality, said more so in terms of his ability to experience sexual desire than orientation, feels far less predatory and out of character than it did in *Silence of the Lambs* due to Fuller adding layers of sensitivity and authenticity to Lecter. Where Hopkins Lecter made audiences squirm for his attraction to Clarice, Mads Mikkelsen, who plays Hannibal in the NBC adaptation, can be believed as having genuine affection and desire for Will Graham, however misguided his attempts to show it are.

When considering NBC *Hannibal*, it is important to acknowledge the deeply hurtful impacts of tying Queerness to villainy. Intentional or not, visual or literary media has used the rejection of traditional gender roles, predatory homosexuality, and unconventional affect to ostracize Queer people at large. The television version of Hannibal Lecter would at least superficially play into these negative stereotypes, but I would argue the contrary. Where other media villains are given Queer traits to separate them from society, NBC *Hannibal* uses these traits to humanize him. Between scenes of slaughtering innocents and misleading the FBI, we see the dramatic actions of a man who wants to be known and later loved by the only person who may be capable of doing so and he just so happens to be another man. References to the evil Queer trope or Queerness in horror are made not in condemnation of any characters or their morality, but simply as a metric in which audiences can analyze media.

Amidst the rise of the horror genre is the identification that Queer-coded characters are deigned the role of antagonist or hapless victim. Audiences would be familiar with these depictions as they appear in horror media such as *Nightmare on Elm Street 2, The Haunting*, or *The Hunger* (Figueroa 2022). However haphazard they may be, recent horror media has made it a point to expand the roles for Queer people, and in some cases make the media almost entirely Queer, as is the case in *Hannibal*. In the series, we see not only the romance between Hannibal and Will but also between Alana Bloom and Margo Verger, eventually leading to the two women marrying and having a child. There are other individual instances such as the frustrating reporter Freddie Lounds, Hannibal’s feeble patient Franklin, and the obsessive Mathew Brown. Few recurring characters fit into what would be considered traditional gendered behaviors, and for those that do, their adherent behaviors tend to cause them pain later (Messimer 2018).
Horror as a genre is slowly being transformed from a tool that would historically twist how the American public viewed the morality of Queer groups. But using those same mechanisms, horror is being transformed into a tool that can teach audiences about these communities (Hartless). By virtue of its popularity, the genre can be used to expose wider audiences to Queer stories that were previously only known to other Queer people. *Hannibal* for many might have been a first view of non-traditional expressions, gender traits or the possible complexity of Queer relationships. These depictions are incredibly important not only for audiences viewing them, but it also opens the opportunity to rewrite harmful tropes targeted at Queer communities.

Since early cinema and television history, there have been depictions of villains or monsters as being Queer-coded. Giving a character what would be recognized as Queer attributes such as exaggerated masculinity or femininity, promiscuity, or heightened vanity, all without explicitly calling the character Queer. In early American cinema, this was a device used to enhance the depravity or psychopathy of antagonists at the cost of the Queer community. For example, the original novel *Dracula* has the titular vampire continually seeking a true genuine intimate connection, not to be confused as sexual in nature (Sorensen). He does not appear to have much care as to the gender or age of this partner, eventually guarding Jonathan Harker's body and mind against the sexual advances of three female vampires.

Part of what makes NBC's *Hannibal* such an enthralling depiction is how heavily the series leans into all the elements of the evil Queer trope without condemning Queer attributes (Messimer). Firstly, Hannibal is depicted as having the stereotypical feminine interest of cooking and hosting dinner parties. In the episode “Apéritif,” we see Hannibal preparing the lungs pilfered from his victim interspersed with a crime scene investigation, implying he is preparing to feed them to special agent Will Graham. Secondly, his extravagant suits and incredible self-grooming is an indicator of his deep sense of vanity. Though he views other people as pigs, he seeks to impress them with his wealth and knowledge if only to feed his ego when receiving their praises. Finally, he uses his own allure and charisma to divert the FBI’s attention away from himself, entering a sexual relationship with a consultant to manipulate the investigation.

On the other hand, our second protagonist, special agent Will Graham, is incredibly masculine. He fixes boat motors, enjoys fishing, and is a social loner while pursuing relationships with women. However, once we strip back these superficial indicators, we reveal more of what can be considered Queer traits. Characters regularly remark that if it were not for his antisocial personality, he would be attractive. He is always at the receiving end of multiple men’s obsessions and manipulates them into helping him with promises of emotional intimacy (Season 2 Episode 5). His overall journey through the show seems to be reconciling his ability to empathize with everyone against what he wants for himself. Both men are somewhat feminized in the greater narrative to differentiate them from society, but those attributes are not what makes them evil.

What differentiates this show from other evil Queer media is the complexity given to these men individually and in their relationship (Messimer). Much like Dracula, their final objective in the series is to find someone who truly sees them and accepts them. Where other *Hannibal* media may superficially include these feminizing details, they function to alienate these men from societal norms and cast
him in a predatory light (Fowler). In NBC's *Hannibal*, while neither Hannibal nor Will qualify as sexual predators, they could count as predators in the animal kingdom definition of the word. In a far scarier sense, what makes them evil has nothing to do with how logically they go about killing, but rather an explosively primal human persona (Carroll) that emerges when they want the thrill. Through a shared taste for murder and eventually human flesh, the men come to a complete understanding of the monster they love.

In many ways, Hannibal could be considered a gothic series, for the dark tones and macabre subject matter. The series is technically qualified as magical realism, but aside from heightened senses of smell and empathetic superpowers, most mythical elements are results of untreated mental illness. The use of mythical creatures and their tropes are depicted more conceptually. For example, Dracula and other gothic literary and cinematic contemporaries have created a specific genre of tropes easily identifiable as gothic. Sometimes paired with the evil Queer trope is the tale of unwilling or Malevolent transformation. In various other media this can be vampire bite turning, sci-fi cloning, or historical accounts of ideological indoctrination.

Considering the prevalence of dogs in the series, *Hannibal* primarily follows the popular fairytale narrative of a werewolf transformation. In these scenarios, the act of becoming a werewolf or transforming into one on a full moon are painful and grotesque moments that bookend a night of feral violence. Often paired with this is a deep disgust and loathing for one's body (Elliott) and a disgust for having devolved to an animal self. Discomfort in one's own body is also a feeling that transgender individuals experience, though to continue the metaphor into that discomfort being monstrous would be mischaracterizing that community. Rather what the two groups share is a wish that their bodies would reflect what their minds view them as. For werewolves that would be remaining fully human and for transgender people it would be a different gender than the one assigned at birth.

The presence of a transformative werewolf narrative is heavily featured throughout *Hannibal*'s run. It is quickly established that while Will Graham can empathize and catch serial killers and psychopaths, the ability quickly wears him down. He simultaneously dislikes that the killers' personalities smother his own while he empathizes with them while enjoying the violence, which he struggles to come to terms with. Lecter immediately recognizes he is disgusted with himself for the desire and makes it his mission to lead Graham towards his "becoming" (Elliott). That "becoming" being embracing his murderous tendencies, and eventually including becoming Lecter's cannibal life partner.

The progression of their relationships seen in Season 1 would be the initial bite. Will Graham is drawn out from his teaching post and involved with crime scene investigation. Worried for his mental health, Director Jack Crawford points him in Dr. Lecter's direction, where he systematically works to plant the idea that murder and cannibalism are more alike to equaling oneself to God than a crime. Graham fights against his emerging murderous nature to the point where he fully dissociates himself from the horror of murder. Season 2 and the first half of Season 3 is him viciously fighting and losing battle to his desires and attraction to Dr. Lecter. Though in Season 3 Episode 7 “Digestivo” sees him finally putting Hannibal behind bars, it is a hollow victory because he has now come to see himself fully transformed into someone who enjoys murder and cannibalism. The series' final episodes show Graham crossing the final barrier or accepting his monstrous transformation by accepting Hannibal's Love and ultimately throwing them both down a cliff because
he cannot envision a world where two monsters like them could live in peace.

Of course, most show fans accept that due to the finale’s post-credits scene, both men survive their fall off the cliff and into the sea below. Due to the series cancellation, we will never know how the story continues for them, but considering the use of Christian theology in the show, the cliff dive may be a reference to baptism. Overall, the show’s narrative follows one of transformation but also seduction (Fowler). Charisma and intimacy were key components in Hannibal’s manipulation of Will and vice versa. Sensuality between the two men follow gothic tropes of mellow yet passionate affairs, aided by the need for discretion due to the network it aired on (Elliot). But in the same manner Will was transformed, Hannibal was also changed. Though he never wavered in his cannibal tendencies, as their relationship progressed Hannibal began taking bigger and bigger risks in revealing himself, finally turning himself in for the sake of his love.

As unfortunate as its cancellation was both for fans and for the sake of program diversity on NBC, it may have been better for the series to end where it did. The show challenged many ingrained beliefs about what makes a villain a villain and countered the role Queerness could play in that depiction. Transformation narratives told a slow story of seduction that played more into a gothic period piece than the crime procedural it was marketed as. To stretch the boundaries of how Queerness could be shown in the horror genre required show runners to take risks in maintaining their platform and audience. While no characters could be considered good people, they are made to be sympathetic by showing a full spectrum of themselves. Watching their struggles to fit in, navigating romance, and internal battles of morality, audiences find themselves rooting for everyone to get what they want. As much as it challenged these tropes it also mishandled some other particularly important Queer storylines created to highlight specific issues. For example, the appearance of Randall Teir, a serial killer who wanted to transition his human body into that of an animal did more to imply trans medical procedure to be closer to mutilation rather than correction. Sexual violence against women was often brushed over, including having a lesbian character sleep with a man to escape an abusive home.

It is critical to consider both the positive and negative impacts of the media we consume. Enjoying the series does not necessarily involve a focus on how Queerness is depicted but without it, audiences lose a large part of what makes the series so complex and addictive. The series has done more good than harm in the circles it hoped to represent, but is certainly going to face the test of time when revisited, seeing how tropes and themes could have been handled through a Queerer conscious lens.

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