

Global Insight

A Journal of Critical Human Science and Culture

World on Fire

Fall 2022

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Volume 3

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Global Insight: A Journal of Critical Human Science and Culture is now accepting submissions for Fall 2023. Contributors must be undergraduate students from any college at The University of Texas at Arlington. Submissions will be subject to double-blind peer review. The journal will be available to a wide, international audience in an online platform via academic hosts and vendors as well as a limited print run.

Global Insight aims at firing the imagination of up-and-coming scholars by providing a venue for critical thinking and independent research. Our endeavor is to cultivate the capacity of undergraduate students for subtle and nuanced reasoning as well as nurture a passion for ideas and an appreciation for the social, political, cultural, linguistic, ethical, environmental, and historical dimensions of important issues facing our global society today. Contributors should use liberal arts approaches such as inquiry, dialogue, and analysis to address the issues of politics and culture, science and technology, or related fields. Topics may range from industrialization and urbanization to agriculture and energy; health and health risks to international relations and foreign policy; international trade, finance, capitalism, globalization, and migration; or public issues such as race, class, gender, and labor, etc. Topics should be explored within their respective global contexts. The views of the authors do not necessarily represent those of UTA Libraries or the McDowell Center for Global Studies.

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UT Arlington Libraries Mavs Open Press: Yumi Ohira, Hang Pham-Vu
Cover Design by Dmitry Rudkevich Jr, Hang Pham-Vu

Published and made openly accessible by:
University of Texas at Arlington Libraries
702 Planetarium Pl.
Arlington, TX 76019

ISSN 2690-8204



Mavs Open Press
2022 University of Texas at Arlington

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From the Editor

The World is on Fire, but do we have the means to extinguish it?

Many things can be said about 2022, but then again, what can we say? When describing 1914 in the month that World War I began, Barbara W. Tuchman's 1962 classic *The Guns of August* seems almost disturbingly relevant to this year. Tuchman describes how the Great Powers of Europe in 1914 had every opportunity to avoid the tragic industrial meatgrinder that the war would become, and yet those Powers chose the battlefield assuming that it would be a quick and easy conflict, never mind the tragic web of circumstances that would drag many parts of the world into the trenches. What about today in 2022? Eight years of tensions and grudges between Russia and Ukraine have boiled into a bloody and gruesome war the likes of which Europe has not seen since the breakup of Yugoslavia. On the other side of the globe, rising tensions in diplomatic relations have brought the two great economies of the United States and China perilously close to open conflict. As of this publication, who knows whether the doves of peace have flown across the globe or the four horsemen of nuclear apocalypse have lain it to waste?

Could we also describe 2022 as a year of tragedy and heartbreak? On May 16, the US officially lost one million citizens to the seemingly unending COVID-19 pandemic. Inflation rose from its 40-year slumber to haunt every hard-working American family in their sleep. Spectacular climate phenomena have seen droughts encompass half of the US as early as June, while some places like California and my home state of Texas have droughts go on past the summer. In turn we saw storms completely submerge Yellowstone, Kentucky, and Dallas, TX because the soil was so dry it could not absorb the water. And yet, can we say that the worst has passed?

Could we describe 2022 as a year of chaos and confusion? The number of mass shootings, most notoriously in a small Texas town's elementary school and another in Illinois on the Fourth of July, have surpassed the number of days so far in the year. Trust in our mainstream media plummets as we try to find out what is truly going on around us, desperately seeking explanations for our world. News headlines, government policies, and even social media posts attempt to provide the facts only to be contradicted immediately afterwards. Our world struggles to find answers to the many questions of this year, but where can we find them?

Here at *Global Insight*, we ask many of the same questions. Our authors in this year's issue have diverse backgrounds and raise awareness on important issues that deserve attention in the global dialogue. From voting rights to media awareness, to the changing landscape of post-Roe America, we believe that our authors shed light on urgent topics that should be of concern to anyone and everyone.

I would like to congratulate each author on their exceptional work with their research, carried out with a dedication and devotion admirable for these trying times. It is my wish that all of you will continue throughout

your lives to apply your skills and commitment toward improving the world and answering the many questions that we all have.

To conclude, I would like to thank the incredible UTA faculty and staff whose hard work and determination provided the impetus that made this publication possible: Digital Publishing & Repository Librarian Yumi Ohira; Editor-in-Chief Dr. Lonny Harrison; Executive Editor Dr. Yubraj Aryal; graduate student peer reviewers at UTA; and most importantly our readers for giving us a reason to share these analyses at *Global Insight*.

2022 has been a chaotic year, and yet, what better time is there to better ourselves and become better human beings?

— *Dmitry Rudkevich Jr, Assistant Editor*

Foreword

Joshua Farquhar

My time at the University of Texas at Arlington was not exactly traditional. I started as a dual-credit high school student in the fall of 2016. A desire to learn Russian had brought me to UTA; after some research, it seemed to be the best opportunity in the area to study the language and learn the culture. My first classes were with Dr. Iya Price, who was teaching accelerated beginner and intermediate Russian that fall and spring. During these classes, I fell in love with language learning, and my interest in Russia as a cultural and geopolitical subject was piqued. I branched out into courses on advanced Russian grammar, and Russian literature (taught by Dr. Lonny Harrison), among others. I graduated from high school in May 2019, and through the study abroad program at UTA, was able to travel to Omsk, in Western Siberia, for a month-long immersion program.

That trip was eye opening. I had traveled to other nations before, but living abroad, alone, for an entire month, was a completely different experience. I gained a deeper understanding of the culture and the people who lived there, and I was able to make meaningful connections with both classmates and volunteers at Dostoevsky Omsk State University. On my way back, I had the chance to stay in Moscow with friends of an acquaintance at UTA. The chance to see such a politically and historically significant city was inspiring.

Upon returning to the United States, I began an undergraduate degree in politics, philosophy, and economics, while continuing to study Russian through private lessons and practice. The opportunities provided by UTA to study both domestically and abroad were major factors in my decision to continue my education with a Master's in International Studies at Dallas Baptist University. I have focused much of my research on Russia and the Eastern European region, and I am currently engaged in research regarding the challenge of global health, honing in on the tuberculosis endemic in Russia. My paper in the current number of Global Insight was written during my analysis of this issue.

Six years ago, when I first came to UTA as a high school student, I did not imagine I would be providing my analysis of Russian political questions in a setting more formal than dinner conversation. I have learned much over the past years, and I am excited to continue growing in my understanding of a region as intriguing as Eastern Europe and Russia. I would especially like to thank Dr. Iya Price for the investment she made in me as I undertook the journey of learning a foreign language. She served as a mentor as well as a professor, and she always sought ways to enhance my education. She served as an example of what a true teacher is. It is entirely possible that without her influence I would not be writing in this journal today.

— Joshua Farquhar, August 2022

The Continuing Specter of Disease: Tuberculosis in the Russian Federation

Joshua Farquhar

For the last two years, the public discussion surrounding global health has focused almost entirely on COVID-19. In the meantime, other historic and dangerous diseases have taken a backseat. Nevertheless, other endemics are worthy of discussion; these diseases, and potential lifesaving solutions, must also be granted attention if global progress on public health is to be achieved. This paper explores the tuberculosis endemic in the Russian Federation (RF), focusing mostly on multi-drug resistant (MDR) TB. While overall rates of tuberculosis have declined in Russia over the course of the 21st century, incidence is still far higher than in most nations, and MDR-TB makes progress more difficult. Two potential strategies are explored. The first strategy includes a public education campaign targeted at changing certain behaviors that contribute to the creation of multi-drug resistant strains. The second involves investment in new treatment options by the Russian government. Each of these policies possesses certain limited benefits but also has weaknesses leading to lack of solvency. As a result, the author suggests implementing both as a two-pronged approach. Each has the advantage of mitigating the weaknesses of the other, and would, therefore, be exponentially more successful if coupled.

Keywords: Russia, tuberculosis, drug resistance, global health

Introduction: The Nature of the Problem

Those living in Western countries generally have the luxury of living without the specter of tuberculosis (TB), but the residents of Eastern Europe do not. After the breakup of the Soviet Empire, the efforts of the central government to control tuberculosis collapsed, and the disease spread like wildfire. For the last few decades, Russia has experienced a tuberculosis endemic. The importance of this issue has been felt throughout centuries; despite the countless diseases humanity has suffered during the course of history, tuberculosis has killed more people than any other. The disease is still a leading cause of death worldwide (“Global Tuberculosis Report 2021”).

The prevalence of tuberculosis in the Russian Federation is felt on both a local and global level. Within Russia itself, the human toll is, of course, the most catastrophic. In 2019 alone, TB claimed over 10,000 Russian lives (Kanabus). Additionally, tuberculosis brings with it a real and staggering financial burden for the infected. The European Respiratory Journal concluded in 2014 that, on average, those who contract TB suffer a cost equivalent to “58% . . . of reported annual individual income and 39% . . . of reported household income.” Many are forced to take loans or sell household items to survive this monetary pressure (Tanimura).

The impact of tuberculosis in Russia is also felt globally. According to the World Health Organization, substantial progress in the global fight against multi-drug resistant tuberculosis will require “particular efforts” in ten countries, with Russia being one (“Global Tuberculosis Report 2021” 20). Estimates predict that, if TB continues along current projections, it will mean the loss of 28 million people and \$984 billion between 2015 and 2030 (“Global Economic Impact”). That loss roughly equates to the population of Venezuela (“Countries”) and the economy of Turkey (“GDP”). Combatting tuberculosis in Russia is a vital part of mitigating such human and economic tolls.

Barriers to a TB Solution in Russia

Studies note a trend in steadily dropping infections, as seen in Figure 1. This figure graphs incidence of TB per 100,000 people in Russia from the year 2000 to 2020. As can be gathered from the steep downward slope, cases of tuberculosis are far less common than they were twenty years ago. A casual researcher of the tuberculosis endemic in Russia may be tempted to conclude that the problem is vanishing.

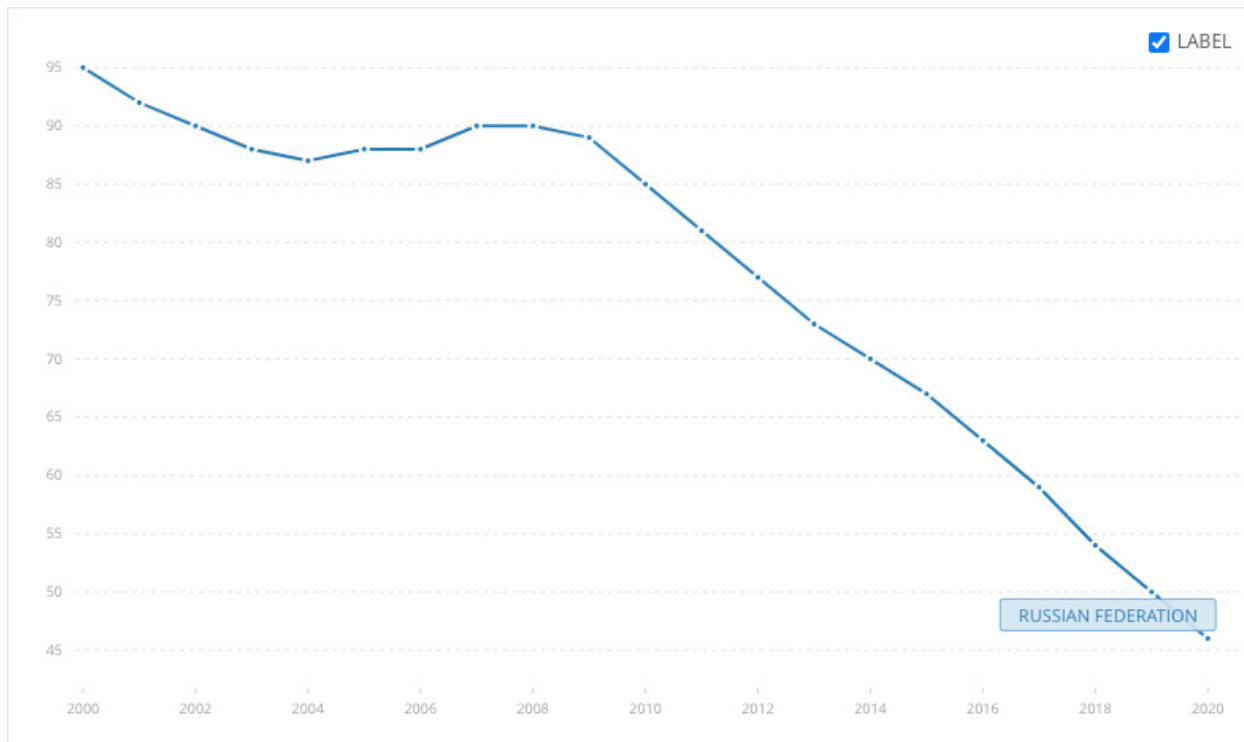
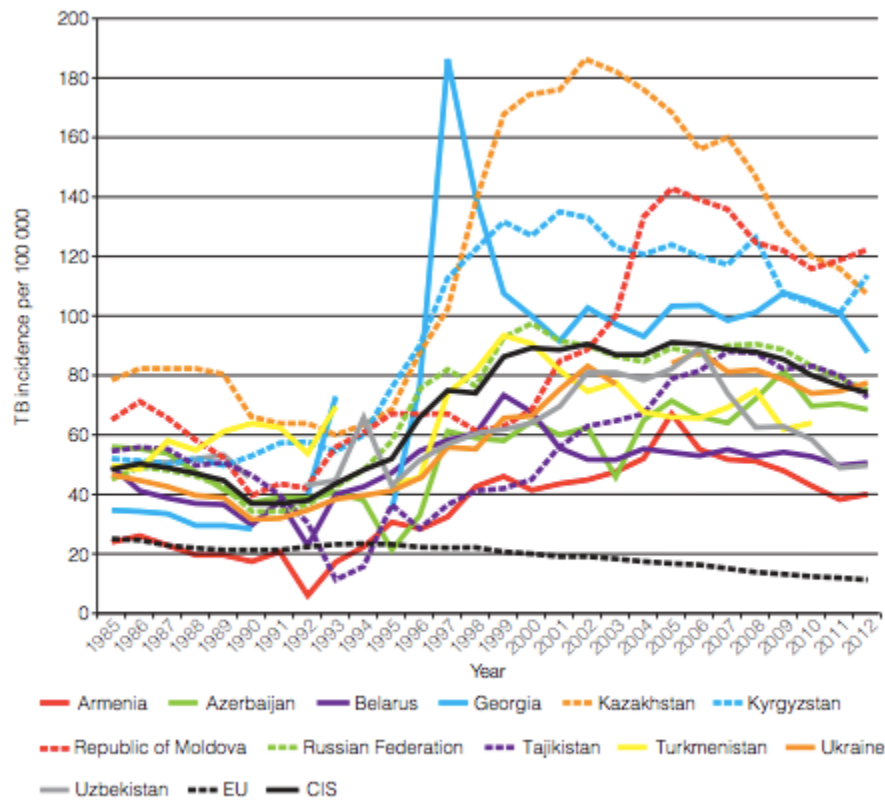


Figure 1: World Bank, 2020 (“Incidence of Tuberculosis”)

Indeed, rates of TB infection have decreased drastically in the Russian Federation since about 2008, dropping from 90 cases per 100,000 to 46 (as of the year 2020) (“Incidence of Tuberculosis”). However, as is often the case, a single graph cannot tell the whole story. While 46 in 100,000 does constitute relative improvement, it is still a far cry from the international average. In the United States the rate is 2.4 per 100,000 (“Data and Statistics”); it is 5 in Germany (“Report on Epidemiology”). In Croatia, with a GDP per capita equal to Russia (“Real GDP per Capita”), the rate is 6.6 (“Croatia”). In addition, even during these years of progress, multi-drug resistant tuberculosis (MDR-TB) and HIV-TB coinfection have maintained powerful footholds within Russia (“New Profile”). In fact, the World Health Organization placed the RF on its 2021-2025 list for high-burden countries for MDR-TB and HIV-associated TB (“WHO Releases New Global Lists”).

Searching for the source of the problem, it is vital to look at when incidence skyrocketed: after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Figure 2 illustrates that almost all former Soviet republics experienced some measure of skyrocketing tuberculosis infections in the early to mid-1990s (“Trends”). Charting each year from 1985 to 2012 shows the incidence of TB per 100,000 people in various post-Soviet countries. In the early 1990s, following the collapse of the USSR, these nations invariably experienced higher rates of infection and the measures used to limit the spread of TB also collapsed. According to the National Academy of Sciences, prevention and treatment of tuberculosis were strongly controlled by the federal government of the Soviet Union, but when that system broke down the health problem was exacerbated (“New Profile”).



Source: WHO, 2014.

Figure 2: European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies, 201 (“Trends”)

The National Academy explains in further detail some of the primary reasons TB gained such momentum during this period following Soviet dissolution. Of particular note, poverty increased. By 1999, 43.4% of Russians were living under the poverty line of \$5.50 per day (“Russia Poverty Rate”). Experts consider poverty a risk factor for TB because it causes people to more commonly live in close quarters with less air flow. As tuberculosis is airborne, this makes the bacteria more likely to spread (“TB and Poverty”). Another cause of increased infection was higher crime rates which caused bacteria to spread through close prison quarters; higher migration into Russia which brought infected migrants into Russia; and military conflicts which led to transmission between Russian soldiers and residents of other nations (“The New Profile”). Finally, and most importantly, the Russian healthcare system was horribly degraded. During the Soviet Union, healthcare was under central control and, consequently, under certain quality regulations. After it collapsed, so did many of those requirements. In 1996, five years after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the *American Journal of Public Health* reported that maintenance and training were poorly conducted in Russia, equipment and

physicians were underfunded, and no effective system of quality management existed (Barr 307).

In addition, the problem extends beyond tuberculosis itself; the disease has evolved and become more powerful. Multi-drug resistant (MDR) TB, a more dangerous form of the bacteria, is becoming more common worldwide. Figure 3 illustrates how many cases of MDR TB were detected worldwide from 2009 to 2016 according to WHO global reports (Lange). It is important to note that cases tripled from 2009 to 2016.

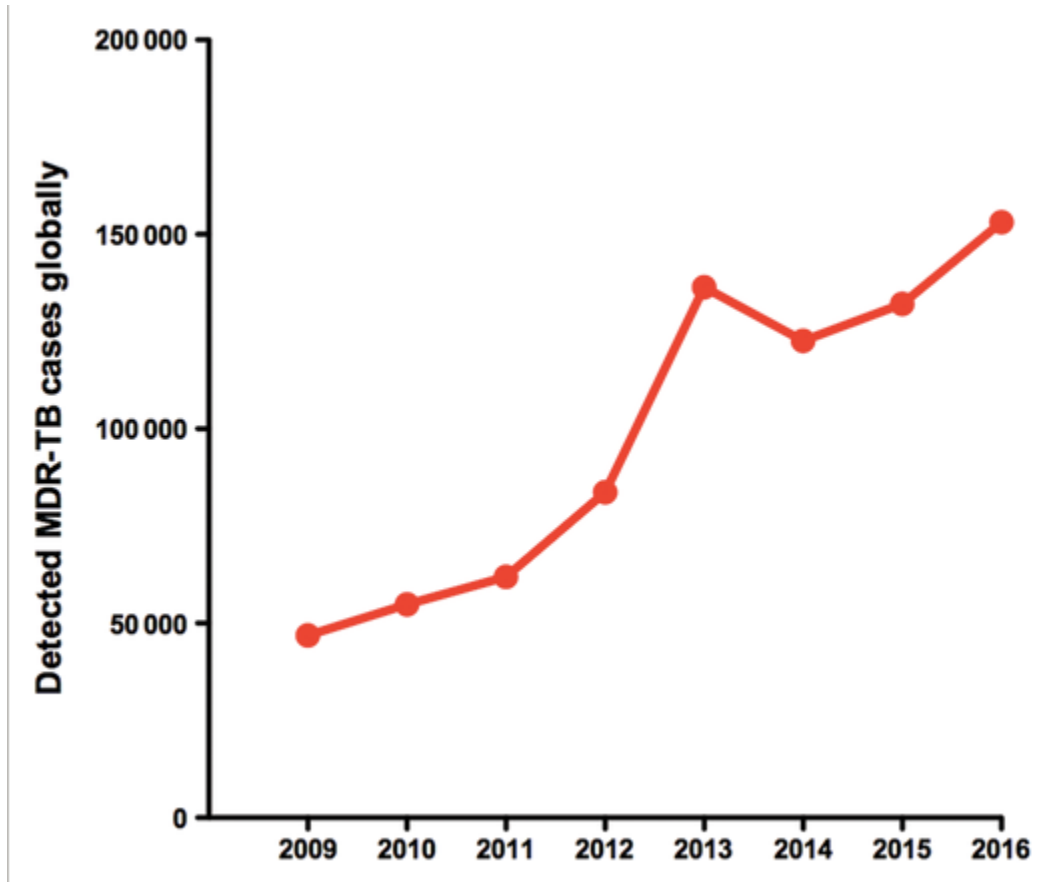


Figure 3: Official Journal of the Asian Pacific Society of Respiriology (Lange)

Not only is MDR-TB growing globally, it is extremely prevalent within Russia. A primary cause of this evolution has been the fractured and degraded health system (Wingfield) which often leads to incomplete treatment. Incomplete treatment can create MDR-TB by, in effect, acting as a vaccine in favor of the bacteria. The treatment is enough to teach the bacteria how to respond and build up their defenses but not enough to wipe them out. This is problematic as it creates a situation where the regularly prescribed full course of treatment becomes insufficient, and a more intense form is required. The Wilson Center provides some insight as to the causes of incomplete TB treatments in Russia when it explains that much of the issue is a result of "unreliable drug supplies, unsupervised therapy, poor management, and a lack of political will" (Hoffman). Research in *The American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine* confirms that screening activities were greatly decreased after the Soviet collapse due to lack of funding, in addition to drug supplies becoming irregular (Yablonskii). That said, the medical establishment is not the only party at fault. Lack of public knowledge regarding how to appropriately respond after contracting TB has exacerbated the problem and contributed to the development of multi-drug resistant TB. Researchers from Far Eastern Medical University and Harbin Medical University found that one of the primary issues in TB treatment is patient compliance related to length of therapy. As they explain,

"Patients become progressively tired as the treatment advances, especially those ones with drug resistance, whose regimens usually last for 24 months or even more. That, combined with insufficient awareness about consequences of intermitted treatment, leads patients to drop out from the treatment, usually as soon as symptoms disappear" (Bykov 15). In other words, as TB patients become weary of the lengthy treatment plan, they decide to drop out as soon as they start to feel better. Their improvements are not, however, a sign of total recovery from TB. Once they drop out, the bacteria become stronger and the treatment often becomes pointless. An additional cause of MDR-TB in Russia, also resulting from public ignorance, is the easy availability of first-and-second-line antibiotics, coupled with a lack of education among the general populous on how to treat tuberculosis ("Trends"). As The European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies explains, over-the-counter access to pharmaceutical drugs limits the ability of professionals to influence the amount, size, and timing of an individual's doses ("Trends"). When people feel sick, they buy and take some antibiotics, thinking that will help. In reality, taking too few doses may end up strengthening the bacterial defense mechanism against the drug. The World Health Organization sums up the problem well in the 2021 Global Tuberculosis Report when they point out that the Russian Federation is one of the ten nations accounting for 70% of the global gap between "estimated global incidence of MDR/RR-TB each year and the number of people enrolled in treatment in 2020" (Global Tuberculosis Report 2021, 20). MDR TB is a continuing problem in Russia, for which a solution must be found.

Potential Policies

Unfortunately, many of the factors contributing to the tuberculosis endemic are socioeconomic in nature. As discussed above, issues such as low living standards, unemployment, and migration continue to spread the disease ("The New Profile"). In general, countries with higher standards of living tend to suffer less with TB because living conditions are less crowded, while lower levels of migration reduce disease spread as fewer groups of people come into contact with one another. While broad-reaching economic policies aimed at these issues would certainly help in the fight against TB, they would also require large-scale changes to Russian political and economic systems. Since redesigning the government of Russia is not a viable option, more finely tuned strategies need to be considered.

A more targeted potential medical solution would be to improve awareness and education on tuberculosis in the Russian Federation. This campaign need not discuss the existence nor danger of tuberculosis itself. Rather, it should be centered on the means by which MDR-TB develops and the importance of finishing treatment. Over the last decade, numerous countries have conducted campaigns aimed at educating the public on the proper use of antibiotics and the importance of finishing treatments. According to the peer-reviewed journal *BMJ Global Health*, these campaigns are most effective when utilizing messages based rigorously on "scientific evidence" and the specific context in which their target audience operates (Huttner). Mikhail Perelman of the Moscow Medical Academy seems to agree with the idea of a public awareness campaign when he argues that more public education on how to maintain health would make TB much less likely to spread within Russia ("The New Profile"). The benefit of this potential strategy is that it includes the Russian people in their fight against tuberculosis. Instead of top-down policies and requirements that simply ask for compliance, an education campaign would inform the populace of measures they can take to reduce the evolution and spread of multi-drug resistant strains of tuberculosis. However, a clear disadvantage of this plan is that it comes with a level of uncertainty. Scholars submit that more research is still needed on the effectiveness of such campaigns. Therefore, the investment may do little in the way of influencing public behavior. An additional disadvantage is that this strategy does not solve for the fact that funding for proper treatments can be unreliable. The medical industry relies on government funds, and the government's problems are left unaddressed. Therefore, the public may be

convinced to demand treatments that are not always available.

A second potential solution would be for the Russian government to invest in second-line treatment options. In this context, second-line treatment simply means treatment designed to counter tuberculosis bacteria that are resistant to the typical regimen of drugs (i.e. MDR-TB). Unfortunately for the Russian public, second-line treatment is expensive (“Tuberculosis”). The Russian public is already struggling to afford needed medicines (Cichowlas), and this is further complicated by the problem of drug irregularity discussed earlier in the paper. Investment by the Russian government in second-line treatments could have the two-pronged benefit of offsetting the high costs of treatment for the general public, as well as increasing the availability of needed drugs within the country. In fact, now is an ideal time for such an investment as new and more effective forms of treatment for MDR-TB have recently been developed. A 2020 study in the *American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine* published the results of extensive multicountry research on the efficacy of these novel drugs. It found these drugs to be highly effective and highlighted “the need for urgent expanded access” (Franke 111). In fact, these drugs have an early effectiveness rate of 85%, compared to 60% for older treatments (Miller). A prime advantage of investing in these new treatments is that most patients could follow a fully-oral regimen of treatment. In 2020, the WHO officially recommended expanded access to fully-oral regimens as an alternative to the more outdated treatment plan, which requires injections and tends to take longer. Patients find it easier to complete this treatment plan (“WHO Urges Countries”), which reduces the risk of MDR-TB developing further resistance to drugs. This is important in the Russian context, as one of the leading causes of MDR-TB development is patients electing not to finish treatment. The main disadvantage to such a strategy is that government possession of the treatment does not guarantee the citizenry will take advantage of it. Easy access to antibiotics (and therefore the illusion of simple self-treatment) may reduce the amount of people who seek official treatment. The overall reduction in TB reporting since the pandemic (Global Tuberculosis Report 2021) may have the same effect. Early detection is important for successfully treating MDR-TB (Bykov), and these factors may therefore reduce the nationwide efficacy of investment in second-line treatments.

Recommendation

It must be noted that, despite continued high rates of infection, Russia has made objective progress in the fight against tuberculosis over the course of the 21st century. Thus, part of the solution must be to continue many of the programs the Russian government has already implemented. However, because of the high incidence of drug-resistant strains, these must be bolstered by some new innovations. While both of the potential solutions addressed above possess their own disadvantages, many of these would be offset by the advantages of the other. The public education campaign could be hindered by the lack of treatment available, but investment in second-line drugs would minimize this roadblock. Investment in treatment would be less effective if the citizenry did not take advantage of treatment plans, but the campaign would likely increase the proportion of people who seek and finish treatment for MDR-TB.

The public education campaign would likely increase the number of Russians who seek professional treatment of their MDR-TB, fulfilling the recommendation in the 2021 WHO Global Tuberculosis Report that TB-affected nations focus on increasing levels of diagnosis. Even before the existence of COVID-19, reporting in the European region was dropping substantially, and Russia was the European country most responsible for the decline globally. Figure 4 charts the decline of TB diagnosis notifications in Europe from 2016 to 2020, showing the rates drop by approximately 30% (Global Tuberculosis Report 2021).

Trends in case notifications of people newly diagnosed with TB by WHO region, 2016–2020

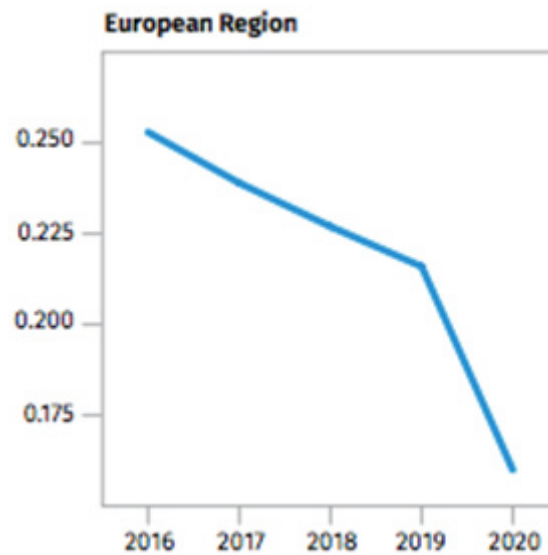


Figure 4: WHO Global Tuberculosis Report 2021

Investment, by bolstering availability of treatment within Russia, would tackle the problem of not enough MDR-TB infected people receiving the necessary care. As discussed above, the WHO reports that there are 10 countries that make up 70% of the gap between the incidence of MDR-TB and the number of people receiving treatment, and Russia is on that list (Global Tuberculosis Report 2021). Lack of treatment is a serious problem that must be addressed if Russia is to continue its successful fight against tuberculosis and see incidence rates drop to the levels known in most developed countries.

These two policies would be far more effective in tandem than either would be as a single-handed approach. In short, if coupled, their effectiveness would likely increase exponentially.

Conclusion

In 2003, American couple Rick and Francene adopted a 13-month-old from Russia. Upon returning to the United States, they brought their new son for his first doctor's appointment in America, and he was tested for tuberculosis. While chest x-rays came back negative, they elected to have a follow-up x-ray conducted six months later. This one returned shockingly different results. Before the family even made it home, the doctor's office called to inform them that their son did, in fact, have TB. Treatment was not easy: it involved months of almost daily injections. Two years later, Rick and Francene adopted another boy from Russia. He also tested positive for latent tuberculosis. Like his elder brother, he underwent treatment. Years later, both children had grown into strong and healthy boys, and neither even remembered their times of treatment. Francene later commented, "For others who may receive a TB diagnosis and must undergo treatment, I would say, if a 13-month-old child can do it, anyone can . . . Treatment is nothing like it used to be, and you can still live your life" ("Rick and Francene's Story").

The above story paints a tragically accurate picture of the modern TB endemic ravaging Russia. It highlights that the disease is far too common, even amongst the youngest members of society. Yet it also stresses that, although treatment can be complicated, it is well-proven and effective. Tuberculosis is well under control across vast regions of the world. Through public education and investment in second-line treatment, the Russian

government has the potential to strengthen the fight against the disease and, over time, become one of those regions.

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A Gamble on Gender: Perceptions of the Singular “They” Pronoun among College-Age Students

Sloane Cheesebrough

This paper discusses a study that was carried out with the aim of discovering the perceptions of the singular “they” pronoun (both general and specified) among college students with a focus on the interaction of the gender of the participant with their perceptions. The linguistic variables considered were the level of acceptability of different pronouns, pronouns used by participants, and direct perceptions of the singular “they,” while the social variables were gender, age, first language, and academic year. The hypotheses are as follows: men would find the singular “they” (both forms) less acceptable than women and nonbinary genders, and in the overall data, the general singular “they” would be rated lower than the pronouns he and she, and the specified singular “they” would be rated lower than that. The study utilizes an online survey targeting college students containing 30 questions about the acceptability of various pronouns, including questions that asked participants to rate sentences on how grammatically acceptable they were (1 being not acceptable, and 5 being very acceptable) and questions regarding social situations involving pronouns. Some general observations of the data are as follows: 94.9% of respondents have met someone who uses the singular they pronoun. Additionally, younger people are more likely to rate the specified singular they higher. Most relevantly, the general singular “they” was rated the same as the pronouns “he” and “she,” and the specified singular “they” was rated highly but significantly lower than any other pronoun asked about. This study helps to fill gaps in LGBT+ linguistics research and provides a wider knowledge base for this topic. Repetitions with larger sample populations would be valuable.

Keywords: pronouns, gender, linguistics, age, LGBT+

Introduction

Numerous sources were consulted for this research, all of which helped to shape the survey that was used for the study and my understanding of the subject matter in general. Here I consider the findings of three of them in particular: Bradley et al., “Singular ‘They’ and Novel Pronouns: Gender-Neutral, Nonbinary, or Both?” (2019); Nikolova, “Singular Specific ‘They’ in the English Language” (2020); and Bradley, “The influence of linguistic and social attitudes on grammaticality judgments of singular ‘they.’” (2020). Other relevant sources for this study include Konnelly, L., & Cowper, E. (2019), an analysis of the morphosyntax of the specified singular “they”; Zimman, L. (2016), a look at the socio-political impact of pronouns; and Hernandez, E. (2020), a study on attitudes towards the singular “they” in the context of prejudice and prescriptivism.

In one of several studies on the topic, Bradley et al. examined whether the singular specified “they” and

the neopronoun “ze” were perceived as gender-neutral (referring to any gender, binary or not) or perceived as specifically referring to a nonbinary gender by having participants match photos to resumes. The authors discovered that “they” is generally interpreted as gender-neutral, while “ze” depended on whether the participant was familiar with the pronoun or not. If the participant was, “ze” was interpreted as gender-neutral. If the participant wasn’t, many thought it was a misspelling of “he.”

An article by Nikolova in 2020 presents the preliminary results of a larger study whose focus is to investigate the frequency and distribution of the singular “they” in comparison to other pronouns in varying conditions depending on the referent’s gender identity, gender explicitness, and the relevance of gender in the condition. This was tested through varying tasks whose goal was natural elicitation from the participants to avoid self-policing. The preliminary results confirm previous studies’ findings: that the singular “they” is growing in prevalence, and is actually used more frequently than thought, notably in places where gender is clear but not relevant.

Bradley’s 2020 article, “The Influence of Linguistic and Social Attitudes on Grammaticality Judgments of Singular ‘They,’” describes a study that is similar to the one that the present author has conducted in that the author presented a series of sentences with pronouns to participants and asked them to rate them on a 1-5 scale of grammaticality. Bradley also asked participants to rate how much they agreed with various prescriptivist statements on a 1-5 scale. The results found that the singular “they” is very acceptable when used in reference to a hypothetical person of unknown gender, while the use of the singular “they” to refer to specific individuals of unknown or nonbinary gender is less acceptable; however, the degree of acceptability varies depending on the participant’s level of agreement with prescriptivist and “benevolent sexism” statements. This is in reference to the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (Glick and Fisk, 1996) which describes sexism either through positive-sounding sexist statements – benevolent, or negative-sounding sexist statements – hostile.

Racial and Financial Minorities vs. Abortion Access

This study used a survey to collect participants’ information starting with demographic questions on age, gender, first language, and academic year. Then came a 30-question section (with question order randomized) on how grammatically acceptable various pronouns are. Six sentences were included with each pronoun (he, she, they [general], and they [specified]), and two control (syntactically ungrammatical) sentences for each pronoun. These sentences were either pulled from American TV show scripts by using a random number generator to choose samples from a transcripts website or were created by the researcher.

The instructions preceding this section asked participants to rate each sentence on a 1-5 scale of grammatical acceptability, with 1 being not acceptable at all – in other words, no one fluent in English would say this with the goal of sounding “correct” – and 5 being totally acceptable, or anyone fluent in English would say this with the goal of sounding “correct.” I worded it this way in order to elicit a more natural response, with the goal of getting the participant’s perceptions rather than administering a quiz. If the study were to be repeated, an alternative question that may elicit more natural responses could be, “If this sentence were being spoken aloud by a friend, how much would it make them sound like a native speaker of English?”

Next in the survey were 11 questions concerning various social situations involving the singular “they” pronoun, including a free response question at the end for any other thoughts on the survey. Figure 1 below contains a few examples of those questions. The complete list of survey questions can be found in the appendix.

What pronouns do you use to refer to yourself?	she/her, he/him, they/them, ze/zim, any pronouns, other
Do you know or have you met someone who uses "they/them" pronouns to refer to themselves?	Yes, No
Do you think it is acceptable to use the pronoun "they/them" (and its variations) to refer to a single person?	Definitely yes, Probably yes, Maybe, Probably not, Definitely not
Do you use "they/them" pronouns to refer to someone whose pronouns or gender you are not sure of?	Always yes, Usually yes, Might or might not, Usually no, Always no

I distributed this survey to friends, acquaintances, former class group chats, various mid-size (1k-5k people) to small (<1k people) discord servers, and the discussion board for survey links for the Language and Gender class I was in at the time. I made sure to specify that I was looking for college/university students fluent in English.

Findings

The sample population (N=78) was distributed as follows: by gender, 51.28% women, 19.23% men, and 29.49% nonbinary gender (in this sense including any genders that are not binary, and not just people who use the label nonbinary). The mean age of the sample was 24.12, with the youngest being 18 and the oldest being 57. By first language, 87.18% said their first language was English, with a further 2.56% listing English and another language. Pronouns had a few more options, so I have included a pie chart below in Figure 2. An interesting additional note: every man chose he/him as his pronouns, but women and nonbinary choices were in every pronoun category. Additionally, it was a little surprising that there were no neopronoun responses.

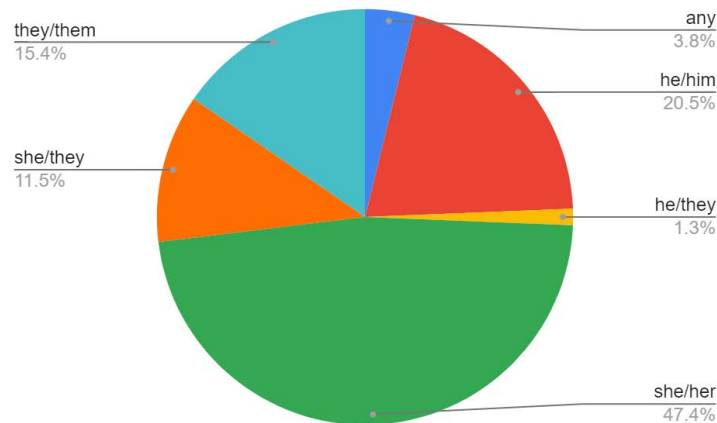


Figure 2

Examining the general results reveals that the original hypothesis was partially incorrect: the specified "they" was rated the lowest; however, the general "they" was nearly identical to both he and she. Additionally, the specified "they" was much higher than I anticipated. Figure 3 below presents the average scores of each pronoun

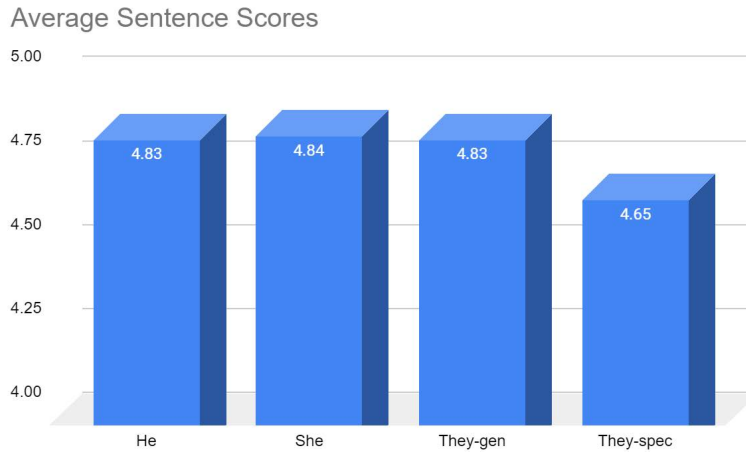


Figure 3

Now, in the interests of time, I will be analyzing the average scores of one sentence, specifically the lowest scoring specific “they” sentence, with gender. The sentence analyzed is “That’s Alex, they’re great at math.” I created this particular sentence and chose the name Alex specifically because it’s vaguely gender-neutral. Below is a table of responses generated for this sentence.

“That’s Alex, they’re great at math.”			
Rated it 4 or higher		Rated it 3 or lower	
Overall	84.51%	Overall	15.49%
F	40.85%	F	9.86%
M	18.31%	M	2.82%
N	25.35%	N	2.82%

Figure 4

It is also interesting to look at proportional percentages of each gender. 80.56% of the women rated the sentence 4 or higher, while 86.67% of the men and 90% of the nonbinary participants responded the same. There were far more women in the study than men or nonbinary participants, but the number of men and nonbinary was more similar, which makes me feel fairly confident in saying that the data suggests that nonbinary people are more likely to rate the singular specified “they” as acceptable than men and women as well.

Additionally, I looked at age and academic year in relation to this sentence's scores but found rather typical data: 93.33% of 18 to 24-year-olds rated the sentence 4 or higher, while 68.67% of 25 to 31-year-olds and 66.67% of 32-year-olds and up did the same. More could probably be found in this area with a larger diversity of age groups, but the target population was college students, so it is unsurprising that I did not get as many older people. As for the academic year, it followed a similar trend of older years rating the sentence lower.

In regards to questions of social acceptability, 94.9% of respondents have met someone who uses they/them pronouns to refer to themselves. This was not surprising, considering that the target population were college students, and studies have found before that younger people are more likely to have met someone who uses they/them pronouns (Parker et al., 2019). 100% said yes or probably yes to the question of whether the general singular "they" is acceptable, while 98.7% said the same to the specified singular. Interestingly these numbers are much higher than the sentence scores. 41% said they might or might not ask someone their pronouns after meeting, and 84.7% said they usually or always refer to someone whose pronouns they do not know as "they." 46.2% said their answers change based on the environment. After that question, I offered a free response for participants to explain their answer further and received some fascinating answers. One in particular seemed to capture most of the sentiments expressed:

If I feel I'm in an environment where using they/them pronouns could create a potentially unsafe or negatively charged environment, then I will avoid using them, or try not to use any pronouns at all. This usually occurs with people who I don't know especially well, or who I know would not be understanding of gender-neutral pronouns and/or would not be receptive to an explanation of these pronouns from me.

This response echoes experiences similar to those of the present researcher and may indicate, along with other supporting data, that the sentiment expressed by the respondent is a commonly held view. Other responses said it depended on whether they were likely to see the person often after that. Some also said they were socially awkward, so they didn't ask and instead picked up others' pronouns from conversational clues.

This response echoes experiences similar to those of the present researcher and may indicate, along with other supporting data, that the sentiment expressed by the respondent is a commonly held view. Other responses said it depended on whether they were likely to see the person often after that. Some also said they were socially awkward, so they didn't ask and instead picked up others' pronouns from conversational clues.

The final question on my survey was a free response for participants to share any other thoughts on the study, and people had a lot to say. A couple of respondents commented on the lack of a gender-neutral pronoun in another language they speak or are learning. Some commented on how gender-neutral pronouns and using the correct pronouns for someone is basic respect and should not be debated. One person, in particular, said "gender isn't real"! One of my favorite responses, however, provided the title for this paper. I've put it below.

I also sometimes with strangers will make a gamble on their gender. For example, a person that appears cis and presents not queer? If that makes sense, I will sometimes assume they use pronouns aligning with their presentation or perceived cisgender. I am more careful about using they/them pronouns for visibly queer or gender-nonconforming strangers until I know their pronouns.

A gamble on gender! It implies that there is something to be won or lost with the use of different pronouns. Also fascinating are the intercommunity perceptions and assumptions that fuel linguistic choices. It makes me wonder about and want to conduct studies on linguistic choice based on appearance in various communities. Would someone talk differently to (or about) someone dressed like a cowboy? Like a skater? Like an heiress? Would that change based on gender? All fascinating questions.

Conclusion

Part of the original hypothesis was supported, and part of it was rejected, while a lot more data was gathered than expected. In general, my results support the idea that nonbinary people are more likely to rate the specified singular “they” as acceptable. A very large portion of the sample population knows of and supports the singular “they” pronoun, and the use of the singular “they” pronoun can at times be restricted to certain environments out of fear of retaliation. Additionally, though unsurprisingly, younger people are more likely to rate the singular “they” as grammatical.

These conclusions are largely confirmed by shared knowledge within the LGBT+ community, as well as in previous studies, such as the study done by the Pew Research Center which found that 35% of Generation Z (born after 1996) knows someone who uses the singular “they” pronoun to refer to themselves. The implications of their study and mine are generally that the younger generations are more accepting, which I find promising for the future.

Something that possibly influenced this data significantly was the fact that it seemed a large portion of participants were LGBT+ or participated in LGBT+ communities. This makes sense in reflection because I sent the survey in communities I participate in, and, as I am LGBT+, I don’t tend to seek out spaces that are unfriendly or hostile to people like me. Repeat studies with different populations could target those less familiar or more opposed to the singular “they” pronoun, or even a study specifically targeting an LGBT+ population. Such a study might include added questions regarding language and why those choices are made.

Ultimately, as is or as could be, my study helps to fill a gap in research on the singular “they” pronoun and on nonbinary pronouns in general. This study and studies like it, particularly in comparison with studies on neopronouns, have the potential to begin to describe the wide variety of language innovations made to describe the human experience of gender as experienced internally and socially.

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Appendix

Demographic Questions

- Comes before acceptability questions, free text response
 - Instructions: ****LOOKING FOR COLLEGE/UNIVERSITY STUDENTS (UNDERGRAD OR GRAD) FLUENT IN ENGLISH**** This is a survey for a research project for a college Language and Gender course. You'll be answering various questions related to how acceptable it is to use different gendered pronouns in different sentences and different social situations. Please answer each question to the best of your ability; your responses will only be used for the purposes of this project and will not be connected to any identifying information from you. There are no right or wrong answers for any question.
1. What is your age?
 2. What is your gender?
 3. What is your first (native) language?
 4. What is your academic year in college?
 - Comes after acceptability questions with multiple choice options
 5. What pronouns do you use to refer to yourself?
 - a. she/her
 - b. he/him
 - c. they/them
 - d. ze/zir
 - e. any pronouns
 - f. Other (please specify)
 6. Do you know or have you met someone who uses "they/them" pronouns to refer to themselves?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 7. Do you think it's acceptable to use the pronoun "they/them" (and its variations) to refer to a single person?
 - a. Definitely yes
 - b. Probably yes
 - c. Maybe
 - d. Probably not
 - e. Definitely not
 8. (Referring to the previous question) What about if you're talking about someone whose gender you don't know?
For example, in a generalized statement about a single person, or the unknown owner of a misplaced belonging?
 - a. Definitely yes
 - b. Probably yes
 - c. Maybe
 - d. Probably not
 - e. Definitely not
 9. (Referring to the previous question) What about if the person you're talking about has asked you to use "they/them" pronouns when talking about them?
 - a. Definitely yes
 - b. Probably yes

10. In general, do you try to refer to people by the name and pronouns they ask you to refer to them by?
 - a. Always yes
 - b. Usually yes
 - c. Might or might not
 - d. Usually no
 - e. Always no
11. When you meet someone, do you ask their pronouns?
 - a. Always yes
 - b. Usually yes
 - c. Might or might not
 - d. Usually no
 - e. Always no
12. Do you use "they/them" pronouns to refer to someone whose pronouns or gender you aren't sure of?
 - a. Always yes
 - b. Usually yes
 - c. Might or might not
 - d. Usually no
 - e. Always no
13. (Referring to questions 11 and 12) Does this answer change depending on your environment (location, what people are around, etc.)?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
14. If you responded yes to question 13, please elaborate. If you responded no, please type N/A. [Free text response]

Acceptability Questions

- Sentences are randomized in survey. Answer options are a scale from 1-5, with 1 being "Not Acceptable" and 5 being "Acceptable". Sources are not included in actual survey. If not sourced, sentences were generated by me.
- Instructions: Please rate each sentence on a 1-5 scale of how grammatically acceptable you find it; 1 being not acceptable at all, you wouldn't say this and you don't think anyone fluent in English would say this (with the goal of it sounding "correct"), and 5 being completely acceptable, you or anyone fluent in

Pronoun	Sentence
She/Her	<p>Acceptable</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "She actually read a short story I wrote." Source: Veronica Mars, S3E18, "I Know What You'll Do Next Summer" • "Maybe someone can actually give Jane the competition she needs." Source: All American, S2E3, "Never No More" • "Is she a professional singer?" Source: The Good Doctor, S1E16, "Pain" • "Okay, we can just stay with her." Source: Atlanta, S2E9, "North of the Border" • "I could take her out to lunch somewhere this week." Source: Mom, S4E14, "Roast Chicken and a Funny Story" • "I'll impress her at the party." Source: Lucifer, S3E2, "The One With the Baby Carrot" <p>Unacceptable</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I didn't she know was here." • "Her wants to be my friend again."
He/Him	<p>Acceptable</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "My roommate said he was going out to the park for a couple hours." Source: iZombie, S1E6, "Virtual Reality Bites" • "You must have been wondering where he was." Source: True Blood, S2E8, "Timebomb" • "Luke feels like the world owes him something." Source: One Tree Hill, S8E15, "Valentine's Day Is Over" • "You can dance with him." Source: Glee, S1E2, "Showmance" • "We'd appreciate if no one told him." Source: FRIENDS, S7E21, "The One With The Vows" • "Should I bring him his phone?" Source: This Is Us, S4E12, "A Hell of A Week, Part Two" <p>Unacceptable</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "He against leaned the wall." • "You can't him give it."

They/Them (Unspecified)	<p>Acceptable</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• "Somebody left their hat in the classroom yesterday."• "A doctor gets to decide which patients they will see."• "The average person doesn't like it when they have to get up in the middle of the night."• "Anyone who goes down that path should know what they're getting into."• "When a customer comes in, ask them if they have a reservation."• "If you see anyone doing something wrong, let them know." <p>Unacceptable</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• "That person over there is running, what's up with they?"
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Westernization and Its Effects on the Sound of Japan

Coleton Boles

A major source of influence on Japanese musicians has historically been Western art, and the resulting music has also served to influence much of Western contemporary music. This paper forms a timeline containing some key moments in Japanese music history, including the pioneering of Japanese-language rock, synth-pop, and Shibuya-kei. This investigation into these important moments is supplemented by quotes from interviews of musicians, including Haruomi Hosono of Yellow Magic Orchestra and Happy End, Keigo Oyamada of Flipper's Guitar, and Yasuharu Konishi of Pizzicato Five. This paper finds that a country's art and culture, in this case Japanese music, can evolve through the importation and assimilation of foreign culture.

Keywords: music, Japan, westernization, Shibuya-kei, techno

Introduction

Prior to the Meiji period, the general Japanese population had little to no contact with the rest of the world, outside of what the government permitted to be traded into the country. The Japanese government practiced an extreme isolationist policy, only allowing limited trade with the Dutch. In 1868 however, Japan began an extraordinary societal shift when the Shogun was overthrown and the authority of the Emperor restored (Asia for Educators, n.d.). Under Emperor Meiji, international trade was welcome, including the use and adoption of foreign technologies. Japan transformed into a modern, industrialized society in the span of just 44 years, which has come to be known as the Meiji Restoration. A major component of this transformation was how receptive the people of Japan were to the cultures of the Western World. Over the years, Japanese society has continued to borrow and reinterpret these cultural values across various mediums. But how have these ever-present influences shaped the sound of modern-day Japan? In this article, I aim to examine the effects of westernization on the music of Japan, as well as the impact Japanese musicians have had globally.

The Meiji period brought about great cultural exchange between Japan and the West, and music was no exception. An article in The Columbia Encyclopedia notes the following:

The Meiji restoration saw the importation of Western music to Japan, beginning with the brass band. In the 1880s, Western music was introduced into the schools, and in 1887 the Academy of Music was established in Tokyo. Later, symphony orchestras were formed, and Western music became an integral part of the cultural life of Japan.

The United States, for a long time now, has been a globally dominant force in the exportation of culture with regard to music in particular. When rock and roll was developed in the US throughout the 50s and 60s by the likes of Chuck Berry and Little Richard, Japan would soon follow suit.



Figure 1: Happy End

In the late 1960s, the influential Japanese band Happy End caused great debate in their home country with their Bob Dylan-esque folk rock music. This debate, called the Nihongo Rokku Ronsō (Japanese-language rock controversy), asked if rock should be sung in English since it is originally American music. Leary (2021) writes, “Essentially the question was whether rock music was something totally foreign to Japan, something created primarily for American consumption, or if the genre could belong to the Japanese musicians creating it.” The band settled this debate and cemented their legacy with their hugely popular 1971 album *Kazemachi Roman*, sung entirely in Japanese.

One of Happy End’s band members, Haruomi Hosono, has since gone on to be perhaps the single most important voice in all of Japanese music, as well as a leading figure for electronic music globally. In an interview at the Red Bull Music Academy in Tokyo (2015), when asked about growing up with American music, Hosono answered:

“I always listened to that music on FEN, the US military radio station. So almost all of the music I listened to was in English. Many of my favorite groups were from California. The psychedelic movement was happening there when I was a teenager. Groups like Moby Grape and Buffalo Springfield. A lot of legendary groups were there. I covered their songs in English. I felt their music was somehow profound.” (00:07:49)

After the disbandment of Happy End and a successful solo career, Hosono began to question what kind of image Western audiences had of Asia when he was exposed to American-made exotica music. Leary (2021) explains, “Exotica was a cudgel used by Westerners to misinterpret the Asian character while truly Asian music, such as the music Hosono was making with Happy End, still had no place.” Hosono, among other Japanese musicians, wanted to shed light on this misconception of his culture, as well as make something that is truly Japanese. This came to fruition with the formation of the forward-thinking and extremely influential Synthpop group Yellow Magic Orchestra.

The group (pictured below), commonly referred to by the abbreviation YMO, sought to challenge Asian stereotypes with their music. Hardy (2001) states, “The trio, with an image which parodied the stereotypical Japanese tourist, targeted Europe and America rather than Japan, and were hailed as the East’s answer to

Kraftwerk." A strong example of this would be their song "Firecracker" (YMO, 1978), which is a cover of Martin Denny's 1959 exotica track of the same name.



Figure 2 (left to right): Ryuichi Sakamoto, Yukihiro Takahashi, and Haruomi Hosono

With this cover track, the band took the older Martin Denny song, whose wind chimes and xylophones created a generalized and fictional sound of the orient, and reinterpreted it into something that was truly and uniquely Japanese. The Yellow Magic Orchestra cover version, as with the rest of their music, was futuristic and cutting edge. YMO, along with Germany's Kraftwerk, were early pioneers of electronic music. They heavily incorporated newly developed musical hardware, such as synthesizers and drum machines, to the extent that almost everything heard in their music was being generated by some kind of electronic gadget. The early work of YMO predicted the direction Western music would head, as well as served as inspiration for many Western artists. In Detroit during the 1980s, Yellow Magic Orchestra and Kraftwerk would get radio play alongside the likes of funk groups such as Parliament-Funkadelic. Inspired by the sonic futurism coming out of Japan and Germany, a whole generation of young, black Detroiters reinterpreted this technologically advanced sound back to America, and created what we know today as techno (Sims).

There are a few other Japanese music scenes worth mentioning because of their connection to Western genres. City pop was popular throughout the 80s and could be described as a Japanese interpretation of disco, not entirely unlike the Italo-disco music of Italy. Noise music (often called "Japanoise" when referring to Japanese musicians) has its roots in Japan, with artists pushing the envelope on what Western musicians were doing in the 70s and 80s with industrial music. But there is one scene that is a melting pot of many different genres, and is truly the culmination of all the back-and-forth of Japanese and Western musicians interpreting each other's musical ideas. This music scene is known as Shibuya-kei.

The English musician Momus, who produced for many Shibuya-kei artists throughout the 90s, wrote a lengthy page on his website about his experiences with the scene. In the article, Momus introduces the genre with the following:

The epicenter of global retro culture is Shibuya, the trendy shopping district of West Tokyo which gave Shibuya-kei (literally 'Shibuya

style”) its name. Here the record shops are the best stocked in the world. Fashions change every five minutes, and the moment a style is invented it’s also revived and parodied.



Figure 3. Pictured left: Pizzicato Five. Pictured right: Flipper’s Guitar

The originators of the Shibuya-kei sound are the bands Pizzicato Five and Flipper’s Guitar, both based in Shibuya, Tokyo. The bands wore their influences on their sleeves, taking wildly and fervently from several radically different sources. Pizzicato Five favored the American and French Lounge pop of the 50s and 60s, and frequently sampled the lush, orchestral instrumentation that was typical of Western music at the time. Another source of inspiration for nearly all Shibuya-kei musicians is The Beach Boys’ founding member and chief songwriter Brian Wilson, whose compositional techniques and use of vocal harmonies serve as the groundwork for much of the movement’s music. Shibuya-kei musicians would often combine these influences with elements of modern electronic music, such as house, techno, and drum and bass, resulting in an innovative dichotomy between old and new musical ideas. Flipper’s Guitar preferred jangle pop and the baggy/madchester music coming out of Manchester, England, which resulted in a much more guitar-driven, psychedelic sound. Keigo Oyamada, former member of Flipper’s Guitar, was asked about his exposure to music growing up. Oyamada (2021) answered as follows:

“I love all kinds of music and am influenced by all kinds of music as well. I think most of those sounds just naturally come out,” he says. “It’s not as if I like rock or only listen to classical — I have a great love for all kinds of music. My father is a musician, and I used to look through his record collection. It’s all because my father’s got some great records.”

It was this crate-digging mentality that drove these artists to create such an inspired sound, but the inspiration for these groups didn’t end with music. Foreign films and fashion were also integral to the development of Shibuya-kei’s sound and image. Pizzicato Five would often blatantly reference film in their music. Their 1985 song “The Audrey Hepburn Complex” uses the late golden-age Hollywood actress as a namesake for their song, and their music videos often contain dedications to film directors of old. The fashion of Shibuya-kei is reminiscent of the films of the French New Wave, with a lot of pastel cardigans and turtleneck sweaters, in addition to beige trench coats and brightly colored dresses. Yasuharu Konishi, founding member of Pizzicato Five, was interviewed in 1999 about the influence French film has had on his music. Konishi stated:

“I saw the film ‘une femme est une femme’ by Godard. I don’t remember where. Japanese-French center?, there was no subtitle [sic], but the images were very beautiful. One of the scenes was Anna Karina and Belmondo’s dancing. At that moment, I thought ‘this is what I want to do!’. I didn’t exactly know what I wanted to make, music?, film?, but I wanted to make something.”

It only seems natural that Western musicians have played such a big role in the shaping of Japanese

contemporary music and vice versa, seeing as how the United States and Japan, respectively, have the two largest music industries in the world. As societies grow and engage with each other, I believe it's important to give and take aspects of different cultures to develop one's culture even further. America can be an incredibly diverse and multicultural place, especially within its cities. Japan, on the other hand, is an island nation with little immigration, so the greater majority of its population is Japanese. The importation of Western music and film has proven to be invaluable to the development of Japanese culture. The artists examined here were given a refined image of the West through imported art, and were able to take from it and make something that is distinctly Japanese.

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Figure 1:

=== Fair Use for "Westernization and Its Effects on the Sound of Japan" ===

Though this image is subject to copyright, its use is covered by the U.S. fair use laws because:

- It is a historically significant photo of a famous band. From left to right, the subjects of the photo are Eiichi Ohtaki, Haruomi Hosono, Shigeru Suzuki, and Takahashi Matsumoto. No free alternative is known to be available, the band disbanded over 40 years ago and Ohtaki is deceased.
- It is of much lower resolution than the original (copies made from it will be of very inferior quality).
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Figure 2:

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Figure 3 (right image):

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- The photo is only being used for informational purposes.
- Its inclusion in the article adds significantly to the article because the photo and its historical significance are the object of discussion in the article.

Redistricting and Voter Suppression in a Post-Pandemic America

Joshua Slatter

The 2020 election was a referendum on many pressing issues of the time. COVID-19, climate change, and civil unrest propelled Americans to the voting booth in unprecedented numbers, shattering previous turnout records for both previous Vice President Joe Biden and the incumbent Donald Trump. Biden and the Democratic Party field won, but narrowly. With the Democratic Party ostensibly holding only a slim majority in the House and the Vice Presidency as a tiebreaker in a dead-locked Senate, there have been large cries of a “stolen election” and “rampant voter fraud.” This has prompted several states, usually with Republican majorities, to pass sweeping restrictions on voting. Using both historical and contemporary lenses, this paper investigates the causes, effects, and motivations to curb voting accessibility and redistricting with an emphasis on red and swing states in the aftermath of the 2020 election, as well as potential solutions to combat the push to further restrict voting rights.

Key words: suffrage, voting rights, civil unrest, 2020 US presidential election.

Introduction

Voting in the United States has always had a history fraught with division when it comes to the young nation’s electorate. Who should vote, how one should vote, and where to vote have all been hotly contested issues since this country was founded. The right to vote was originally only for wealthy, white male landowners. As time went on, however, the right to vote has gradually expanded to eventually include women and people of color. Not without struggle, the ease and accessibility of voting has both grown and been restricted with time. And with the 2020 election in the history books, it will remain one of the most consequential elections in American history. This paper does not focus on the politicians who won or lost – although they have a part to play – but rather on the resulting fallout and controversy from that election, the push and pull from those seeking enfranchisement, as well as what history teaches us in the constant battle between the two ruling parties, and what we can learn and expect moving forward into a decade of uncertainty.

To begin, selected data can provide a glimpse into early American elections and some early suffrage trends. As noted above, it is important to bear in mind that between 1782 and 1828 the only people permitted to vote were white landowners or taxpayers. At the time this would have constituted only about 6% of the population. Voter expansion and restrictions do not always proceed in a straight line, however; historically they ebb and flow, even from the earliest days of the young republic. According to Stanley L. Engerman and Kenneth L. Sokoloff in *The Journal of Economic History*, “Overall, the dominant trend over the colonial period was the movement away from the idea that the right

to vote should be based solely on the ownership of land” (Engerman 7). This is most apparent in the 1776 New Jersey Constitution which defined eligible voters as “Inhabitants,” and while this was contentious at the time, New Jersey was the only state which understood this to mean free black people, single women, and white men who could satisfy the 50 Pound financial requirement (Curry-Ledbetter 707). While policy across different states varied quite a bit for the early American electorate, the norm was that taxpaying and land-owning white people were permitted the right to vote. Over time this would change, as the trend toward removing tax and property restrictions became somewhat popular. However, this seemingly progressive trend in voting rights was also being used as a means of control. This push was led by the newer states entering the union, which wanted as many people as possible to secure power in the form of statehood. Also worthy of note is that the 1828 presidential election was the first election in which poor or non-property-owning white men could vote, and by the end of the 1820s universal white male suffrage was the norm. Property-based voting restrictions were largely abandoned by this point, although a few states such as Ohio or Virginia held onto a tax-based voting qualification.

Legacy of the Civil Rights Era

So, what do voting restrictions from hundreds of years ago have to do with today? The roots in this original system are still influencing elections in the United States to this day. This is most apparent in the South and other traditionally “red” states. For example, in what is a first since the Civil Rights Act was adopted in 1965, itself born out of the discrimination of Reconstruction and the Jim Crow era, many states with a history of widespread discrimination will be able to draw up their voting districts without oversight from the federal government. This is done through the process of packing. Packing is a term used when minority voters are compressed into a small number of districts when they could effectively control more. This results in cracking or spreading minority voters thinly into many districts, which according to research by Loyola Law professor Justin Levitt and University of Colorado Law School professor Doug Spencer, would disenfranchise millions of Americans through a process known as minority vote dilution (Levitt, Spencer). This subversion comes at a time in which national tension and division seem to be at an all-time high. According to trends observed from the Pew Research Center, the American electorate is divided on a plethora of pressing issues such as whether the Trump administration had a good response to the COVID-19 Pandemic (Dimock, Wike). Additionally, “roughly eight-in-ten registered voters in both camps said their differences with the other side were about core American values, and roughly nine-in-ten – again in both camps – worried that a victory by the other would lead to ‘lasting harm’ to the United States” (Dimock, Wike). Suffice it to say, such high levels of division can and do lead to civil strife and conflict.

A Uniquely American Challenge

So why this division? Other nations have diverse populations, along with a history of strife and conflict. What makes the American situation so different from that of the United Kingdom, New Zealand, or France? The answer is multifaceted. Other nations have similar issues to the United States; however, despite sharing modern social media, partisan news networks, and cultural and regional divides, these other nations have a more equitable parliamentary system of government. This is to say that the United States, for all practical purposes, condenses wide swaths of various policies and debates into two extremely rigid blocks divided among the Republican Party and the Democratic Party. These blocks, combined with an electoral system that is winner-take-all, with the balance of power on any election hanging by a razor’s edge, result in an electoral system that is cutthroat and appears as a zero-sum game where if one side wins, that automatically means the other side loses. Additionally, it is worth looking at how over the past 25 years or so, these competing camps have been overlaid onto people’s identities. According to Thomas Carothers and Andrew

O'Donohue, this sort of personalization is "especially multifaceted," as "powerful alignment of ideology, race, and religion renders America's divisions unusually encompassing and profound. It is hard to find another example of polarization in the world that fuses all three major types of identity divisions in a similar way" (Carothers and O'Donohue 1). This divide in American culture was simmering for some time, long preceding the relatively recent rise in populism (Carothers and O'Donohue 2). But with the murder of George Floyd and the outbreak of COVID-19, these events served to bring these divisions to a head over the spring and summer of 2020, which saw widespread protests and unrest across the country from Portland to Minneapolis. Unfortunately, there was an overwhelmingly violent response to them. In a report written by Roudabeh Kishi from the ACLED using data taken from the US Crisis Monitor at Princeton University, it was found that 93% of demonstrations were peaceful (Kishi). Additionally, of the less than 10% that contained some level of violence, the majority of those scenarios were perpetrated by instigators and provocateurs not associated with the movement, and this violence, especially in Portland, was contained to a small handful of city blocks. Yet for the reasons mentioned above, this has led to a disproportionate view, where in the same study over 40% of respondents associated these same protestors with attempting to incite violence and destroy property. This imbalanced perception also led to an increase in interventions from government and police, interventions that used tear gas, rubber bullets, and pepper spray over 50% of the time. Subsequently, this violent reaction has led to a deepened mistrust and suspicion in many communities across the country (Kishi).

A Lasting Divide

Americans are divided. We recently had an election with record voter turnout on both sides in the middle of a deadly pandemic. What happens next? With a close victory in the Electoral College, the Democratic Party now has a slim majority in the House of Representatives, the tie-breaking vote in the Senate, and the Executive Branch. In this winner-take-all system, the Democratic party has, for all intents and purposes, won. However, after this defeat the Republican Party has not sat idle. After the 2020 election, a plethora of Republican states and their legislatures launched a barrage of investigations and inquiries into the validity of the outcome of the election – a practice Democrats dubbed "The Big Lie," which claims that the election was "stolen," or that former President Trump was "cheated" out of winning reelection despite there being no evidence to support this. This may be seen as an effort to save face. This action has been described as a firehose of falsehoods, which according to the ACLU has led many states with Republican leaders and legislators seeking to curtail certain accommodations that proved popular during the pandemic. These popular accommodations include items such as early voting and removing mail-in voting. This curtailment of popular policy is combined with purging voter rolls and expanding voter ID laws which disproportionately affect people of color. According to the Associated Press, the Montana state legislature recently passed a law that limited the use of college or student IDs for voter registration as well as eliminated same-day voter registration on Election Day. In Texas, according to the *Texas Tribune*, legislators are working on a two-pronged approach to maintaining their dominance in the coming decades through a combination of redistricting in a way that can reduce Black and Latino voting influence specifically, as well as the removal and bans of popular changes to how people vote, such as drive-through voting, and restrictions on mail-voting, even though people of color make up 95% of Texas's new population increase (1). These restrictions exist solely to reinforce the grip the party has on their state strongholds. By peddling "The Big Lie," the Republican leadership has a convenient scapegoat to rally against, despite there being no evidence to suggest that widespread voter fraud, election theft, or stealing of any kind took place during the 2020 election. In fact, according to the *Washington Post*, the rate of voter fraud was only %0.0025 in data taken between the 2016 and 2018 midterm elections. To put the data from this study into perspective, this would be about 372 possible cases of voter fraud out of 14.2 million votes cast (Viebeck, Elise).

Conclusion

What are some takeaways from this? Active participation in our democracy is important for its health, and efforts to undo our democratic process should be confronted. Sustained protests, constant marches, and peaceful disruptions of the day-to-day lives of lawmakers will likely be consequences that stem from these gradual efforts to restrict the accessibility to which people exercise their rights. Additionally, laws such as the John Lewis Voting Rights Act offer a possible remedy before the midterms and next general election if passed, which would help curb gerrymandering and district cracking. Furthermore, adopting a national standard that gives everyone ample time and accommodations to vote, such as mail-in ballots and drive-through voting would likely have a positive impact on our democracy as more voices and voters would be heard at the polls.

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The Abortion Debate in Post-Roe America

Umber Batool

This paper exhibits the argument surrounding the ethicality of abortion, its restrictive laws, and the makeup of child welfare organizations that may influence one's decision whether or not to have an abortion. Abortion laws were unregulated in the US until the 1800s. Since then, laws have been changed many times, largely depending on the state the law has been ordained in. Texas's recent passing of the abortion-restricting Senate Bill 8 in September 2021, as well as the national overturning of the 1973 abortion-permitting *Roe v. Wade* Supreme Court case in June 2022, have sparked debate on this topic. Defining and providing pro-life, anti-abortion, pro-choice, pro-abortion perspectives, the present article aims to prove why abortion restrictions are wrongful to personal freedom and harmful to populations physically, financially, and emotionally. A forced pregnancy results in unprepared expenses, lack of emotional, parental connection, and a risk to women's lives with unsafe abortions. Racial and economic minority groups are negatively affected by restrictive abortion laws more than others. Issues with alternatives to abortion, such as adoption and government programs, are explained, and it is concluded that until fraud and corruption are eliminated in these programs, abortion is the best solution for now to solve this debate. Solutions proposed in this paper involve electing officials who are in support of abortion and are able to change restrictive laws, encouraging and incentivizing more adoptions, bettering governmental child-care systems, and changing laws that better quality of life in order to lessen the number of abortions overall.

Keywords: abortion, politics, adoption, foster, debate

Introduction

Taking a trip to the drugstore to buy a pregnancy test can either be exciting or terrifying. For people who see the two lines on the test stick with anything but joy, options about the future and avoiding parenthood begin to race through the mind. One option is abortion, or the process of removing a developing baby from a uterus to discontinue a pregnancy. Records of abortion practices date back to as early as 1550 BC Egypt from the Eber's Papyrus (Potts and Campbell 1). In the United States, abortion procedures were legal and not regulated from colonial times until the mid-1800s, when the switch in women's healthcare providers was made from midwives to primarily male doctors. There for the first-time abortion was deemed criminal once a fetus reached quickening, or the period when the movements of a fetus could be felt after approximately four months (Blakemore 13). Since then, laws have changed or stayed the same depending on the state they have been enacted in, but interest in and knowledge surrounding abortion has increased in the past five decades due to the 1973 Supreme Court trial of *Roe v. Wade*. The case ruled that restrictions on abortion during a pregnancy's first trimester are unconstitutional but granted states the right to impose restrictions on abortions during the second and third trimesters, depending on the health of the mother and risk of pregnancy ("Abortion" 1, 3). However, the right to an abortion granted by *Roe v. Wade* has been overturned by the Supreme Court as of June 2022, where

the decision is now left up to the states. According to the recent article “What If Roe Fell,” by the Center for Reproductive Rights, “nineteen states [do not have] legal protections for abortion,” and six states “ban abortions entirely and enforce [them] through criminal penalties” (68-69). Texas is an anti-abortion state, but shortly after the fall of Roe, a “temporary restraining order by Judge Christine Weems in Harris County came . . . to resume services. [However,] Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton on Twitter said he was immediately appealing [and] a further hearing is scheduled for July 12” (Raymond).

Though the overturning of Roe had been temporarily blocked in Texas, abortions were being restricted even before this decision. The September 2021 passing of Texas’s Senate Bill 8, also known as the Heartbeat Bill, will remain in effect as the current abortion ruling for the state. This law deems abortions illegal after detection of fetal cardiac activity, which takes typically six weeks after conception, regardless of consent, unless an abortion is medically necessary for the carrier’s health. The bill’s main intended enforcer is the general public, rather than the state, which allows people to sue others for getting or aiding in the process of getting an abortion. Its small, six-week timeframe and indifference toward assault-caused pregnancy has received backlash from many professionals and women’s health and reproductive health care organizations. Constitutional law professor Lawrence Gostin from the University of Georgetown says this bill will “shoot a hole in the protection [that was] offered by *Roe v. Wade*” (Bohra). On the other hand, Texas Senator Ted Cruz, Governor Greg Abbott, writers of the bill, and other supporters of the law declare it a “victory for Texas and the pro-life movement” (Caldwell and Hollers).

Both *Roe v. Wade*, its overturning, and Senate Bill 8 have led to differing views. Groups against abortion argue that it is unethical and religiously unrighteous to discontinue a developing life. Others for abortion argue that it is a woman’s choice and freedom to privacy and healthcare. This issue interests me because as a chaste and religious empath, I can see both sides to it; in other words, it is a war between perceived morality and personal rights. Debate on abortion has ebbed and flowed throughout history as values, resources, and rights have changed. However, in this current era, I side in support of abortion and for each person who experiences an unwanted pregnancy to have the freedom to choose what they think is best for them, without any government or outside influence. Abortion should be available and not restricted because the lack of its availability disproportionately affects different groups of people, places stress on families, and endangers the lives of pregnant people.

Racial and Financial Minorities vs. Abortion Access

Restrictions on abortion affect groups unequally. Professionals and results from studies conclude that differences in racial and economic status are two factors that influence the ability to receive an abortion. In their article, “As Texans fill up abortion clinics in other states, low-income people get left behind,” published in the nonprofit *Texas Tribune* newspaper, criminal justice reporters Jolie McCullough and Neelam Bohra describe the effects of Senate Bill 8 found from a study. Allowed after review by the Supreme Court in December 2021, the bill has caused people to travel for their procedure. Trans-care services specialist Dr. Bhavik Kumar, interviewed from Planned Parenthood Houston, revealed that people who “went out of state [for their abortions] tended to be higher income, [and] white,” while those whose abortions were delayed or in cases where it was not as easy to travel to achieve them “were . . . folks of low-income [and] folks of color” (McCullough and Bohra). Along with this, those seeking an abortion typically already have children and are below the poverty line, according to a video from the *Washington Post* (Jewell). Restrictions on abortions contain a racial and class-based bias as they affect racial minorities and those who are not financially well-off worse than those who do not belong to these groups. People who already have fewer economic resources are compelled to spend more proportionately for an abortion in comparison to those who are better off, and those who are privileged socially have a higher chance of getting their needs met. Restricting abortions is another example of a law hurting populations who typically

need more help.

The next option after abortion to avoid parenthood seems to be adoption. However, the longitudinal “Turnaway Study,” conducted by University of California at San Francisco demography and public policy professor Diana Foster on over one hundred pregnant women who were denied or not able to get an abortion, shows otherwise. This work found that “more than 90% [chose] to keep and raise the child rather than place it for adoption,” and this result implies how, along with the increase in social acceptance of keeping unplanned children, the adoption system is not favored by most (Foster 3). Stories of long wait times, wrongful loss of adoptive rights, an unequal proportion of desire to adopt babies versus children, and deception about alleged birth parents and adoption fraud are just some of the reasons why people are not able or choose not to adopt, and why children stay in adoption centers for years as their age increases. After a year of research, Tik Root, writer of the *TIME* article, “Inside America’s Murky Private-Adoption Industry,” explains how “the scarcity of available infants, combined with the emotions of desperate adoptive parents and the advent of the internet has helped enable for-profit middle men . . . to charge [adoption] fees that stretch to tens of thousands of dollars,” as “there is no federal regulation” (5). Due to the lack of adoption laws and the variation between them among states, part of the system is ruled with a scam whose ultimate goal is to use babies and children as a monetary gain instead of providing them a home. Adoption in and of itself is an amazing thing when the process goes right, but many adoption cases are not always ethical or executed as planned. Because of this, adoption is not a viable solution; those already with fewer resources and privileges are compelled to go through with pregnancy, which consequently worsens their situation due to the lack of equal abortion accessibility. The effects of abortion restrictions are disproportionate as groups with more resources and privilege can work around the law while those already economically and socially disadvantaged are bound by it. The ability to access safe abortions is unequal because of this law, and it endangers those already disadvantaged.

Because adoption is not widely chosen, restricting abortion means placing stress on families who could not get one. Foster’s study concluded that non-aborted children “fared worse” than the “next children born to women who received abortions” and were more likely to live in poverty and have “poor maternal bonding” (2-3). These worse socioeconomic situations for unaborted children imply how opposing or restricting abortion does more harm than good by placing financial strain on families and preventing emotional connection between mothers, parents and children. Finances means adequate food, clothing, and shelter, and bonding means forming necessary connections to build trust and grow emotionally. Restricting abortion means prohibiting two of these arguably most imperative things in a child’s development. This idea is supported by an anonymous account of an adult who was not aborted but realizes, in hindsight, that they should have been. The article, written by senior editor Chris Bodenner in *The Atlantic*, shines light on the fact that going through with a pregnancy and raising a child is not always a good thing. Though it was published five years ago, the story is still relevant, as it relates to the stories of many others who were not aborted. The author sides with both pro-choice and anti-abortion and emphasizes the better good for all people involved by saying:

My mother suffered severe post-partum depression that was left untreated and became a lifelong affliction. As a result, my childhood was dysfunctional to an extreme. It took a decade of therapy and psychiatry for me to recover. . . . It is not a favor or something moral to give birth to a child you cannot properly parent or care for or who will suffer If I had the power to choose as a fetus, I would have chosen to be aborted if it meant improving my mother’s miserable life. I have always found it odd that folks assume a fetus would choose its own life over the life and welfare of its mother and family. Why would we make that assumption? I had an abortion at 30 I believe it was a sin but less than bringing a child into the world under [bad] circumstances. Life is often about choosing the least of all evils The real tragedy is how many women must choose abortion because of finances, homelessness, or other problems solvable with a little help from others. (Bodenner)

The individual’s experience recorded by Bodenner is one example of many where abortion would have been

the better thing to do for all people involved, and it refutes the notion that unaborting children will prefer living. It is better to provide a livable space a baby can grow from than to knowingly bring a baby into a world of pain. Babies who do live but were meant to be aborted are also more likely to face abuse as children. In the study "Child Abuse and Abortion Availability," published in the *American Economic Review*, economics professors Marianne Bitler and Madeline Zavodny found that, "contemporaneous abortion restrictions are generally positively associated with child maltreatment reports" (365). Physical and emotional abuse along with financial strain and the lack of essential bonding between parents and a child necessary for development are problems being risked and welcomed with the passing of abortion restrictions. The number of kids who face these problems in the home will only increase, and solutions to these problems may potentially go undetected for years. Denying abortions means eliminating family planning by forcing pregnancies and causing emotional and financial issues which are largely preventable.

For those wanting to avoid these potential harms, alternatives such as illegal and unsafe abortions can be equally daunting. According to an article published in 2017 by the World Health Organization, about twenty-five million unsafe abortions take place every year globally. WHO says, "restricting access to abortion does not reduce the number of abortions," and that the majority of these unsafe procedures take place in developing areas due to "countries' laws and policies on abortion, the financial cost of accessing safe abortion services [and] the availability of safe abortion services and trained health providers" (WHO 2). This article was written almost five years ago, and the number of unsafe abortions presented in its data are likely only to increase as tighter restrictions are enacted. America, and Texas in particular, is taking a step backward by implementing abortion restrictions. The effects of these laws (as presented by the Texas Tribune article mentioned previously) can already be seen with minority groups. Because of new abortion restrictions, the regions that have previously had safe abortion rates have regressed and will continue to do so as well as see a decrease in the overall safety of women's health.

Along with unprofessional abortion procedure complications, women's lives are placed at risk as well. An anonymous account recorded by a registered nurse explains how the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* in June 2022 has affected their job:

I work in a small NICU/L&D floor. Our trigger laws went into effect immediately after the decision. We had a woman with an ectopic walk in [and] had to sit on her until the doc could speak with a lawyer. Her ectopic ruptured. She then did not get her procedure done for another nine hours because the doc was working with the lawyer for so long trying to work around the laws and not lose his license. By the time she had her procedure, she had over 600 CC of blood in her abdomen. She almost died. (@travelingnurse; content edited for clarity.)

Doctors are having to put emergency situations on hold to get approval for life-saving treatment due to the fear of losing their jobs. These new anti-abortion laws are about testing ethics and unjustly forcing professionals to choose between the lives they are meant to save and the job that provides them a living. Abortion is healthcare, and restricting it means risking a life that is already being lived over a life that could potentially be lived. The lack of access to necessary healthcare to treat complications turns not getting an abortion into a potential for death. Though complications are not met in every pregnancy, that does not mean women are not at risk to die. In the study "Homicide During Pregnancy and the Postpartum Period in the United States, 2018-2019," written in *The Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology* by a group of women who have master's degrees and PhDs, it is "confirm[ed] that homicide is a leading cause of death and during pregnancy and postpartum in the United States," with "a majority of pregnancy-associated homicides occur[ing] in the home" (Wallace et al. 769, 764). These killings happen due to the absence of desire for a child, and more and more women will die due to the inability to get an abortion. Abortion restrictions like Senate Bill 8 and the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*, will cause a greater number of unprofessional abortion procedures and deaths of pregnant people to take place and make

not only Texas, but the United States as well, become on par with developing regions in terms of unsafe abortion and mortality rates. Abortion restrictions are an attack on the health and lives of pregnant people; freedom becomes an oxymoron in a sovereign and democratic nation where one cannot do anything to help protect their own life.

On the other side of the debate, anti-abortionists cite ethical and religious arguments. Religious groups argue that abortion is wrongful, as it means destroying a part of what God has intended to take place. In his article, "Abortion: Why the Arguments Fail," Duke University theological ethics professor Stanley Hauerwas argues that killing God's creation of a fetus and prohibiting the plan God has for its life from being carried out is immoral, and he states that it is a responsibility for Christians everywhere to provide care for any child who is born (Hauerwas). Aside from religious reasoning, University of Kansas professor Donald Marquis brings a philosophical viewpoint to the fight against abortion.

In his article published in *The Journal of Philosophy*, Marquis explains both sides of the argument thoroughly and argues that:

Abortion is . . . in the same moral category as killing an innocent human being . . . Of course, embryos can be victims: when their lives are deliberately terminated, they are deprived of their futures of value . . . The moral permissibility of abortion stands or falls on the moral status of the fetus. Since a fetus possesses a property, the possession of which in adult human beings is sufficient to make killing an adult human being wrong, abortion is wrong. This way of dealing with the problem of abortion seems superior . . . because it rests on the ethics of killing, which is self-evident . . . and because the argument avoids the usual equivocations on 'human life', 'human being', or 'person.' (Marquis 183, 200, 202)

Though strong, both religious and philosophical arguments against abortion are built from ideas and perspectives rather than facts and lack a concrete foundation. It could also be argued how God has given humans the choice to sin, so why, if it is deemed a sin, would the choice to abortion be restricted and not any other? Viewpoints, in general, are different, as each person is different, due to the individual circumstances one has experienced or values one has been brought up with, but they do not relate to everyone.

Another instance where both views of the argument come together is demonstrated in an interview of a woman pastor's opinion on abortion, published in *The Atlantic*. Jes Kast explains her supportive view on abortion, in terms of religious interpretation:

I question[ed]: How would God infringe upon [body autonomy]? And . . . why is it when it comes to this topic, almost always white, straight, Christian men are the loudest? . . . When that bodily autonomy is taken away, to me, that is against Christian scripture, and is against the Gospel I believe in . . . For me, [abortion is] a health-care issue. The best person to make that decision is the one who has to decide that . . . In Genesis, it says that God breathed God's spirit into our lives—"the Holy Spirit." Because of that, we're not puppets controlled by God. Because of the image of God in us, we have freedom . . . Jesus says, "I have come that they might have life and live it abundantly." . . . I believe Jesus values life—I value the choices that give us the type of life that we need . . . I wish one section of Christianity didn't demonize another section of Christianity . . . who see safe and legal abortion access as part of what it means to do justice. (Green)

Kast's credibility is established through her position as an esteemed pastor who acknowledges and works through differences in opinion in her surrounding religious community. She points out how Christians are given free will to use with better judgment and cites religious scripture to make the argument that abortion is not religiously unrighteous or sinful, but rather a medical procedure humans are given the choice to undergo in order to ensure quality of life. Her being a woman emphasizes her empathy on the issue and brings out the fact that men typically make laws for women. However, there is no universal perspective for any issue, from any group; each person has their own version of morality which is true in

their own eyes. The US is home to people with many different backgrounds and perspectives and was founded upon principles of freedom, the freedom of religion included. However, the Constitution of the United States guarantees separation of church and state, and with the overturning of Roe, the government currently controls the rights of women by forcing pregnancies and choosing rules based on a philosophy and theology not everyone believes in. It is erroneous to push restrictive laws that only cater to and support the perspective of one group in a country where the rights of so vast and diverse a number of people are protected that it is known as "The Land of the Free."

Conclusion

Even as opinions on the subject differ, there are similarities to be found. Unity lies in the belief that babies who are not aborted should be taken care of by others, which implies both groups support adoption, foster care, and other programs that involve helping parentless and unplanned children. While these programs serve a worthy cause, they can and should be bettered. Just as the adoption system was mentioned previously to have a lack of regulation, the current state of Texas's foster care system is underfunded and unsafe. Due to lack of space, reporter Reese Oxner states in a recent *Texas Tribune* article, foster children are placed in unlicensed facilities illegally where they are neglected, abused, and managed by workers who are not trained to deliver the therapeutic care foster children need. Due to these wrongful practices, "[children] often age out of care more damaged than when they entered," according to child welfare District Judge Janis Jack, interviewed by Oxner. In other words, both systems have an imperative to improve; the adoption system does not need to be unethically fueled by monetary greed, and the foster care system needs to be better funded to better train and increase the number of workers who provide services to children who need them. Not enough cases in these programs go perfectly, and there is potential for improvement, which is why I believe restrictive abortion bills do not stand for "pro-life," as much as they do for "no abortion." Without necessary improvements made to adoption, foster and other such programs that can and should be made for children who were not aborted, along with laws already in place that directly affect quality of life in general (such as unlivable minimum wage, high price housing, the absence of mandatory-offered paid family leave and bettering the K-12 education system), I advocate for restrictions on abortions to be lifted. Even though society should help others, in reality, people do not always live up to these expectations. This makes for a flawed system which forces parents to either raise their children with difficulty or hand them over to imperfect programs. Restricting abortion means giving more kids difficult childhoods and putting the health and lives of pregnant people in danger. Everyone's childhood, good or bad, shapes what type of adult they will become. It is the duty of people living now to live without pushing their beliefs on anyone else and to ensure the better lives of future children. If the right political leaders were elected to better welfare systems and shift their focus away from greed and the wealth gained from purposely imperfect programs; and if laws were passed instead that allowed safe, secure abortions for everyone, fewer kids and families would deal with hardships that could have been prevented, and fewer people would have complications from illegal abortions or lack emergency medical procedures during pregnancy that could save their lives. In short, in order to ensure safety and protect reproductive rights, abortions should be unrestricted.

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Propaganda in America: How to Recognize and Defend Against It

Chae Balistreri

Corporations and governments use modern propaganda techniques to influence and manipulate the public, incurring social and environmental consequences which are compounding over time. This paper provides both historical and modern examples of propaganda, then highlights key issues that arise as a byproduct, such as planned obsolescence, astroturfing, and the internet filter bubble. Companies like Google and Facebook use proprietary algorithms to shape the internet as well as their users' minds through dopamine-driven feedback loops. The effects of a consumer driven culture spill over into the environment, with plastic pollution and e-waste littering the shores of distant countries. This paper details how plastic pollution in the environment has made its way back into the human body, while propaganda is used to distract people with targeted advertising using techniques pioneered by Edward Bernays. Propaganda is a multifaceted subject which requires historical context to understand and identify. This is an informative paper which has the goal of arming readers with an ability to recognize propaganda and defend against its negative effects. It is vital for Americans to become aware of the propaganda being used to manipulate them. Otherwise, societal issues caused by social media and other factors will continue to erode our ability to communicate and think critically.

Key Words: astroturf, planned obsolescence, manipulation, social media, pollution

Introduction

The politician promises change, the preacher salvation, and the businessman satisfaction. They have one thing in common: each advertises his or her wares using propaganda. Propaganda is a complex idea that has gained negative connotations over time, perhaps rightly so. Professor Sherly Tuttle Ross describes propaganda as something directed by "a political institution, organization, or cause" which is aimed at "a socially significant group of people" and has the "intention to persuade" (20). Furthermore, author Stanley B. Cunningham writes that propaganda is "primarily a twentieth century . . . mass phenomenon" (177). I define propaganda as a systematized method of packaging and disseminating information which intends to generate a specific behavior or belief in people. Its earliest forms were commonly used for recruiting troops or promoting warfare, but there has been a modernization of this multifaceted method of persuasion. Propaganda in America affects the psychological and environmental state of Americans and the rest of the world. Both corporations and governments relentlessly engage the population in what George Bernays referred to as "psychological warfare" (Bernays 155). Short-sighted corporate and political decisions yield high profits for a select few but incur devastating consequences.

A shrinking number of large corporations dominate every market and flood it with shoddy products designed to fail quickly, accumulating waste.

A good understanding of propaganda is essential for recognizing its use. My goal is to arm the reader with the tools necessary for recognizing propaganda and knowing how to defend oneself against its subtle influences. I want to bring awareness to the detrimental effects of propaganda, which affects both our psyche and the environment, and what can be done about it. This paper briefly explores some historically noteworthy examples of propaganda. The ancient world sets the stage for what comes later in modernity, which is this paper's primary focus.

This paper is organized into four sections. The first highlights a brief history of propaganda, beginning with prehistoric humans and quickly moving to Athens, where it is honed. I touch on the printing press, which introduces a powerful new medium for disseminating propaganda. Then, in the early 1900s, George Bernays would apply Freudian psychology to the American business world. This event is vital for understanding the changes occurring over time in consumer and corporate relationships. The second section explores examples of successful modern propaganda campaigns. Here, special attention is given to astroturfing, considering its massive rise and success in the spheres of social media. In the third section, I discuss some of the harmful effects of modern propaganda, notably, how internet companies have created "bubbles" that isolate users into custom echo chambers, void of dissenting or differing views. Furthermore, social media harms Americans and their ability to communicate and connect. The fourth section introduces methods for defending oneself against propaganda and its influences. Individual responsibility and awareness, seeking out opposing viewpoints, and counterpropaganda are effective ways to defend against propaganda in America.

A Brief History of Propaganda

When our ideas first took the shape of words and pictures, propaganda lacked a name, but its presence was still evident. "Neolithic cave drawings," seen as far back as around 7000 BC, depict "perhaps the earliest form of war propaganda" (Taylor 20). There are depictions of "men using weapons against each other," which could have served various purposes, such as training, decorating, or inspiring fear or awe. They showed that from our beginning, propaganda has been a part of our culture and how we interact. At its core, it is a method people use to convey ideas, wants, or needs. When people collectively build institutions of power – like a government or church – propaganda is a potent tool. The "Assyrians [who] were challenging the Babylonians" applied propaganda beyond the military application, crafting "heroic poems and hymns" to demoralize their enemies while emboldening their troops (Taylor 22). Powerful institutions tend to concentrate power and stifle dissenting voices. These are early examples of psychological warfare, which others would emulate and expand.

A master swordsman in the art of propaganda was Alexander the Great, the king of Macedonia, who reigned from 336-323 BC. Taylor discusses how Alexander's decision to have his face "replace that of Heracles, the 'real' son of Zeus" on Greece's coinage was an act of "political propaganda." Alexander sought "deification" and saturated his image in as many forms as possible throughout Greece. He further wielded propaganda by "employ[ing] Greek artists and craftsmen to depict him in . . . statues and in paintings." His efforts were successful, with people believing en masse that it was "his destiny to rule [which was] granted by the gods" (33). At the time, it would have been rather difficult to argue against his logic, considering his face was molded into the same coins commoners used – ones that previously featured gods.

In book seven of *Republic* (c. 375 BC) – the "Allegory of the Cave" – Plato describes a scenario where chained prisoners would be forced to view a wall where shadows would serve as their sole indicator of the outside world. Because they had been there their entire lives, the shadows were all they knew. The shadows the prisoners could see were controlled by "men passing along the wall carrying all sorts of vessels, and statues and figures of animals" (253). One prisoner was shown the outside world and brought back. This experience was alarming

and unexplainable from that prisoner's perspective, who suffered a second sensory shock upon returning to his previous dark predicament. Instead of being welcomed back with curiosity, his fellow prisoners warned him that if he even thought to "loose another and lead him up into the light," they would "put him to death" (254). The story illustrates intellectual truth and how revelations can be alarming for all parties. Reality and truth are not always synonymous. In other areas of *Republic*, Plato writes in favor of censorship, as well as the government generating misleading information to protect society from itself. Ideas like these serve as the framework for modern governments and corporations to influence and change people's perceptions. As US Republican Party political consultant and strategist Lee Atwater (1951-1991) is credited with saying: perception is reality.

The arrival of the printing press in the 15th century revolutionized the ability of institutions like the church to mass produce propaganda. During the 16th and 17th centuries, "Protestant and Catholic propagandists" used the printing press in the Reformation, believing it to be "an important weapon" for "influencing the public" (SCARC). Aine Doyle, in the paper "Tracing 'Fake News,'" emphasizes "the importance [in the] power of controlling and manipulating information," noting how the printing press "set the precedent for the multimedia content of the present-day media" (55). Before the printing press, it was not possible to mass produce literature or art. It was an expensive item that few could afford. However, those that could afford it controlled the information people could access. The printing press drastically shifted the power paradigm between the elite and the commoner, and its effects strongly resonate today.

Propaganda was beginning to blossom at this point. Throughout history, there are those who have understood that with evolving technologies and a growing population, new methods for control must be developed to maintain the hierarchy. The coming modern world was bringing strange new ideas that would reshape how propaganda was applied. Thinkers such as Sigmund Freud, B. F. Skinner, and Leon Festinger were pushing into a new frontier: the human psyche. Edward Bernays's arrival in America heralded a new era of consumerism and corporate propaganda. By applying his uncle Sigmund Freud's psychological practices to groups of people, Bernays gained new insights into how people's minds operate. He learned how to nudge them towards something – a product or an idea. Both Bernays and the companies who would employ him would yield hefty profits.

Bernays has several noteworthy accomplishments in his life, but one stands out. Prior to the 1930s, it was "acceptable for women to smoke at home," but "a woman seen smoking in public was labeled a hussy or worse" (Bernays 386). The Lucky Strikes tobacco company wanted women to smoke, which meant overcoming a strong social stigma. Bernays was hired to overcome this social barrier. It is essential to note that women confronted discrimination practices and a lack of gender equality during that time. Bernays would associate their struggle with smoking by calling cigarettes "torches of freedom." This is an early example of a modern corporation using a psychological technique known as "transfer propaganda," which means associating one idea, value, or person with another. Word association is a powerful component of a propaganda campaign and was integral in shifting the public's attitude toward smoking. During the 1929 New York City Easter Parade, Bernays had a "parade of ten young women lighting 'torches of freedom'" and paid journalists to cover the story and news outlets to run it (387). Torches of freedom were a resounding success, with women viewing "the cigarette as a weapon in their increasing challenge to traditional ideas about female behaviour." Between this campaign and their "Reach for a Lucky instead of a sweet" campaign, the Lucky Strikes cigarette company's propaganda efforts were "highly effective" and "made Lucky Strike the best selling brand for two years" (Amos 4). Bernays would go on to have a successful career in marketing and consulting, changing the public's perception of things like breakfast, cake mix, soap, and more. Later in life, in his biography, he reminisced on how he learned that "age old customs . . . could be broken down by a dramatic appeal [and] disseminated by the network of the media" (Bernays 421). Corporations would exploit this idea ruthlessly in the coming race for internet attention.

The rise of social media brings societal issues related to communication and truth. Propaganda may have its roots in warfare, but with thinkers like Bernays, new techniques were brought into modern consumerism and

corporate advertising. Tactics initially used to draw peasants into fighting for their king are now used to convince people that a product is necessary. Moreover, corporations masquerade as grassroots movements formed by regular people in disinformation campaigns designed to influence public opinion.

Modern Examples of Propaganda

Propaganda exists all around us, from the music and art of the obscure small-time creators to global advertising campaigns. Individuals want to control their image and market themselves for personal gain. Corporations and governments want the same things.

Propaganda can be applied in positive and negative ways. Positive examples of propaganda include the anti-smoking campaigns funded by the US government, which aimed to build public awareness of the dangers of smoking. The “public attitudes regarding cigarette smoke . . . [has] changed over the past 50 years,” said Dr. Michael Cummings of the National Tobacco Reform Initiative in an article published in the NIH. He found that “in 1980, only 37% of smokers had labeled smoking an addiction,” while newer studies had shown that “by 2002 that had risen to 74%” (Cummings). This increase in awareness meant fewer people were smoking, and consequently, fewer people dying from cancer.

The state can shift the public’s perception through publicly funded campaigns. Another positive example of propaganda is the “Don’t Mess with Texas” anti-littering campaign from the late 1980s. Celebrities like Stevie Ray Vaughn, Willie Nelson, Matthew McConaughey, and others were paid to highlight the costs and damages done to Texas roadways due to littering. Studies have shown that most Texans now associate “Don’t Mess with Texas” with not littering. Michiru Nagatsu calls these types of campaigns “social nudges” in his paper “Social Nudges: Their Mechanisms and Justification.”

Good examples of propaganda exist, but this paper focuses on the negative aspects, how to be more aware, and how to defend against its harmful effects. A truism is that the modern world is full of examples of propaganda. The military presence in national sports programs is one such example. Football games have a solid patriotic theme and draw large crowds from around the country, making it an ideal place for the military to promote its image.

Any corporate jingle or slogan, from McDonald’s “Ba-da-da-da I’m loving it” to Nike’s “Just Do It” is designed to build familiarity with the brand. This type of propaganda is generally apparent in its intentions: give money; get widget. Corporate advertisers have developed sneakier methods of propaganda, many relying on emotional appeal. One effective way to promote a product is to build it around a fear-of-missing-out (FOMO) mentality. A company might suggest that you will not fit in or keep up without Widget A. This scenario can be played out on social media to influence consumers directly and repeatedly.

Many types of propaganda are harmless, but there are concerning variations. Astroturfing is a phenomenally effective and worrying example, which seems to be increasing in frequency. Astroturfing is a campaign to create and build up a false grassroots movement. Special interest groups employ others to act like concerned citizens voicing their opinions, flooding government representatives with concerns. It is designed to appear as a spontaneous and widespread phenomenon. Astroturfing helps influence public opinion and political policy. Texas Democratic Senator Lloyd Bentsen first coined the term “AstroTurf” in 1985 when he said, “a fellow from Texas can tell the difference between grass roots and AstroTurf . . . this is generated mail” (Ostler). He was referring to the many letters and cards sent to his office which appeared to be from concerned citizens pressuring their representatives. However, the reality was that they originated from the same insurance companies looking to manipulate Bentsen’s vote in their favor.

Besides Senator Bentsen’s revelation that insurance companies were inundating him with support for pro-insurance legislation, other examples of astroturfing are worth mentioning. The National Smoker’s Alliance (NSA) was formed in the early 1990s to fight against anti-smoking legislation in Congress. The NSA acted like a

grassroots movement but was “a public relations created front group funded by the tobacco industry.” Tobacco companies relied on the “public relations . . . theory of Edward Bernays” to “mold public opinion” in such a way that it favored a “client’s preferred public policy” (Givel).

In addition to foreign interference, the 2020 American elections saw several prominent financial players spend enormous sums of money to influence it. According to a press release by the Director of National Intelligence, China, Iran, and Russia were “seeking[ing] to compromise [the] election” to “undermine the American people’s confidence” (Evanina). There were also several domestic players who helped muddy the water with incredible sums of money (Wang). One such player was Michael Bloomberg who spent over a billion dollars during his 100-day election run, according to a Report of Receipts and Disbursements by the Federal Elections Committee (“Form 3P for Mike Bloomberg 2020, Inc.”). In 2016, then-candidate Donald Trump utilized a now-defunct company, Cambridge Analytica, to analyze “millions of Facebook users’ personal data” in order to help “aid [his] political campaign” (Kozłowska). Not only did this bolster his support, but Trump effectively employed propaganda to build his cult of personality. Each of these candidates benefitted from flooding the entire system with propaganda, some more effectively than others. Studying the effects of domestic and foreign interference on the election would be worthwhile to discern if one had more weight than the other.

Companies like Twitter have become integral to communication in the United States, thanks to people like Donald Trump. He would speak directly to his constituents only through the online media platform. Twitter also has power because a large portion of the population is using its platform and the company, like all companies, is not beholden to the Constitution. Say something against their terms and agreements, and you can find yourself without a platform to speak on. A common refutation is that anyone is free to go out and start their own media platform. However, this is moot, considering the competition is a billion-dollar company controlling the central connection between people. A computer programmer possessing all the necessary skills could not create a platform to compete because they ultimately lack the audience that Twitter or other social media giants have garnered.

Although this is not an all-encompassing catalog of propaganda techniques and employments, I hope that readers are now more aware of how things might not be as they appear. Forces unseen are at work manipulating people’s emotions, nudging them towards something which benefits those unseen drivers. Newer technologies like social media have enabled foreign and domestic actors to manipulate large population segments while skirting around the Constitution. So, what are the effects of modern propaganda in America?

Harmful Effects of Propaganda

Initially, the internet was a small network of computers, each with an address. Users could send information back and forth, provided they knew the proper address. As the internet grew and more computers came online, it became necessary to index and keep track of all of these addresses. In the internet’s early days, sites like AskJeeves, WebCrawler, Lycos, AltaVista, and Yahoo indexed websites based on keywords and presented the results to inquiring users. Each engine used algorithms to determine rank order. Before search engines, unless a user knew the specific address of a website, it would have been nearly impossible to find it. Search engines connected the dots and gave order to the internet. Then came Google, which would quickly dominate the search engine world, providing accurate and helpful search results by indexing sites according to its search engine algorithms. A *Wall Street Journal* investigation revealed that “every minute, an estimated 3.8 million queries are typed into Google.” In that same report, the authors point out that “Google’s algorithms are subject to regular tinkering from executives and engineers.” Companies as large as eBay and as small as DealCatcher – a 12-employee company owned by Dan Baxter – have seen their websites temporarily blacklisted. Consequently, their website will not appear in any of Google’s search results. In Baxter’s case, his website traffic was “suddenly

down 93% for no apparent reason” and did not return for a month (Grind). When Google suddenly changes its algorithm, eBay might survive a month-long blacklisted period on Google, but smaller businesses may not fare as well.

The so-called internet filter bubble emerged slowly over the past three decades. People’s attention is valuable to an advertising company like Google. When users like something, they engage with it for longer; when they dislike it, they disengage. Google began designing its algorithm to keep users engaged by avoiding things that would reduce screen time. This forms an echo chamber that wraps itself around each of us every time a search engine request is made. Unfortunately, this acts as an enabler for confirmation bias, where people tend to believe sources that confirm their bias and disregard sources that go against it. Google unintentionally entrenches people into their beliefs and silently navigates users around the things that might disinterest them for fear of lost revenue.

Social media exacerbates several issues. One issue is that social media companies use tactics that hijack our brain’s reward system. Chamath Palihapitiya was Facebook’s Vice President for User Growth and left in 2011. Since then, he has been raising concerns about the “short-term, dopamine-driven feedback loops” companies like Facebook use to keep users engaged. Palihapitiya said that “bad actors” use companies like Facebook, Twitter, and Snapchat to “manipulate large swaths of people.” Those unaware of social media dangers are more susceptible to manipulation. Sean Parker, an early investor in Facebook, became a “‘conscientious objector’ to social media” and said the company is “exploiting a vulnerability in human psychology.” In addition to psychological manipulation, fake information can also be an issue. Disaster can result when large segments of the population believe the propaganda. In India, “several men who were falsely accused” were lynched when a “hoax . . . spread through WhatsApp” (Wang). Being able to recognize propaganda reduces its ability to have an influence and can reduce these kinds of incidents.

Another harmful effect of propaganda is a byproduct of the consumer culture: planned obsolescence. Readers can look at commercials for older widgets and find simple advertisements that emphasize quality. As time passed, companies realized that making one widget that lasts a lifetime was less profitable than producing many widgets that fail after a preset amount of time. Since more widgets sold equals more profit, “there’s little incentive to design for durability, longevity, [or] repairs.” In 1924, a “group of lightbulb manufacturers called the Phoebus Cartel” created planned obsolescence, which had the specific goal of “limiting the life span of bulbs” to sell more. The decades to come would see countless “plan[s] to stoke consumption,” such as IKEA’s 1996 campaign to “encouraging British women to dispose of their stodgy old furniture” or “Apple’s . . . unreplaceable battery” in 2001 (Goldmark). However, what of all those failed widgets? Where do they go, and what does this do to the environment? Some end up in a landfill, and a large portion of waste is shipped out of the US. Ana Singh, in a Berkeley Political Review article, points out that there could be “up to 43 shipping containers full of e-waste . . . leaving the United States every day” (Singh). Several countries like China have started refusing waste from countries like the United States. Forbes Senior Contributor Kenneth Rapoza writes “China . . . first introduced new rules banning the import of ‘foreign garbage’ in 2017.” His article points out that much of the US lacks the waste infrastructure necessary to handle the garbage we produce because we usually export it.

Companies produce subpar goods and export the consequences of their manufacturing processes to “create both physical and psychological distance” between consumers and businesses (Goldmark). This is a growing problem that “undermine[s] global public health initiatives” and allows dangerous and toxic chemicals like lead, arsenic, and mercury to leech into soil and water reservoirs (Singh). Scientists are also raising alarms about the increasing plastic in our bodies. A June 2019 study by the World Wide Fund for Nature notes that the average amount of plastic a person could be ingesting is around “5 grams” (Hakizimana). This is the equivalent of a credit card worth of plastic every week. Companies use propaganda to distort reality and present consumers with an alternative that lacks all the facts. The lack of accountability and poor manufacturing processes cannot continue

without dire consequences for our environment and us.

Finally, how does social media impact American society? Consider that we are all participating in shared propaganda on social media websites: I see what you want me to see, and you see what I show you. We are, however, not viewing just our friends and family but also the projections and fabrications of governments, corporations, special interest groups, and more. These deep-pocketed players generate an online presence that might not reflect reality nor have our best interests in mind. And when we cannot agree on what is real, there can be no meaningful or productive communication. It is difficult to determine what percentage of online content a human being creates and how much is generated by technology like automated scripts or bots. More research is needed on this topic.

Combatting Propaganda

Up to this point, I have explored the idea of propaganda and its history and applications. Examples of both positive and negative employments of propaganda have been selectively laid out to build familiarity with the reader. The situation in modern America might also reflect that of different world areas. This section presents several tactics for individuals to increase their awareness and protect themselves against the emotional tug indicative of propaganda.

Conscious awareness and understanding ensure a continuation of life and enable a more honest expression of the self. In George Orwell's dystopian novel *1984* (1949), people spoke a language called NewSpeak. It was a simplified language designed to limit people's communication and ability to express themselves. A person living in the environment of this novel would not possess the knowledge or awareness of how to express their thoughts or feelings. The result is misery and subjugation. Before civilization, a lack of awareness would provide some opportune hunters with an easy meal. Since modern society does not require constant alertness for predators lurking behind buildings, we pay less attention. Cell phones and digital tech exacerbate this problem by distracting people from their surroundings. Becoming more aware of one's surroundings and what is subjectively happening mentally and emotionally is crucial to fighting the effects of propaganda. Emotions are the hooks and triggers that companies seek to exploit. You can be manipulated and controlled by failing to maintain awareness of your emotions. Emotions can be stirred up or elicited by external stimuli, and unless recognized for what they are, they can quickly compound into something unexpected, like an outburst.

There are several methods for gaining awareness of oneself, including meditation, yoga, philosophy, etc. Whichever of these appeals to any individual, becoming more in tune with what is happening within is just as important as paying attention to the environment. This is not to suggest that a person attains an emotionless mind, but instead not to allow oneself to be dragged unaware down an emotional path. American society has a stigma that mental health should not be discussed. However, America is suffering from a mental health crisis, which is partially a result of propaganda by people and groups who do not have anyone's best interest in mind except their own. It is imperative to communicate with others and allow them to communicate since this breaks down the illusions created by propaganda. It is crucial to acknowledge problems, then seek out support and help for what ails. Becoming a more conscious individual raises the consciousness of the collective group by some tiny iota. Each of us has a responsibility to play our part.

Without awareness it would not be possible to progress in the fight against propaganda and its influences on an individual. Awareness is vital to the next step, which is intentionally seeking out opposing viewpoints. When presented with a subject that has a side, first consider the idea of belonging to that side. Did you choose this side yourself, of your own volition, or were there influencing factors worth considering? Seek out the opposing side with curiosity and work to understand why its purveyors believe what they believe. People have come to act as if there is no distinction between a person and their beliefs. To criticize one is to attack the other, and

the internet has reinforced this. Separating a belief or a view from the individual allows for closer inspection. You might ask, why seek out what you know or believe is wrong? Unless it is an absurd claim that would be more of a waste of time – sorry flat-Earthers – hearing out the opposition will result in one of two things: it will either reinforce your belief and understanding of your position, as well as gain you a better understanding of your opposition, humanizing both sides in the process; or it might influence you just enough to consider a shift in consciousness. This is how successful ideas and relationships are formed and grow over time. Awareness of oneself and one's tendencies allows for a more objective analysis of the internal and external world. An awareness of the propaganda, how it makes you feel, and how you are being led to respond, as well as an open mind to opposing viewpoints – all of this leads to an empowered position in the modern world. Part of this process involves limiting exposure to some sources of propaganda, like social media or the news. Most power is derived from the audience paying attention. Deprive them of attention, and you deprive them of influence over yourself and those around you.

Lastly, counterpropaganda can help combat propaganda. Counterpropaganda is based on truth and targets the same audience as the propaganda. Because of the internet, rapid deployment of information is possible almost anywhere. However, I am tepid about this suggestion, due to the increase in noise. The internet and media already flood the American psyche with so much propaganda that to add to it, even with the best intentions, might not have much effect. Alternatively, worse, it might serve to confuse people further. Ultimately, I believe it is most effective to disconnect from the noise source. Social media, the 24-hour news cycle, politicians, corporations, and more – much of it is unnecessary and can be minimized or cut out completely. Combine this with increasing awareness among a population and this is the recipe for clarity and truth.

Conclusion

Propaganda poses new challenges in the digital age. Bad actors can use increasingly powerful technologies to manipulate large swaths of the population anonymously. Becoming more aware of emotional manipulation in media and the corporate-driven digital world is crucial to maintaining mental health. Propaganda is a tactic that has been honed and sharpened over centuries. This latest iteration is brought to you by corporations employing psychologists, sociologists, scientists, data scientists, and more to manipulate and control you. And they are deeply invested in you believing what they are peddling because their paycheck depends on it.

I believe more research is necessary to better understand the social issues. But those long-term views are inadequate for combating the issue immediately and directly. Humans, especially Westerners, think in terms of a dichotomy: this and that. We believe that there are two sides to everything, whether good vs. evil, up vs. down, or left vs. right. Our thinking leaves no room for ambiguity, despite life being ambiguous by nature. A society is not independent of its citizens, and a person is not independent of their environment. Changing one changes the other.

I hope that this paper can resonate with others who find their power in choosing to become more conscious, open, and aware. One may use the tools of this paper to raise one's level of awareness and perception of both the analog and digital worlds. Making a difference is possible, one responsible person at a time

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On the Future of Liberal Arts: An Interview with Interim Dean Cavanagh

Dr. Yubraj Aryal

Dr. Dan Cavanagh, Interim Dean of the College of Liberal Arts, was interviewed by *Global Insight* Executive Editor, Yubraj Aryal. Dr. Aryal asked Dean Cavanagh about a few of the current issues regarding liberal arts education.

YA: Why is a liberal arts education important for our undergraduates?

DC: The liberal arts provide a foundational set of skills for everyone. Indeed, it is one of the reasons that liberal arts courses are part of the “core” set of courses most undergraduates need to take across the nation. A comprehensive understanding of these subjects allows students to synthesize information, drive creative solutions to problems, and communicate those solutions to a wider audience. This is especially important in the workforce and in civic life. For students who do not major in a liberal arts field, it is important for them to also build a base of these skills to apply to their lives.

YA: A majority of students in my literature classes, on the other hand, are from the sciences or engineering. I learned from some of them that they find liberal arts to be boring, or a waste of time. They take liberal arts courses not because they know their importance to their lives and careers but because such courses are required by the university. In this scenario, what can we do to make a difference for the current status of liberal arts in a university setting? Are there more things we can do to inform our students that the normative orientation of a liberal arts education can be coordinated with the empirical evidence of their other fields?

DC: I think this is a common feeling among any college student about not wanting to take courses outside their chosen field of study – we hear the same things from students in the liberal arts being required to take a math course, for example. However, there is a reason we have a core group of courses, across disciplines, that students are required to take. I do think it will take educators spending a bit more time, in class, to explain the “whys” of what we are teaching and why it is required of all students. I speak with many people who did not realize until they were long out of school how important their education in the liberal arts turned out to be

for them. I also think we need to tell our story differently and more forcefully. We need to emphasize the skills and competencies that the liberal arts brings to the work environment and life outside academia. One way to do that is to continue to emphasize the importance that CEOs are putting on the skills the liberal arts provide. Communication skills, for example, are the top requested skill in job placement ads as analyzed by the Texas Workforce Commission. These are all skills taught and honed in the liberal arts.

I do think we can do more to help our students understand the connection between the liberal arts and STEM-focused empirical education. One way to do this is to better communicate among our fields in the professoriate. A long-standing problem in research has been a “silo” problem between academic research fields. I think we experience similar issues in the pedagogical side of our profession. That trickles down into our students’ experiences in the classroom. An enhanced focus on interdisciplinarity, not just with particular classes, but through “teams” of students bringing different skills to the table is one way to attack this problem. This demonstrates to students the value of different approaches and skillsets being brought to bear on any given problem.

YA: Since the value of education is conflated with career, money, and life-style these days, are you hopeful our students will develop a renewed interest in liberal arts in the current age of science and technology?

DC: I disagree with the premise of the question – it has been shown empirically that people with liberal arts degrees tend to earn the same or more than their counterparts across fields when you look at the five- to ten-year time frame. That is because students with a deep grounding in liberal arts fields develop skills that become more important the further one moves on in one’s career – such as strong communication, critical thinking, creative connection-making, understanding of context and history, and flexibility and adaptability. These skills allow people to lead change and drive innovation efforts. Likely it is a matter of us in the liberal arts telling this story better, something that is a driver in the national conversation right now about the value of the liberal arts.

YA: Since you are a music professor, I’d like to ask: Why is music important to our undergraduate students? How do they benefit from music?

DC: Music is an art form that is important for creators and appreciators alike. There is an element of studying music (similar to other art forms) that opens our understanding up of the human condition – the human experience that is still difficult to quantify in the hard sciences. The “hard problem of consciousness” is an illustrative and prominent example here of how it has taken centuries to develop a bioscientific, neurological understanding of our brain, yet we still do not understand how consciousness works. Music is a window into our souls and the souls of the performers and composers. The shared audience experience (for example, in a concert hall or at a music venue) is a human, shared experience that is invaluable to the processing of our place in this world and universe. Music, alongside all the arts, provides varied lenses through which we can contemplate these deep questions. Gaining structured experience, for example through a music appreciation course, or through performance in a musical ensemble, helps develop and hone those skills that will serve students all for life.

Contributors

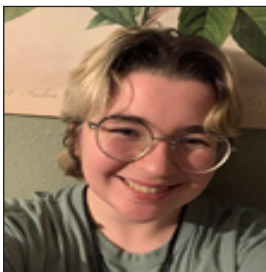
Authors

Joshua Farquhar



Joshua Farquhar studied in UT Arlington's Department of Modern Languages from 2016 to 2018 as a dual-credit student, where he completed a minor in Russian. Soon after, he lived in Omsk, Russia, where he had the opportunity to study alongside a cadre of international students and become more familiar with Russian language and culture, while also living alongside Russians and experiencing their day-to-day life. Joshua has also completed a BA in Politics, Philosophy, and Economics from Dallas Baptist University and will complete an MA in International Studies this December. This fall, he will be a guest lecturer at UTA on debate and Russian language, assisting with the Rebuilding a Russian-American Conversation program funded by a grant from the U.S. Embassy in Moscow. In his free time, Joshua is an outdoorsman and loves any activities that take him out into nature.

Sloane Cheesebrough



Sloane Cheesebrough received a Bachelor of Arts in Linguistics with minors in Spanish and English from the University of Texas at Arlington in August of 2022. In their undergraduate studies, they conducted research on LGBT+ linguistics, language and gender, and inclusive language policy. They are pursuing their Masters in Linguistics at the Toulouse Graduate School at the University of North Texas and will be serving as a Graduate Teaching Assistant. After graduation, they plan to pursue their doctorate. Their interests include romance languages, literary criticism, and creative writing.

Coleton Boles



Coleton Boles is an undergraduate at the University of Texas at Arlington currently pursuing a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science. Independent from his studies at University, he enjoys researching music and film history, as well as learning web development and Japanese in his free time. After graduating he plans on helping non-profits dedicated to alleviating poverty through the AmeriCorps VISTA program.

Joshua Slatter



Joshua Slatter has an Associate of Arts degree and is currently a political science major at UTA planning to graduate in 2023. His areas of concentration are environmental sustainability, history, and politics. He is also an aspiring member of the Archer Fellowship Program in Washington, D.C. His goal is to start working with local grassroots campaigns and eventually move up from the local to the state and eventually federal level and work in either the National Parks service or the State Department. His hobbies include reading, hiking, and caring for animals.

Umber Batool



Umber Batool was born and raised in Arlington, Texas. Currently a second-year undergraduate at UTA, Umber is pursuing a BA in English, with minors in Political Science as well as Technical Writing and Communication Design. Umber finds interest in learning about different perspectives, politics, debate, reading, writing, and graphic design. Her aspirations for the future are to work at a library, become a politician, or work in the corporate world as a social media manager.

Chae Balistreri



Chae Balistreri is an undergraduate student at The University of Texas at Arlington. He is a first-generation college student pursuing his B.S. in electrical engineering with a minor in mathematics. Chae recently began working with a UTA research group led by the professor of bioengineering and nanotechnology, Dr. Kytai Nguyen. As an extracurricular, he enjoys attending the EE workshops led by UTA Engineering Technician Todd Kelley and is a member of IEEE. On his own time, Chae produces television and film, teaches guitar, and enjoys reading and writing and numerous other endeavors. After graduating, he plans to either start a business or pursue his master's degree.

Interviewee

Dan Cavanagh



Dan Cavanagh is the interim Dean of the College of Liberal Arts at the University of Texas at Arlington. As a composer and pianist, he is a professor of music with numerous recordings released. He has performed extensively in North America and Europe as a jazz pianist, and he has also performed in Asia and Central America. His music continues to be commissioned and programmed by ensembles and artists around the world.

Prior to serving as interim Dean, he served as interim Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, where he worked to guide curriculum through approval processes, oversaw the college teaching and research awards processes, and contributed to a wide variety of university-wide initiatives and task forces, including the Student Success Task Force and the Covid Academic Planning and Reopening Task Force. He has held a variety of other administrative roles. Highlights include serving as Chair of the UT System Faculty Advisory Council, where he worked with leaders across the UT System and state to tackle issues of shared importance to faculty and the system. He has served as Music Department Chair, Director of the Music Industry Studies area, and Assistant Director of the Jazz Studies program.

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Yubraj Aryal is a Lecturer at The University of Texas at Arlington. He was a Visiting Scholar at NYU (2014) and Postdoctoral Researcher at The University of Montreal (2016-2017). Dr. Aryal has published several articles including the most recent ones, "The Kurdish Freedom Movement: Self-organizing and Self-managing Democratic Confederalism" in *Deleuze Studies* and "The Political as a Practice: The Sadhus' Art of Not Being Governed" in *The South Asianist*. He is currently working on his new book *After the Second Surge: Pandemic, Politics, and Protests*.

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Dmitry Rudkevich Jr is a graduate student at the University of Texas at Arlington. He obtained his Bachelor of Arts in History from UT Arlington. Currently, he is pursuing a Master of Arts in History as well as a middle and high school teaching certification program, and desires to pursue higher education. He has volunteered for the Mansfield Historical Society and Allies in Youth Development as well as tutored in his expertise to his co-students. In his free time, he enjoys reading, playing the piano, and spending time with his family.

Editor-in-Chief | Dr. Lonny Harrison



Dr. Lonny Harrison is Associate Professor of Russian at The University of Texas at Arlington, where he is also Director of the Charles T. McDowell Center for Global Studies. His PhD is from The University of Toronto (2008). Dr. Harrison specializes in 19th and 20th-century Russian literature, and also has a major interest in the intersection of revolution, media, and propaganda. His book *Archetypes from Underground: Notes on the Dostoevskian Self* was published in 2016 by the Wilfrid Laurier University Press, and his second book *Language and Metaphors of the Russian Revolution: Sow the Wind, Reap the Storm* was released in December 2020 by Lexington Books. He is currently working on a monograph about Russian revolutionary terrorism for Academic Studies Press.

Digital Publishing & Repository Librarian | Yumi Ohira



Yumi Ohira currently serves as the Digital Publishing & Repository Librarian at The University of Texas at Arlington Libraries, which she joined in April 2019. Her portfolio includes matters related to scholarly communications and open access. Previously, Ohira worked at Fort Hays State University, Kansas, as Digital Curation Librarian, then at The University of Nebraska at Omaha as Digital Initiatives Librarian. Ohira is originally from Japan, where she received a B.S. in Applied Physics from Fukuoka University. After her professional experience working as an engineer in Japan, Ohira moved to the United States and attended The University of Kansas and Southern Illinois University-Carbondale, where she was awarded an M.F.A. in Studio Art. Ohira went on to study at Emporia State University, Kansas, and completed her M.L.S. and Archive Studies Certification.

Digital Publishing Specialist | Hang Pham-Vu



Hang Pham-Vu graduated from the University of Texas at Arlington in 2021 and currently works as a Digital Publishing Specialist for UTA Libraries. During her graduating semester at the University of Texas at Arlington, she served as the social media intern for the university's English department and completed multiple graphic design projects while learning how to write creative copy. Her four years spent in the College of Liberal Arts strengthened her interests ranging from creative writing to technical communication. In her free time, she enjoys reading, watching films, and listening to music.



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ISSN: 2690-8204