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A Note from the Director

Welcome to the 2024 edition of *The Cupola*, Christopher Newport University's undergraduate research journal. As the Director of Student Research and Creative Activity, it is my pleasure to serve as the journal's editor, establishing guidelines and facilitating the vetting process.

Our top two essays reflect the complexity of research conducted by CNU's undergraduates: from Whitney Flores' study of the representation of autism in a contemporary American television show and Maeve Korengold's examination of the enduring and often-complicated legacy of Marie Antoinette; these pieces indicate the rigor, the depth, and the variety of undergraduate research at Christopher Newport University.

The Office of Student Research and Creativity is proud of these students who, with enthusiastic and skilled faculty mentorship, continue to produce insightful and meaningful work.

Dr. David A. Salomon
Director, Office of Student Research and Creative Activity
July 2024

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Ideological Representations of Autism in *Everything's Gonna Be Okay*
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Winner of the Cupola Award

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Michaela Meyer, Department of Communication Studies

Abstract

The method of ideological criticism was utilized to explore ways that representations of autism in the American television show *Everything's Gonna Be Okay* (2020-2021) reinforced and resisted dominant ideologies. The research question was guided by existing scholarship on the state and power of televisual representations of disabled and autistic people. The social model of disability and Kafer's (2008) political/relational model of disability challenge the dominant ideology of the medical model of disability. The analysis reveals how the show resisted dominant ideology through depictions of sensory differences, neurodivergent family dynamics, and definitions of independence. Texts that disrupt dominant ideologies open the door to a greater understanding of how mainstream media represents autism and, ultimately, how these representations affect public perceptions of autism, neurodiversity, and disability.
Keywords: autism, disability, ideology, medical model, representation

Ideological Representations of Autism in *Everything's Gonna Be Okay*

The American comedy-drama *Everything's Gonna Be Okay* (2020–2021) was written and produced by, and starred, Australian comedian and creator of *Please Like Me* (2013–2016), Josh Thomas. The show follows his character, Nicholas, and his two, teenage half-sisters, Matilda (Kayla Cromer) and Genevieve (Maeve Press), after their father dies of cancer. Matilda, her girlfriend, and later wife, Drea (Lillian Carrier), and eventually Nicholas, by the end of season two, are all openly autistic. The television show's representations of autism through these characters garnered attention and was a hit with many autistic viewers. Clee (2020), an autistic writer at *NeuroClastic*, wrote, "Instead of relying on stereotypes, Matilda is a character going through a coming-of-age arc that feels refreshingly human. Autism is brought up *a lot* but it's never used as a replacement or shortcut for her personality" (para. 5, emphasis in original).

Other reviewers expressed relating to Matilda, like Birch (2023), "I see so much of myself in Matilda. I have not made it through an episode yet that hasn't brought me back to a difficult time in high school" (para. 10; Grimmer, 2023). Other reviewers appreciated the way the show handled romantic relationships with its autistic characters, such as Rozsa (2020) who wrote for *Salon*,

> *Everything's Gonna Be Okay* pays particular attention to the struggles faced by autistic people when they seek romantic relationships. Whereas *Atypical* often seemed to approach these problems from the vantage point of an outsider looking in … *Everything's Gonna Be Okay* dives into the mindset of the autistic character herself … [Matilda] is a normal teenager who happens to process these things through an autistic lens. (para. 5)

In addition to inspiring intrapersonal reflection, the show sparked conversations within the disabled community and their allies. Professional speaker, author, and autism-film consultant, Magro (2020), shares hope in the potential of the show and future ones like it,

> When I get the opportunity to mentor individuals with special needs, I wish I had more resources I could provide them on relationships minus my own personal successes and challenges dating on the autism spectrum. (para. 5)

Regarding the show's reception, 97% of reviews by "Tomatometer-approved critics and publications" from *Rotten Tomatoes'* Tomatometer were positive. Its IMDb Rating was 7.4 out of 10 from 3,100 reviewers (IMDb, n.d.a; Rotten Tomatoes, n.d.a; Rotten Tomatoes, n.d.b). Thomas's success has been attributed, in part, to the fact that he was deliberate in making sure there were autistic voices in front of and behind the camera (Lawler, 2021; see also Cruz, 2021). The autistic representation was not what drew all in viewers nor all that viewers took away from it. A review from *The New York Times* called the show "a charming variation on the orphans-raising-one-another scenario" and *Rolling Stone* praised Nicholas' complex, meanswell, messy character (Poniewozik, 2020, Subtitle; Sepinwall, 2020). These responses suggest the show captured a wide audience. This is further demonstrated by the fact that the show won a Seal of Authentic Representation from the Ruderman Family Foundation Seal of Authentic Representation and ReFrame's 2021 Award for Narrative and Animated TV (IMDb, n.d.b). Additionally, autistic actor Carsen Warne, who played Jeremy, won the Young Entertainer's 2021 award for Best Recurring Young Actor Television Series (IMBd, n.d.b; Weaver, 2020). The show was nominated for GLAAD's 2021 Media Award for Outstanding Comedy Series, Australia's 2021 Screen Music Awards for Best Music for a Television Series or Serial, Dorian TV's 2020 Award for Best Unsung TV Show, and Hollywood Critics Association Television's 2021 Award for Best Comedy-Cable Series (IMBd, n.d.b).

This project is significant because of the way that the ideological representations of autism in media can influence public perception of autistic people as well as disability and neurodiversity more generally. This research engages with a developing conversation between media studies and critical disability studies. Scholars from media studies perspectives ask

epistemological questions and challenge power dynamics (Parikka, 2020), while scholars working in critical disability studies specifically question dominant ideologies of disability to scrutinize barriers to integration into society faced by disabled people (Reaume, 2014). Together, they allow for an important perspective from which new voices and new questions emerge (Ellcessor & Kirkpatrick, 2019).

This study is grounded in research from disability studies that elucidate how disability is created and redefined by mass media such as television. The moral, medical, social, and political/relational models of disability offer a range of theoretical perspectives on disability (Kafer, 2008; Oliver, 1996; Olkin, 2022). Looking at the medical and social models of disability, Garland-Thomson (1997) discusses how media creates and perpetuates narratives and public conceptions of disability. Representations of disability in mass media are often stigmatizing and limited to a handful of stereotypes (Black & Pretes, 2007; Zhang & Haller, 2013). Common stereotypes of autism include White, cisgender, heterosexual males; the magical savant autistic character; and a complete disconnect to romance, sexuality, and dating (Baker, 2010; Brooks, 2018; Ryalls, 2023).

The purpose of my study is to analyze, through ideological criticism, how representations of autism in *Everything's Gonna Be Okay* reinforce and challenge the medical model of disability. Ongoing scholarship about autistic representation highlights specific ideologies, narratives, and stereotypes of autism used in film and television.

Literature Review

Disability Theory

Disability can be understood through multiple theoretical models, including the moral, medical, social, and political/relational models (Kafer, 2008; Oliver, 1996; Olkin, 2022). The moral model of disability views disability as a sign of a person's character or "karma" (Olkin, 2022, para. 2). This framework posits disability as a punishment for poor character or behavior, often coinciding with religious beliefs that say sin leads to poor health and good faith leads to good health (Retief & Letšosa, 2018). The medical model of disability similarly perceives disability as an individual problem (Berghs et al., 2016). The medical model pathologizes and medicalizes bodies with any "'deviation' from 'normal'" and positions disability as something that needs to be fixed (Berghs et al., 2016, Medical Model section; Olkin, 2022). The social model of disability frames disability as an interaction between bodies and their environment (Oliver, 1996). Under the social model, individuals may have impairments, defined as conditions that disrupt everyday functioning regardless of the environment, but disability stems from social, legal, and physical barriers (Goering, 2015). Disabilities are man-made "disadvantage[s] or restriction[s] of activity" that "exclude" physically disabled people from fully integrating into or participating in society (Oliver, 1996, p. 22). The distinction between impairments and disability is subjective, but the implications remain the same. Under the social model of disability, society at large is responsible for creating access and care for disabled people through policy and design rather than leaving them as individual burdens. The political/relational model frames the definition and perception of impairments and disabilities as social constructs (Kafer, 2008). Kafer built on the social model's recognition that man-made structural barriers can disable people but did not view impairments to be distinguishable from disability.

Representations of Disability

Disability is a social construct whose definition, uses, and boundaries have and will continue to change. Mass media communicates models of disability through narratives. Narratives are effective at dispersing ideas because they are how we make sense of the world

(Fisher, 1984). The stories we hear shape how we interpret our reality and future stories. This perspective on narratives is foundational for Garland-Thomson's (1997) argument that disabled bodies are created by, seen in context with, and reinforced by media.

Representations of disability in mass media are often limited to stigmatizing narratives that can cause harm to disabled communities and provide limited understandings of disability for audiences (Zhang & Haller, 2013). Zhang and Haller (2013) asked disabled people about disability representation to analyze the perceived accuracy of the representation, the importance of accuracy, the reaction to observed stereotypes, and the effects of the representations on their self-identity. Their participants agreed, overall, that mass media generally portrays disabled people in one of three ways: "supercrips, disadvantaged, or ill victims" (Zhang & Haller, 2013, p. 329). These results aligned with previous studies concerning disability stereotypes such as the seven identified by Black and Pretes (2007) which were: pitiable and pathetic; supercrip; sinister, evil, and criminal; better-off dead; maladjusted-own worst enemy; burden to family/ society; and unable to live a successful life. Participants of Zhang and Haller's study found representations of disabled characters as "disadvantaged" or "ill victims" worsened their "self-esteem about their self-identity" (p. 330) as the portrayals positioned disabled lives as "inferior to" and less than the lives of non-disabled characters. The representations negatively impacted their self-worth and ability to "envision themselves properly" (Zhang & Haller, 2013, p. 330). The "supercrip" narrative was, at times, positively received, unlike the other narratives, but was considered unrealistic. Black and Pretes (2007) define the supercrip narrative as a stereotype that "portrays the individual with a disability as exhibiting great courage, stamina, and determination to overcome his or her disability" (p. 67; see also Schalk, 2016). These narratives intend to be "inspiration" for audiences to do something extraordinary themselves (Black & Pretes, 2007, p. 79). However, these images often set "unrealistic" expectations and "unattainable goals" for disabled people which can lead to feelings of failure and lower self-worth (Zhang & Haller, 2013, p. 330). Black and Pretes (2007) also say that in supercrip narratives "disability is portrayed as an individual characteristic that can serve to build character" as opposed to recognizing social or systemic barriers (p. 80). Through this perspective, "audience members are blameless as to their role in perpetuating discrimination and oppression of individuals with disabilities" on top of being inspired (Black & Pretes, 2007, p. 80). Positive portrayals of disability strengthened participants' sense of identity.

Representations of Autism

Mainstream representations of autism are often artificially limited to select stereotypes and tropes. As autism diagnoses have become more common in the last few decades, autism has become increasingly visible and a prevailing subject of interest (Nawaz & Norris, 2023). Subsequently, media representations of autism have become more common and prolific.

The typical autistic character, a White, cisgender, heterosexual male, does not represent the diversity of the autistic community (Ryalls, 2023). In 2020, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimated one in thirty-six children in the U.S. are autistic (Maenner et al., 2020). Autism has been reported across all racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups. Maenner and their colleagues (2020) estimated that three percent of Black, Hispanic, Asian, or Pacific Islander children are autistic compared to two percent of White children (Nawaz & Norris, 2023). Children assigned male at birth remain four times more likely to be autistic, but that may be due to additional variables that complicate children assigned female at birth getting diagnosed as autistic (Maenner et al., 2020; see Nawaz & Norris, 2023). Autistic people are also statistically more likely to be LBGTQ+ than their allistics, or non-autistic, counterparts (Weir et al., 2021).

Another popular trope or stereotype is the autistic savant character whose intelligence and skill are treated like magic, superpowers, or as if they are part computer (see Baker,

2010; Draaisma, 2009). One of the earliest and most well-known autistic savant characters was Raymond Bobbitt from *Rainman* (1988) (Treffert, 2009; see also Baker, 2010). Treffert argued that the overrepresentation of the prodigious savant can indirectly harm the autistic community. Approximately one in ten autistic people demonstrate some savant skills, but there is a spectrum. The most common type, "splinter skills", include, for example, "obsessive preoccupation with, and memorization of, music and sports trivia" (Treffert, 2009, para. 20). Prodigious savants, which are the most magical-like savants, are extremely uncommon. Treffert estimates one hundred prodigious savants are diagnosed and alive today. This overrepresentation of savant characters encourages the myths that autistic people are machine-like, not quite human, emotionless, or lacking empathy, and raises social and cultural expectations for real autistic people, most of whom are not savants (Baker, 2010; Draaisma, 2009; Poe & Moseley, 2016; see also Aspler et al., 2022). Poe and Moseley (2016) observed that these autistic characters were either so intelligent that their autism was forgotten or such a burden that their problems overwhelmed the other characters. Some characters play both roles when it suits the narrative, yet these extremes do not accurately reflect the experience of the majority of autistic people (Poe & Moseley, 2016). Baker (2010) called this use of savantism a "spectacularization" of autistic characters (p. 234). Autistic characters are already "exoticized" and seen as "separate from the normal world," something that endorsing their representations with superhuman savant skills exacerbates (Baker, 2010, p. 230). Draaisma (2009) argued that in addition to reinforcing the myth of "machine-like" autistic people who "have no true feelings," savantism makes autistic characters useful to other characters and moves the plot forward (p. 1478). As narrative props, autistic characters never become fully thought-out, human characters (Baker, 2010).

There is an assumption that autistic people are incapable of being in successful romantic relationships due to infantilization and a perception that autistic people lack empathy or are uninterested in relationships (Brooks, 2018). Brooks (2018) explains how these two assumptions work together to create the idea that autistic people do not and cannot care about or engage in relationships, intimacy, sexuality, and romance. Brooks argues this has led to an "overreliance on supercrip narratives" (Brooks, 2018, p. 176). Ryalls (2023) explores how the Australian reality television show *Love on the Spectrum* (2019–2021) creates supercrip narratives by ignoring systemic issues, such as racism, "in favor of telling individual stories of autistic success" (p. 151). *Love on the Spectrum* portrays autism as a problem all of the participants sought to "fix." Specific autism-related traits or behaviors that were labeled problems ranged from living with parents as an adult to being nonverbal. The participants' goal was to find a romantic relationship that would fix their autism. The way the show moved contestants towards this goal was by changing them to fit a specific whitewashed heteronormative narrative. Independence was also considered a key part of success. This narrative frame narrowly defines independence as being in a romantic relationship and living with your romantic partner away from home (Ryalls, 2023).

As a result of this literature review, it is clear that understanding representations of autism and disability is important to critical media studies which leads to my research questions: How do representations of autism in *Everything's Gonna Be Okay* resist the dominant ideology of the medical model of disability?

Methodology

Textual representations of different groups of people, places, and cultures, explicit and implicit, are encoded with ideologies. Textual representations can reinforce dominant ideologies, bring back "residual" ones, as well as offer alternative, "emergent" ideologies (Williams, 1977, p. 122). In the words of Foss (2009), texts "embody, enact, and express" (p. 291) chosen ideologies. These ideologies can be identified and exposed through the method of ideological criticism.

Hegemony is made up of ideologies that are created, maintained, and disrupted through media texts. These "artifacts of popular culture" are legitimized as subjects worth studying "because they are places where struggles take place over which meaning and ideologies will predominate" (Foss, 2009, p. 294). All texts are inherently ideological, meaning they are all encoded by producers, consciously or unconsciously, with "biases, interest, and embedded values, reproducing [certain] point[s] of view" (Kellner & Durham, 2006, p. xiv). As sites of meaning, media texts may potentially influence "ways of thinking about, even defining, social and cultural issues" (Croteau & Hoynes, 2013, p. 160; see also Jhally, 2015; Lopez, 2020).

Ideological criticism is a method used to expose the reinforcement and resistance to dominant ideologies in specific texts (e.g. Piper & Meyer, 2020). Foss (2009) considers the objective of ideological criticism to be "to discover and make visible the dominant ideology or ideologies embedded in an artifact and the ideologies that are being muted in it" (pp. 295-296) with the goal being "the emancipation of human potential" (p. 296). Foss (2009) explains, "A dominant ideology controls what participants see as natural … normal discourse, then, maintains the ideology, and challenges to it seem abnormal" (p. 295). This process of normalization toward hegemony is insidious by the nature of their invisibility. Ignorance of the harm caused by different ideologies leads people toward accepting them without question. Thus it becomes significant to make ideologies in media visible and understand their relation to dominant ideologies.

This study examines the television series *Everything's Gonna Be Okay* which has a forty-three-minute pilot and nineteen twenty-minute episodes. The show's two ten-episode seasons were watched from beginning to end to gain a broad map of the ideological messages present in the text. Implicit or explicit ideological messages related to the medical model of disability or autism were noted while watching, culminating in twenty-seven pages of notes. The messages most closely considered were: character behavior; character motivations, goals, and intent; dialogue; relationships; and conflict. This viewing was sensitive to the stereotypes discussed in the literature, namely the relationship the autistic characters had to Whiteness and heteronormativity, any representations or lack of representations of savantism, and the framing and role of romantic relationships. Seven episodes were then selected for a closer reading: episodes five, six, nine, and ten from season one, and episodes five and six from season two. These episodes were selected because they explored or illustrated one or more ideological themes clearly, in-depth, or in an otherwise noteworthy manner. Some messages reinforced the dominant ideology, while others disrupted it or fell somewhere in between. These seven episodes were re-watched as needed for (1) selection, (2) content and broad details, e.g. characters in a scene, setting, conflicts, (3) implicit messages, and (4) smaller details that may have been overlooked, e.g. clothing being worn. The dialogue was transcribed when it was notably involved in the representation of an ideological message. Autistic coding was most often found in the interpersonal communication between the main characters, as a family, including how information was presented, what behaviors were normalized, and the ways they handled conflict. Miscommunication occurred frequently despite best efforts.

Analysis

Everything's Gonna Be Okay offers counter-hegemonic representations of sensory differences, neurodivergent family dynamics, and definitions of independence.

Normalization of Sensory Differences

While sensory differences are not exclusive to autism, they are a part of the diagnostic criteria for autism spectrum disorder (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2022; see also Grapel et al., 2015). *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-5) (APA, 2022) described sensory issues as "Hyper- or hypo-reactivity to sensory input or unusual

interest in sensory aspects of the environment" (p. 57). Sensory issues can make processing everyday sensory information challenging (National Autistic Society, 2020). Self-stimulating behaviors, known as stimming, sensory sensitivities, needs, triggers, and coping skills utilized for sensory overloads vary from person to person. Sensory overloads occur when someone receives more sensory information than their brain can process at one time (Griffin, 2020). These overloads can lead to fight, flight, or freeze responses which can become meltdowns and shutdowns.

Matilda and Drea's, her autistic girlfriend's, sensory differences in *Everything's Gonna Be Okay* are normalized in how their differences are represented, how their needs are communicated, and the reactions they incur from others. The ninth episode of season one which focuses on the couple, shows multiple representations explicitly exploring their differing sensory needs, triggers, and experiences. At the beginning of the episode, Matilda picks out an outfit for Drea to wear to her piano recital from her own closet because she, Matilda, in her own words, has "good style" (Thomas & Goldenberg, 2020, 2:11). In the scene, Matilda is wearing a light blue dress with a flowery pattern and buttons down the front over a t-shirt with ruffled sleeves while Drea has on an oversized dark green shirt over a long-sleeved black compression shirt, which are both outfits typical for the characters. While it might have been her chosen style regardless, Matilda's performance of femininity may be "based on the internet's collective opinion of what girls should wear" (Mylo, 2022, p. 53). Meanwhile, Drea worries less about gender performance and more about the "sensory impact" of her clothing (Mylo, 2022, p. 54). Drea rejects each outfit Matilda suggests due to sensory concerns. The first outfit Matilda pulls out is a loose, empire-style, red dress with a deep V-neck. Drea shakes her head at the sight of it and says, "I don't like light flowy things that brush against me. I need fabric to be tight and heavy" (Thomas & Goldenberg, 2020, 2:13). The result is disappointing to Matilda because she has certain ideas in her head of how they should look and act as a couple, but she never dismisses or complains about Drea's sensory needs. Drea communicates her sensory preferences for clothing clearly and Matilda accepts them.

Throughout the show, Matilda and Drea also use different strategies to cope with emotional overwhelm. In the first episode of season one, Matilda embarrasses her younger sister in front of her friends by sharing personal information that she did not realize was a secret, which overwhelms her (Thomas & Thomas, 2020). At first, Matilda paces back and forth, hits herself with her lunch box, and reprimands herself under her breath. She apologizes and leaves the scene to go to a piano she can access in the theater at the school. She looks comfortable doing this as if she has done so before. Once she begins playing the instrument, she visibly relaxes. This is the first time the show makes it clear that Matilda often self-regulates by playing music.

Drea does not use music to self-regulate. She often stims, pets her service dog, and folds in on herself if she is sitting, instead. The ninth episode of season one shows Drea experiencing an emotional overload caused by positive feelings. This scene stands out because emotional overloads are often misunderstood to be solely caused by negative input. In this scene, Drea's body visibly shakes as she paces in front of Matilda and flaps her hands to stim. Matilda waits patiently for Drea to speak. Finally, Drea does, telling Matilda that she loves her for the first time. When Matilda says "I love you" back, which overwhelms Drea even more, and she has to sit down on the floor. She lays down on her back, taps her chest, and says to her service dog, "Duke. Duke, pressure" which tells the dog to lay on her chest to provide deep pressure to help her calm down (Thomas & Goldenberg, 2020, 4:40). Matilda, remaining patient, calmly asks Drea what she needs without judgment, "Do you want me to stay with you while you stim or can I go practice?" (Thomas & Goldenberg, 2020, 4:45). When Drea answers, "No, you can go. I'll be done soon," Matilda leaves the room quietly (Thomas & Goldenberg, 2020, 4:48).

Overloads cannot always be avoided. When an autistic person remains increasingly agitated

and irregulated, they may experience a meltdown or shutdown. Meltdowns can be confused for tantrums and, when seen in an adult, can be perceived as childish or "manipulative" (Rudy, 2023). Tantrums are intentional, emotional outbursts that, unlike autistic meltdowns, are "learned behavioral response[s]" used to get a need or want met (Autism Research Institute, n.d.). Meltdowns are involuntary neurobiological responses to information overload. The depiction of the build-up to the overloads before the meltdowns depicted in the show provides audiences with a linear narrative of the overwhelm expressed by the characters without leaving room for arguments that the response was intentional. Treating Matilda and Dreas' meltdowns as understandable responses and generally depathologizing their sensory differences rejects the dominant ideology of the medical model of disability. When people make adjustments to their behavior or the environment to accommodate a disabled person's needs, they reject the medical model of disability's expectation that it is disabled people, alone, who are responsible for adjusting. These depictions in *Everything's Gonna Be Okay* illustrate that someone could influence, for better or worse, a person struggling with sensory issues and normalizes conversations on the subject.

Support Needs and Parental Control

Nicholas and Drea's parents offer Matilda and Drea advice, respectively, but do not make decisions for them or try to control their behavior even when they disagree with their choices or predict a situation will go poorly. They do not try to control Matilda and Drea nor infantilize them, which are common patterns in other mediated representations of autism, including *Atypical* (2017–2021) and *The Good Doctor* (2017–present) (see Boren, 2017; Frey, 2017). Instead, the parental figures treat the young women as adults who can and need to make their own mistakes.

This choice of guidance over control, demonstrated across many aspects of their lives, includes sexual autonomy. Matilda has specific ideas about sex based on what she has observed in the media that are not all realistic or healthy (Mylo, 2022). More than one conversation about sex between Matilda and Nicholas illustrates this dynamic. One occurs over the phone in the eighth episode of season one when Matilda calls Nicholas at the end of her school day. He is standing in the kitchen with his boyfriend when Matilda begins with the question, "Remember when we decided I could have sex if I asked you first?" which suggests at least one prior conversation about safe sex (Walshe & Goldenberg, 2020, 11:54). Nicholas is visibly uncomfortable with the conversation and unsure as to what he should say, but he listens to Matilda. When she asks "Can Jeremey and Drea come over for a threesome?" (Walshe & Goldenberg, 2020, 12:03) he hesitates, then says, "Yeah, I don't see why not" (Walshe & Goldenberg, 2020, 12:23). Nicholas does not believe she is making a smart decision; however, he respects her bodily and sexual autonomy and accepts that she is capable of making decisions for herself.

Nicholas' choice to guide rather than attempt to control Matilda is evident again in the fifth episode of season two when eighteen-year-old Matilda tells him she has invited a twenty-six-year-old man named Ian over to the house for "a no-strings-attached hook up" (Walshe & Holder, 2021, 4:47). This plan is made with Drea's permission when Drea realizes she is homoromantic asexual and together, she and Matilda, decide to continue dating romantically in a "non-sexual partnership" (Walshe & Holder, 2021, 7:35). Nicholas attempts to stop the plan, naming the age difference and reminding them that they do not know this man. Matilda rebuffs with the argument that she is old enough to make the decision for herself and does not need his permission. Not long after this conversation, Nicholas has a private conversation with Ian, who asks if he is okay with Matilda having him over. Nicholas says he is not and explains that it is because he believes this plan will end with, "realistically, either Matilda and/or Drea sad" (Walshe & Holder, 2021, 11:11). He did not agree with the plan from the start; however,

he does not believe he should force Matilda one way or the other, or as he puts it, "I don't agree that what I want should matter" (Walshe & Holder, 2021, 11:16).

Dominant ideology understands independence for young adults as living away from home, ideally, with a romantic partner they may or may not live with (Ryalls, 2023). Autistic people may not all be able to achieve these statuses at the same age as their peers, if ever. Divergence from this vision of adulthood, by living at home after college or not being in a long-term, monogamous, heteronormative relationship, for example, is not "independence" under this perspective. Thus, autistic young adults may have to create their own definition of independence based on their support needs.

Matilda and Drea make efforts to prove to their parents and guardians that they could be independent. Living separately from their parents is an important part of their idea of independence. This is evident in episode six of season two when Drea plans an overnight stay at her family's cabin with Matilda to demonstrate what their future together could look like. Upon arrival, Matilda gets out of the car and happily announces, "Smells like pine trees and independence!" (Donnelly & Thomas, 2021, 1:01). Drea exits next and jumps up and down in excitement, "We're doing it, we're doing it! We're free!" (Donnelly & Thomas, 2021, 1:04). This was a big step for them to figure out what they wanted and what they could handle. Unfortunately, they quickly grew frustrated with tasks they did not want to complete, such as checking for snakes, and tasks they were unable to complete, such as chopping up firewood for warmth. One problem they faced was forgetting the bags filled with ingredients for their dinner, including perishable food, outside after they got distracted by the excitement of arriving. Drea's parents had offered to bring the bags inside before they left, but Drea refused their help. After a long and stressful day, Matilda and Drea realize they cannot live away from their parents, at least not yet. Their conversation reckoning this was somber and emotional. Drea explained to Matilda why she wanted to make this trip and why it was so important to her, "Tonight I wanted to show you that we could live normal lives without grown-ups. Because together, we are grown-ups. Even if we can't be independent alone, I thought maybe we could be independent together" (Donnelly & Thomas, 2021, 13:28). Drea recognized the two of them could not meet what they perceived to be the typical definition of independence, which included living alone together as a couple, but wanted to be with Matilda even if "there are things that other couples do that we don't do" (Donnelly & Thomas, 2021, 13:49). Matilda assures Drea she wants to be with her, too, even if they cannot be as independent as they want to be, assuring her, "I promise I'm not gonna leave you because we don't do all the things that other couples do" (Donnelly & Thomas, 2021, 14:28).

In the tenth and last episode of season one, Nicholas buys tickets for her, himself, and Genevieve to go to New York City to explore the campus after Matilda receives her acceptance into Juilliard (Thomas & Howard, 2021). In the morning, Nicholas and Genevieve drop Matilda off at the subway so she can experience taking the subway alone. When Matilda meets her siblings at their designated meeting spot, she is in tears. The pressure of navigating the city alone in addition to the sensory and social overload from the subway is too much for her. As a result of this experience, Matilda decides to give up her dream of going to Juilliard because navigating New York City alone was too sensory-challenging. In the next episode, the first episode of season two, Matilda sits on her bed with her laptop, alone, in the dark. Although she made the decision not to attend Juilliard, she still mourns her inability to make her dream a reality.

In the seventh episode of season two, at dinner with her family, Matilda announces her plans to propose to Drea the next day. Nicholas, his boyfriend, and Genevieve all ask questions meant to nudge her against the idea because she is so young, but she does not change her mind. Nicholas talks to Drea's mother about how to best persuade Matilda to wait until she proposes and why. Both agree eighteen is too young to get married. Matilda and Drea being autistic is

not mentioned. When Nicholas attempts to talk Matilda out of her decision, she asks if he thinks she should not get married because she is autistic, suggesting they might not believe she has the emotional and social intelligence needed to make the decision to get married, "Do you think just because I'm autistic that means I don't know whether I'm in love or not?" (Ward & Holder, 2021, 13:32). Nicholas firmly strikes this down, saying his disapproval is due to her age, "No, Matilda, that is not what this is. You're eighteen. Eighteen is too young to get married. That's it. That's the whole story" (Ward & Holder, 2021, 13:35). Thus, the conflict becomes more about ageist cultural assumptions for relationships rather than concerns about disability preventing those relationships from being successful. He has multiple conversations with her to persuade her to wait to get married, but does not attempt to control her and, in the end, supports her decision to propose, and then marry, Drea because it is her decision to make.

The parents and guardians of Matilda and Drea consistently do their best to guide the young women in life without trying to control them. This is evident in the way they approach conversations about sex, relationships, and independence. After their overnight stay in the cabin, Matilda and Drea realize they cannot live alone together because of the additional support they need from their parents and guardians, yet still pursue marriage as something they both want. They were upset with this realization at first but eventually found an arrangement that worked for them in which they were able to find joy in with guardians who were able and willing to support them. As two romantically, but not sexually, involved women, Matilda and Drea do not have a traditional partnership. Their families recognize that these new definitions of independence and relationship configurations go against the status quo. They consider Matilda and Drea finding what works for them a net positive. These portrayals of Matilda and Drea as young adults with specific needs, which at times lead to atypical ways of doing things, as opposed to people who are deficient and will never be independent or "grown up," disrupts the ideology of the medical model of disability and offers a perspective closer to Kafer's (2008) political/relational model of disability.

Conclusion

Through ideological criticism, this study found ways the television show *Everything's Gonna Be Okay* disrupts the dominant ideology of the medical model of disability and, at other times, reinforces it. The show does not frame autism as a problem to be solved, a key part of the way it resists dominant ideologies. The show's autistic characters faced challenges related to their autism, but autism was not at the center of all conflicts. Conversations about sensory needs and the experience of sensory overloads were depicted as a normal part of the lives of not only the autistic characters but their families as well. Matilda and Drea have different sensory preferences and needs, as seen in their contrasting preference for clothing. Matilda plays the piano and Drea gets support from her service dog demonstrating different coping strategies to self-soothe and -regulate after sensory overloads. These differences are communicated when relevant, accepted, and not framed as a burden to other characters. The interpersonal family dynamics of Matilda's neurodiverse family differ from other mediated representations of autism where two neurotypical parents are surprised by an autistic child. It is not uncommon for an autistic child to be born to one or two parents who are also neurodivergent, although they may not be diagnosed, as autism is genetic and can run in families (Cleveland Clinic, 2023; see also Hansen et al., 2019). In fact, in this aspect, *Everything's Gonna Be Okay* excels in showing Nicholas' journey toward his own autism diagnosis through his parenting style. His experience reflects the current reality of increasing numbers of parents being diagnosed with autism after their children are (Lyall et al., 2014; Malia, 2020; Moorhead, 2021).

Several autistic stereotypes and tropes used for autistic characters that play into hegemonic narratives of autism were identified in the literature. *Everything's Gonna Be Okay* avoided many of the stereotypes, ultimately avoiding the tendency of "spectacularization" (Baker, 2010, p.

234) by not labeling any of the autistic characters savants, an overrepresentation described by multiple scholars (e.g. Baker, 2010; Draaisma, 2009; Poe & Moseley, 2016). Matilda was an extremely talented pianist and composer, demonstrated by her playing and acceptance to Julliard. However, her skills are attributed to extensive practice, not her autism or any superpowers that might come with it. Regardless of where she might fall on the spectrum, no one calls Matilda a savant. Her musical skills do not function as a narrative device to help other characters.

This show was the first to center an openly autistic female character played by an openly autistic actress, and the only show with autistic women on air at the time of production (Cromer, 2021; see also Gilchrist, 2020). This representation held particular significance due to persisting myths that only boys can be autistic (Diemer et al., 2022). The queer autistic characters and relationships in the show were also significant as they are typically underrepresented (Gilchrist, 2020). Since then other series like *Young Royals* (2022) and *Heartbreak High* (2021–2024) have included autistic teen characters played by autistic actors (Kapit, 2023; The Permanent Rain Press, 2021). Thus, the show truly opened a door for more diverse representations both in casting behind the scenes and in characters on screen.

The show could have gone more in-depth with conversations such as the one questioning Matilda's ability to consent to sexual acts. A cast with greater racial and ethnic diversity and a story that reflects that was another missed opportunity. The entirety of the main cast is White or White-passing, which does not reflect the fact that Black, Hispanic, Asian, or Pacific Islander children are statistically more likely to be autistic than their White counterparts (Nawaz & Norris, 2023). There is a need for more representations of autistic characters of color that acknowledge and discuss this intersectionality.

Time was a limitation of this study. Further research could go more in-depth into the topics addressed in this study and discover more ways *Everything's Gonna Be Okay* resisted or reinforced dominant ideology. As the show ended in 2021, the entire artifact was and continues to be available for viewing. Future research could compare the representation in *Everything's Gonna Be Okay* to other mainstream television shows with autistic characters. For example, Abed Nair from *Community* (2009-2015) and Woo Young Woo from *Extraordinary Attorney Wu* (2022) could provide insight into how autism intersects with race and how these dual identities are represented (see Bunting, 2022). This would be worth studying because autistic people with marginalized racial and ethnic identities face specific intersectional challenges (Gilyard, 2023).

Representations of autism in *Everything's Gonna Be Okay* both challenged the medical model of disability with social and political/relational perspectives and, at times, reinforced the dominant ideology. Through this ideological criticism, strong contenders of resistance to dominant ideology were found in scenes about sensory differences, neurodivergent family dynamics, and definitions of independence. Future media representations of autism have the potential to continue disrupting dominant ideologies of the medical model of disability and create a greater understanding of how autism, neurodiversity, and disability are represented and understood by general audiences.

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About the Author

Whitney Flores is a May 2024 graduate of Christopher Newport University where they received their Bachelor of Arts in Communication Studies. As a student, Whitney fostered community on campus by founding the Disabled Student Union and tutoring peers in the Alice F. Randall Writing Center. They plan to spend the next year writing for a high school's communication department and working on their novel before pursuing their next degree. For this study, they engaged with critical disability studies from a media communication perspective to explore how media representations of autism reinforce and resist dominant ideologies.

The Complicated Legacy of Marie Antoinette:
The Public's Perpetual (De)Construction of a Queen
Maeve Korengold

Winner of the Cupola Award

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Michael Mulryan, Honors Program and
Department of Classical Languages and Literatures

Abstract

The life of Marie Antoinette (1755-1794) and her involvement in the French Revolution has been the subject of thorough scholarship, which largely focuses on her purported shallowness and disinterest in the plight of the lower class. However, there is much to be said about the conditions of Antoinette's upbringing and her life as a foreign-born monarch, which were largely influenced by the gendered expectations put upon women in the political sphere. This paper argues that French Revolutionary discourse bred a distinct set of expectations for women in politics based on the power associated with their sexuality and the focus on their physical appearance. The fictionalization of Marie Antoinette's life in the centuries following her death greatly contributed to the continuation of these expectations as her legacy.

This conclusion is based on the work of various scholars of the French Enlightenment and Revolution, whose biographies give important historical context, as well as scholars of queer and feminist theory, whose models I use to construct an outline of how the sexism Antoinette faced set a precedent for the experiences of women in politics. The findings presented in this paper offer an alternate perspective on the implications of Marie Antoinette's legacy in the context of today's Western political sphere.

Like many figures who rose to prominence during the French Revolutionary era,[1] Marie Antoinette (1755-1794) has remained the subject of much controversy. A notable number of concerns about Antoinette were related to her womanhood, particularly her sexuality. Antoinette struggled to adapt to her new role as Queen of France and to the conditions created by the virulent opposition she faced. Alongside their radically progressive ideas of religion and governmental power, revolutionary figures oversaw a regeneration of the constructs of gender in alignment with new systems. Although stereotypes surrounding women's behavior and intellectual ability existed before the French Revolution, the level of antagonism against Marie Antoinette as a woman in political power reached a height that set the tone for evolving social standards that work against women in politics.

Over the past century, new theories exploring Marie Antoinette's life in the contexts of sex and gender presentation have begun to enter academic circles. One historian, Pierre Saint-Amand, offers a framework outlining how women, particularly in the political sphere, are socially defined and demonized by their sexuality. "Marie Antoinette Syndrome," introduced in his 1994 article "Terrorizing Marie Antoinette," involves three parts: the demonization and multiplication of a woman's influence, the idea that a woman's sexuality is the origin of her influence, and the appropriation of a woman's body to be used as an object of influence at her expense. Saint-Amand gives the public's treatment of Hillary Clinton at the time her husband was head of state as an example of "Marie Antoinette Syndrome" in action: both these women were charged with "corrupting the body politic" by using their sexual influence to interfere in political spaces built by and for men.[2] New theories on gender, sex, and power, along with Saint-Amand's "Marie Antoinette Syndrome," produce an argument for Marie Antoinette's life and death as the foundation of a new obsession with the sexuality of women in the political sphere. The public preoccupation with Marie Antoinette's physicality, sexual behavior, and sexual orientation that resulted in the partial fictionalization of her legacy continues to impact women in politics today.

Becoming Marie Antoinette: Becoming A Woman

Maria Antonia was born in 1755 to Emperor Francis I and Maria Theresa of Austria. At age eleven, she had already been proposed as the future wife of the future Louis XVI, and at fourteen, she was sent to France to become his wife and future queen.[3] Upon her arrival, the adolescent was forced to strip naked and change from her Austrian-made clothing into French clothing.[4] Her name was changed to Marie Antoinette, making her transition from her homeland to France official.[5] These physical changes represent the symbolic loss of Antoinette's agency and identity that she was not able to fully develop through adolescence.

The standards Antoinette was held to following the announcement that she would be the next queen of France changed along with her appearance and name. Since she was incredibly young, many close to Antoinette noted her natural aversion to ventures expected of a noble lady: her disinterest in literature, dance, and etiquette was reported by various teachers.[6] The new pressure to represent her new country greatly affected Antoinette: she became devoted to learning French customs; something she would struggle to master for the rest of her life.[7] She dedicated her days to building relationships with other nobles and spending extravagantly,

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1   Between the years 1789 and 1799, for the purposes of this paper.
2   Pierre Saint-Amand, "Terrorizing Marie Antoinette," *Critical Inquiry* 20, no. 3 (1994): 400.
3   Stefan Zweig, *Marie Antoinette: The Portrait of an Average Woman,* trans. Eden and Ceder Paul (New York: Harmony Books, 1984), 3-4.
4   Zweig, 13.
5   "Marie Antoinette," Palace of Versailles, February 17, 2023, https://en.chateauversailles.fr / discover/history/great-characters/marie-antoinette#a-queen-at-the-court.
6   Zweig, 5-6.
7   Palace of Versailles.

as expected. However, these efforts did not aid in mending her reputation but painted her as ignorant of her people's plight. Interaction with other noble French women in the public eye was also difficult for Antoinette, as a feud with Madame du Barry, a former prostitute and the last mistress of Louis XV, would set the stage for the public's overwhelming perception of her as shallow and disaffected.[8]

Progressions in understanding of the relationships between gender, sex, and society contextualize these conditions of Antoinette's life. In their book *Gender Trouble,* first published in 1990, American theorist Judith Butler introduces the argument that gender is a social construct performed on the basis of one's biological sex, as opposed to an immutable expression of one's sex, into the field of gender studies. Butler cites French philosopher Simone de Beauvoir's well-known statement that "one is not born a woman, but rather, becomes one," but adds that people assumed female at birth are "always under a cultural compulsion to become one."[9] Antoinette was not only trying to perform according to the conventions associated with nobility and French society but also the basic expectations of expression based on her sex.

Not everyone received Antoinette's efforts to "become a woman" negatively. Edmund Burke, an Anglo-Irish and anti-revolutionary statesman and philosopher, defended Antoinette in his 1790 book *Reflections on the Revolution in France* as a good woman and a good queen. He praises her "loyalty to rank and sex," her "proud submission," and her "dignified obedience," and laments that France will never have a queen like her again.[10] Royalists like Burke saw Antoinette's traditionally feminine appearance and behavior as necessary for a successful society.

Sexuality as Power

In the eyes of the public, one of Marie Antoinette's biggest failures was the seven-year delay in the consummation of her marriage to Louis XVI. This was of immense interest to her subjects because of the importance of her production of an heir to the French throne.[11] However, the public also relished rumors surrounding Antoinette's sexual orientation and behavior outside her marriage. Many became concerned that Antoinette was not devoted enough to the throne, citing the lack of consummation of her marriage along with her extravagant spending. Various explanations of this delay have been offered by various scholars, the main one being that the King suffered from phimosis, a condition described as an abnormally tight foreskin that makes sexual intercourse extremely painful. However, the many medical examinations ordered by Louis XVI's father did not show anything abnormal.[12] Other scholars cite the young couple's lack of technical knowledge of the marital act and Marie Antoinette's "coldness" towards her husband as the main factors contributing to the lack of consummation.[13] Regardless of the true reason for it, this delay had a profound effect on the public perception of the couple and resulted in speculation surrounding their dynamic. In his biography of Antoinette, twentieth-century writer Stefan Zweig asserts that Louis XVI's inability to assert his dominance in this way led him to fulfill Antoinette's material desires to placate her.[14] Antoinette's unfulfilled sexuality was seen as a source of power she held over her king, which was unacceptable.

The unfounded notion of Antoinette finding sexual satisfaction outside of her marriage

8   Zweig, 42-58.
9   Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, New York: Routledge, 1999): 12.
10   Edmund Burke, *"Burke's reflections on the Revolution in France, in a letter intended to have been sent to a gentleman in Paris,"* Gale Primary Sources, Accessed November 17, 2023, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CW0103795495/ECCO?u=viva_cnu&sid=bookmark-ECCO&xid=37a7f5f8&pg=1: 61.
11   Zweig, 23-24.
12   John Hardman, *The Life of Louis XVI* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016): 33-34.
13   Hardman, 34.
14   Zweig, 25-26.

became a primary tool in vicious campaigns against her. Beginning as early as 1779, when Antoinette was twenty-four, pornographic political pamphlets depicting her alleged affairs, particularly with the Princesse de Lamballe, a friend and confidant of Antoinette.[15] The assertion that the female head of state was a 'tribade'[16] was troubling because it threatened the natural order of society. If Antoinette did not conform to these heterosexual and monogamous standards for women, there were no bounds she would not cross, in the minds of those upset by these rumors.

In modern leadership theory, power is defined as the ability to influence a target.[17] As Butler notes in *Gender Trouble*, power is typically associated with masculinity, as women are designated as the psychologically and physically incomplete counterpart to men.[18] The desires for women that Antoinette was rumored to have associated her with masculinity, creating a threat to the conventions of the time. At the same time, Antoinette's femininity posed a threat to the body politic. Male political figures feared women entering the public realm and disrupting the ecosystems they had created. One reason behind this fear was the belief that women had the unique ability to dissimulate, or conceal their true feelings in public.

An eminent historian of the French Revolution, Lynn Hunt explains in her essay "The Many Bodies of Marie Antoinette," Rousseau, Montesquieu, and other thinkers who had a profound influence on revolutionary thought believed that women's exclusion from the public sphere maintained social stability and prevented the demasculinization of society.[19] Antoinette's robust performance of femininity may have been received as fake and an attempt at dissimulation, threatening the natural order of the body politic and society at large.

Despite being unable to hold effective authority, Antoinette was villainized for her association with her male counterpart, Louis XVI. Although she did not have any official power to affect her husband's decisions, her perceived sexual power over him made her a target for culpability. Revolutionary figures blamed her for the ways in which they felt the monarchy failed them. This, combined with accusations of deviant sexuality, made Antoinette a sinister character in the minds of French citizens and eventually, the Revolutionary Tribunal.

Trial and Execution by the Public

Antoinette was brought to trial before the Revolutionary Tribunal two days before she was executed. She was found guilty of conspiring with foreign powers, the depletion of the state treasury, and committing high treason by acting against the security of the French state.[20] Another accusation was one of sexual abuse of her son, which shocked the public because of its severity.[21] In the minds of those threatened by Antoinette based on the sexual power

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15   Lynn Hunt, "The Many Bodies of Marie-Antoinette: Political Pornography and the Problem of the Feminine in the French Revolution," The French Revolution: Recent Debates and New Controversies, (1997): 119, https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203004036.

16   Early modern term for a lesbian or bisexual woman. Terry Castle, "Marie Antoinette Obsession." Representations, no. 38 (1992): 1–38, https://doi.org/10.2307/2928682: 17.

17   Linda L. Neider and Chester A. Schriesheim, "Power: Overview," Encyclopedia of Leadership, Edited by George R. Goethals, Georgia J. Sorenson, and James MacGregor Burns, Vol. 3 (California: SAGE Reference, 2004), https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/ CX3452500304/ GVRL?u=viva_cnu&sid=bookmark-GVRL&xid=236b0589: 1248.

18   Butler, 14-17.

19   Hunt, 119.

20   "An Authentic Account of the Imprisonment, Trial, and Execution of Marie Antoinette, Late Queen of France; Who Was Beheaded at the Place de La Revolution, in Paris, October 16, 1793; In Pursuance of a Sentence Passed the Preceding Day by the Revolutionary Tribunal, Translated from the French of a Gentleman Present at the Trial and Execution," Gale Primary Sources, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CW0107764336/ECCO?u=viva_cnu&sid=bookmark-ECCO&xid=2204f306&pg=1: 7.

21   "An Authentic Account," 13-16, Hunt 118.

they ascribed to her, it was logical that she would exert her power on those around her, even her young child. If a woman's greatest power is her sexuality, she will use it in every area of her life to meet her goals. This power is extremely dangerous; therefore, Antoinette must be extinguished.

Although the methods with which people can smother the perceived power of women in politics are different today, female politicians experience similar contempt. In 2019, former California representative Katie Hill was forced to step down due to death threats leveraged by constituents and nude photos distributed by republican media after an alleged affair with a member of her legislative staff.[22] Hill was not executed in the literal sense, but the loss of her contributions to the political world because of speculation surrounding her private life is emblematic of the continuation of the same association of a woman's sexuality with power.

Postmortem Representations

Since Antoinette's death, perceptions of her character have varied greatly. The three most prominent depictions focus on her beauty, her role as a political actor during her rule, and her sexual orientation. The interaction between these facets of Antoinette's identity showcases the ways in which women in politics continue to be scrutinized.

Marie Antoinette, the Beauty

Some memorials of Antoinette call on her beauty to portray her positively. A poem written about Antoinette's time in prison and execution written by Ann Yearsley illustrates the emphasis on the late queen's femininity and appearance: one line reads "The beauteous Marie yields to woe."[23] Other language in the work focuses on Antoinette's weakness relative to the "Troubles" working against her. While revolutionaries feared Antoinette's perceived sexual power as a threat and villainized her, those who favored the monarchy believed that Antoinette's beauty absolved her of her ability to affect the political landscape. Although those who espoused this defense had the intent of protecting Antoinette against criticism, it employs sex-based stereotypes in attempting to explain her innocence.

Marie Antoinette, the Politician

Often overshadowed by the sensationalism of palace affairs and lifestyle, Marie Antoinette exhibited an interest and intellect in French and international politics. Using her close relationship with her husband to her advantage in the last few years of her life, Antoinette was largely responsible for France's decision to intervene in the American Revolutionary War,[24] and securing Russian and Austrian support for France during this time.[25] Her active role in state affairs, particularly during the Revolution, gave way to extreme criticism of Antoinette as a symbol of the French nation and its actions. The emphasis on Antoinette's beauty, a natural consequence of her womanhood, intensified her position as a character, rather than a multidimensional head of state. Many only know Antoinette for her infamous utterance, "Let them eat cake" in response to being told that the surrounding peasants had no bread. Not only did this citation originally appear in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions* as part of the story

22   Rebecca Klar, "Katie Hill says right-wing attacks were 'dehumanizing': 'You're not seen as a person anymore,'" The Hill online, November 24, 2019, https://thehill.com/homenews/house/471842-katie-hill-says-right-wing-attacks-were-dehumanizing-youre-not-seen-as-a/.

23   Ann Yearsley, "An Elegy on Marie Antoinette, of Austria, Ci-Devant Queen of France: With a Poem on the Last Interview between the King of Poland and Loraski." Gale Primary Sources, Accessed November 2, 2023, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CW0116587975/ECCO?u=viva_cnu&sid=bookmark-ECCO&xid=82575cc3&pg=1: 4.

24   Larkin, T. Lawrence, "A 'Gift' Strategically Solicited and Magnanimously Conferred: The American Congress, the French Monarchy, and the State Portraits of Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette." *Winterthur Portfolio*, 44, no. 1 (2010): 31–76, https://doi.org/10.1086/651087.

25   Antonia Fraser, *Marie Antoinette: The Journey* (New York: Doubleday, 2001): 152.

of an unnamed "great princess," but Rousseau had finished writing the book in 1767, before Marie Antoinette had ever set foot in France.[26] The willingness of the public to attribute this phrase to Antoinette was in part due to their association of her beauty with low intelligence and awareness of the state of the nation.

A dichotomy between beauty and intellect still exists for women in the public and political spheres and limits their ability to participate as full members in these areas. If a woman is thought to be beautiful, her contribution to intelligent conversation is questioned. Whether used in defense of her as Yearsley attempted, or used to discredit her, the focus on a woman's physical appearance in reference to her decisions undermines her ability to be seen as a valuable participant in her community.

Marie Antoinette, the Queer Icon

More recent work involving Antoinette positions her in the context of the rumors surrounding her sexual orientation in a positive light. In her 1992 article "Marie Antoinette Obsession," lesbian literary scholar Terry Castle confidently describes Antoinette as a "homosexual" and a "lesbian."[27] Castle describes how Antoinette was regenerated and used as a model throughout the development of lesbian pulp fiction as a genre, and that she continues to serve as an icon for sapphic women because of her rumored affair with the Princesse de Lamballe. With a new understanding of gender and sexuality that is more accepting of same-gender attraction, the myth surrounding Antoinette is now seen in a positive light by many, especially those in the LGBTQ+ community seeking historical figures with which to identify. The addition of Judith Butler's philosophy on gender as a performance allows authors to creatively explore Antoinette's life and expand upon what is known about her in their works.

The appropriation of Antoinette's legacy in the LGBTQ+ community explored by Castle is another example of a way in which positive attributions of the queen's sensuality may be problematic in their assumptions of her private life. Apart from the demonization of Antoinette's influence, the situation created by the new acceptance of the unsubstantiated notion that she had same-sex relationships by LGBTQ+ writers today fits seamlessly into Saint-Amand's framework. This group celebrates Antoinette for her sexuality alone, and her physical body is used as a vehicle for the progression of their writing.

Women in Politics Today

Although representations of Antoinette's supposed deviant sexuality have been used in posterity in an effort to empower her and other women, bad-faith usage of sexual stereotyping has also lasted up until this point. Women's sexuality and relationships, whether real or alleged, are still used to discredit them in politics and public service. During her time as first lady of France, Carla Bruni was the subject of numerous rumors of infidelity. Although her husband, Nicolas Sarkozy, was also speculated to have extramarital relationships, social media users focused on Bruni's wrongdoing.[28] French media is adamant about their disinterest in the private lives of those holding political office, but the public does not hold back their conjecture.[29]

Instances of this reborn culture are not limited to France. For example, during the recent elections for Virginia's General Assembly, it was revealed that Susanna Gibson, a

26   Susan S. Lanser, "Eating Cake: The (Ab)uses of Marie-Antoinette," *Marie-Antoinette: Writings on the Body of a Queen* (New York: Routledge, 2003): 289.

27   Castle, 15-38.

28   "Are French President and Ex-Supermodel Wife Involved in Extramarital Affairs?," ABC online, March 10, 2010, . https://abcnews.go.com/Entertainment/nicolas-sarkozy-carla-bruni-rumored-affairs/story?id=10062204.

29   Tara John, Martin Goillandeau and Pierre Bairin, "This isn't America say French politicians, after candidate quits in sex scandal," *CNN* online, February 14, 2020, https://www.cnn.com/2020/02/14/europe/paris-mayor-benjamin-griveaux-intl/index.html.

democratic candidate for the House of Delegates, had engaged in sex acts with her husband on a pornographic website. In response, the Republican party of Virginia sent mailers with screenshots of Gibson's videos. There is an uncanny similarity between this effort and the pornographic pamphlets described by Hunt. Although Gibson was leading her Republican opponent in pre-election polls, she lost the election, with many voters citing the dissemination of these mailers as the reason for their decision to vote for Gibson's opponent.[30] Monica Gary, another politician who ran for a seat in the House, was disparaged by her opponents for being a former exotic dancer.[31] The success of these women was undermined by speculation and shame surrounding their sexual behavior, like Antoinette.

The beauty of female political figures is also still a factor in the public's favorability towards them. A September 2023 article by conservative outlet Rare Politics lists the top five "hottest women in American politics."[32] The author cites the women's facial structures, figures, and ways of speaking in his explanation for each ranking. A Google search for "prettiest female politicians" yields many other comparable articles encompassing women from varied countries. The use of physicality to praise women in politics survived along with the use of their sensuality to shame them.

Conclusion

Two-hundred and thirty years after her execution by guillotine, Marie Antoinette remains a controversial figure as scholarship continues to evolve. She is now given the privilege of a contextual understanding of the systems and ideologies that ruled her life, allowing for analysis of her behavior and the behavior of the people around her. The utilization of sexuality against women with political power that began with the publicized disinformation campaigns against Antoinette has adapted to affect women in politics today. Society at large remains preoccupied with the private lives of women who seek to improve the world through public service and uses rumors to discredit their ability to do so.

Simultaneously, the physical attractiveness of women is still exploited today in an attempt to elevate them. In their writing, Burke, Yearsley, and Smith attribute virtue to controversial female political figures based on their beauty, upholding the idea that women are worthy of respect or forgiveness based on how they look.

Marie Antoinette never became woman enough to be accepted by the French public, and women in the public sphere today still work against the constraints that outlived her. She could not live up to the impossible expectations of her subjects, whose dissatisfaction ultimately resulted in her death. The points of view explored in this article encapsulate the wide range of sentiments women involved in Western politics still must navigate today. Sexist stereotyping is only one symptom of the overarching issue: the public's tendency to accept the representation of a person that confirms their preexisting bias.

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30   "Republican leads over Democrat whose House of Delegates race became embroiled in sex Scandal," *Associated Press* online, November 8, 2023, https://apnews.com/article/susanna-gibson-david-owen-virginia-election-2023-5db9aec5a490a3a4cc9a695c0e1b7a17.

31   Leah Vredenbregt, "Meet the former dancer-turned-politician running for Virginia Senate," ABC online, May 10, 2023, https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/meet-former-dancer-turned-politician-running-virginia-senate/story?id=97720442.

32   Troy Smith, "Is Jen Psaki The Hottest Woman In American Politics? Our Top 5 Rankings," *Rare* online, September 2023, https://rare.us/rare-politics/ranking-the-5-hottest-women-in-american-politics/.

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How Medicine and Culture Impact Our Views of Autism Spectrum Disorder

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Abstract

When autism was first defined in the 20th century, there was a lot of misunderstanding and shame surrounding the disorder and those who were afflicted by it. Despite increased understanding of the disorder today, medicine and society still hold many stereotypes of what exactly autism "looks like," and how it should be addressed. This paper discusses the deeply intertwined relationship between society's view of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) as it relates to the quality of care, understanding, and support provided by the medical field. Through analysis of the current diagnostic procedures, biases, and reflection on the future of support for Autistic adults, this paper seeks to examine the connection between culture and medicine in order to gain a deeper understanding of how both can move towards acceptance of Autistic individuals instead of apprehension.

Introduction

Since autism was first described in 1943 by psychologist Leo Kanner (AZA United, 2023), it has been largely misunderstood within the medical field and by society. Kanner noted that Autistic children, "have come into the world with an innate inability to form the usual, biologically provided contact with people" (Harris, 2018). This statement would be used by the public in order to justify the mistreatment of Autistic people for decades to come. During the 20th century doctors most commonly approached autism as a disease that needed to be cured—which was reflected in the treatment of Autistic individuals by the medical field. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, those labeled with the disorder were frequently institutionalized at first glance, and were not given proper long term care or support. If an Autistic patient was ever released from an institution, it was usually after being confined there for years—and for some, even decades (Hollins, 2021). Many patients were lucky if they could independently find a job, housing, or even if their families accepted them back into their homes after so many years. This unfortunate reality has had lasting effects on growing rates of homelessness and disability-related poverty in Autistic individuals—with one source suggesting that rates of autism among the homeless are 3000% to 6000% higher than the general population (Jones, 2016). This mistreatment fueled misunderstanding and stigmatization among the public, creating an environment where autism was treated as a taboo topic that was not frequently discussed, and even connected with shame for many families of Autistic individuals (Ghuman, 2021). In the late 20th century, misconceptions about what an Autistic person "looks like" contributed to a low rate of diagnosis nationally, with a prevalence believed to be two to four children out of 10,000 (National Academies Press, 2015). The "look" of autism at this time was believed to be white, male, children who were primarily non-speaking and labeled as "low functioning" by medical professionals (Mandell et. al., 2009). As medicine progressed, autism received its own diagnostic criteria independent of other behavioral disorders in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Third Edition (DSM-III) in the year 1980 (Zeldovich, 2018). Though it is clear that the 20th century brought about a great deal of information regarding autism as a disorder, the treatment of Autistic *people* had not followed suit. Today, many misconceptions about the disorder remain as they did when the word "autism" was first recorded more than 80 years ago. Specifically, the treatment of Autistic people by the healthcare system—although improving—largely continues to be fueled by misinformation and mistreatment. Additionally, long standing *cultural* beliefs regarding autism (i.e. shame surrounding the disorder) continue to be heavily intertwined with the medical field—influencing how people perceive and treat those with the disorder, and how autism is addressed by healthcare professionals. This long-standing dynamic between culture and medicine has led to direct, negative impacts on the treatment of Autistic people in areas such as diagnosis, treatment, and (lack of) societal support.

Barriers to Diagnosis

A fundamental aspect of gaining support for Autistic individuals is having a formal diagnosis. Having a clinical diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) allows primary care practitioners (PCPs) to initiate individualized care and interventions (such as therapeutic, family, or educational support systems) that are key in the long-term success and management of the disorder (Malik-Soni, 2022). Despite this well documented fact, both medicine and society have had very rigid ideas about what exactly an Autistic person looks like—leading to delayed or completely absent diagnoses for individuals who do not fit the "look" of autism. Sex is a major factor that influences the rate at which people are diagnosed, and the subsequent level of support that they receive following diagnosis. It is estimated that for every four males diagnosed with autism, one female is diagnosed (Calleja, 2019). This disparity is not due to the common assumption that autism simply occurs more frequently in men—instead, it

is due to the flawed diagnostic process as well as the differences in how autism presents in women compared to men. Females with ASD typically display camouflaging behaviors–that is, behaviors done in order to assimilate with neurotypical people–at higher rates than men (Ratto, 2018). Camouflaging behaviors often include: forced eye contact, facial expressions, suppression of "stimming" (self-stimulatory behavior), and other cues that many Autistic people find to be unnatural in social situations. The prevalence of camouflaging in Autistic women is a direct cause of the disparities seen regarding age of diagnosis for males and females. I myself was diagnosed with ASD at the age of 17–despite showing clear signs of the disorder for my entire life. I attribute my late age of diagnosis to the fact that I am a woman who can do things that many people (including healthcare professionals) believe Autistic people are incapable of, such as: making eye contact, public speaking, and being a high academic achiever for my entire life. After I received a formal diagnosis of ASD, my doctors believed that I required no further assistance since I had lived with the disorder for so long, completely unsupported, but still managed to get good grades, maintain friendships, and lead a traditionally productive life. My reality is all too common for Autistic women due to the aforementioned stereotypes and flaws that exist within society regarding how autism presents.

In addition to sex disparities, factors such as race and socioeconomic status are variables that have been shown to delay diagnostic rates of autism spectrum disorder. In one study, it was found that white children were 19% more likely to receive a diagnosis of autism than Black children, and 65% more likely to receive a diagnosis than Latinx children (Aylward et. al., 2021). Additionally, one of the largest studies to date on racial inequalities within the diagnostic process found that on average, Black children do not get diagnosed with ASD until three years after their family initially voiced concerns to their pediatrician (Constantino et. al., 2020). Due to racism, biases, and mistreatment of Black patients by the medical field, many parents are unlikely to even approach their child's physician in the first place with concerns– making delayed diagnosis even more severe for Black children (Wilkens, 2024). These disparities have been consistent across studies conducted up to two decades ago–suggesting that this systemic issue has not been adequately addressed (Pham et. al., 2022; Aylward et. al., 2021; Furfaro, 2021). In fact, it can be argued that the global and cultural imbalance of our knowledge on how autism presents, expresses, and is diagnosed has resulted in a diagnostic process and support system that is culturally and contextually biased (de Leeuw, 2020).

In rural populations, shortages of specialists who are able to diagnose and treat autism are common–contributing to a delay in diagnosis for people outside of metropolitan areas, mainly impacting impoverished and lower class populations (Aylward et. al., 2021). Families that do not have access to this specialized care are additionally unlikely to seek outside assistance due to substantial costs, time agreements, and interruptions to work or school (Malik-Soni, 2022). If one is able to overcome these barriers, the subsequent financial strain that diagnostic testing induces is often unattainable for many families. On average, children from low socioeconomic status households are less likely to receive a diagnosis, and experience later diagnoses more frequently than higher socioeconomic status families due to the substantial price of autism evaluations (Spartz, 2021). As of 2023, one therapist explains that a simple diagnostic assessment conducted by a psychologist may cost between $1,500 and $3,000, while more thorough diagnostic procedures (such as speech and language pathology) can add an additional $500 to $1000 to the bill (Zauderer, 2023). Shockingly, this expense is not covered by most insurance plans held by families with lower socioeconomic status–making it nearly impossible for impoverished families to afford access to much needed accommodations and support for their loved ones (Malik-Soni, 2022).

Intersectionality

The idea of intersectionality largely exemplifies the reality for many Autistic people and parents of Autistic children who are not male, white, wealthy, or otherwise belong to identities that are underrepresented and treated poorly by the healthcare system. Formally, intersectionality is defined as, "a metaphor for understanding the ways that multiple forms of inequality or disadvantage sometimes compound themselves and create obstacles that often are not understood among conventional ways of thinking" (Crenshaw, 1989). If someone belongs to multiple different minority groups, a diagnosis of autism becomes more and more unattainable. Although there have been great strides in the diagnostic processes for autism, much of the criteria in place to this day remains focused on impairments commonly observed in cis-gender, white, male patients—usually belonging to middle/high class families. For example, one study found that poor, African children with autism did not display many of the common stimming behaviors often observed in financially stable white children—such as hand flapping, or rocking back and forth (de Leeuw, 2020). In the DSM-IV (the most recent version of this diagnostic manual)—stimming is considered to be a behavior that *must* be displayed by a person seeking an autism diagnosis (CDC, 2022). Most practitioners recognize the aforementioned behaviors as stimming, but may not recognize behaviors exhibited by people of other cultures. Another major cultural difference that has been shown to delay diagnosis is eye contact. In some Asian, African, and Latinx cultures, looking your superior in the eye is viewed as shameful—meaning that decreased eye contact in these settings is more likely to be dismissed by parents and instead be seen as a form of obedience in young children (de Leeuw, 2020). Because the DSM-IV does not list less common avenues of stimming as well as differing presentations of autism—or provide deeper cultural context to varying behaviors—delay in diagnosis is now increasingly seen in those who do not display the few stereotyped behaviors that many practitioners are familiar with. This is just one example of how current diagnostic criteria does not provide enough insight on how autism presents differently depending on identity—decreasing the rate at which minorities are diagnosed with autism as well as delaying access to necessary interventions for these populations. The diagnostic process for myself—while difficult—was made easier due to the fact that I am white, speak English, belong to the middle class, and am able to advocate for myself. My diagnosis of ASD was delayed for more than a decade—a time frame that may be even longer for people of different racial/ethnic backgrounds, education levels, or already living with an additional mental or physical disability.

The Importance of Support For Autistic Adults

Another commonly held belief among the public as well as within clinical research is that autism is a childhood disorder that one will grow out of, or eventually no longer identify with. Although it is common for Autistic individuals to learn coping skills as they age, this does not change the fact that autism is a disorder that results in life-long effects on the brain and behavior (Shen & Piven, 2017). When learning how to manage symptoms and discomfort throughout childhood, Autistic people may seem "less Autistic" as they age, but the reality is that Autistic adults still require a great deal of support and have not simply grown out of the condition. Oftentimes, people have a hard time understanding this concept—frequently suggesting that a cure for autism must be found in order to rid individuals of the condition by the time they reach adulthood. Instead of searching for a cure, however, many Autistic adults suggest that access to appropriate support for *adults* with autism would greatly improve their overall quality of life—without altering behaviors in order to align with the standards of the general public (Botha, 2022). One promising intervention that has been gaining more recognition is Community-Based Intervention Programs, which aid Autistic adults in vocational, social, and leisure tasks (Bishop-Fitzpatrick et. al., 2014). Although these programs and other up and coming interventions show promise in aiding Autistic adults, it is also noted

that they have yet to be implemented on a larger scale across the country and are therefore not accessible to all adults seeking support. While research on potential interventions for Autistic adults is emerging very slowly, it is clear that the needs of this population are far from being met (Malik-Soni, 2022). Currently, there is little to no funding or incentive to publish research focused specifically on adults with ASD–further delaying progression towards increased resources (Malik-Soni, 2022; Korp, 2021; Camm-Crosbie et. al., 2018). In fact, current research suggests that over a quarter of Autistic adults do not have access to enough services or support for themselves (Korp, 2021). Some of the most common issues faced by Autistic adults include: difficulty forming meaningful relationships, burn out, problems acquiring and keeping a job, as well as attending higher education. One statistic claims that approximately half of students with autism who attend college leave without completing their intended degree due to lack of support (Morris, 2019). Additionally, autistic burnout is a syndrome experienced by some Autistic individuals resulting from chronic life stress and lack of general support–and is generally classified by pervasive, long term loss of function, reduced tolerance to stimulus, and exhaustion (Raymaker, 2022). Burnout is just one example of a debilitating and damaging result of lack of support for Autistic adults. Through current research it is suggested that the simple integration of transitional services for Autistic adults has the potential to produce more satisfaction, joy, and a sense of belonging among Autistic adults who feel more and more isolated as they continue to age–therefore effectively reducing rates of burnout and stress among this population (Morris 2019).

Although it is true that the way in which society as well as medicine perceive Autistic people has shifted since the disorder was first described in the 20th century, there is still major work that needs to be done in order to achieve true acceptance of Autism Spectrum Disorder. Through analysis of both the past and current climate of autism acceptance, it is clear that there are still a myriad of issues that Autistic people experience both on a day-to-day basis and also long-term. Among these issues, perhaps the most significant is the current diagnostic processes in place for ASD, which have been shown to exclude people belonging to marginalized identities–often delaying the age of diagnosis for women, racial minorities, and people belonging to lower socioeconomic levels–to name a few. Receiving a diagnosis of autism also does not guarantee support from the healthcare system or from society in most cases. Support for Autistic adults is especially lacking–leading to higher rates of burnout and mental duress compared to non-Autistic populations (Raymaker, 2020).

Community and Conclusions

In the face of this adversity, communities for Autistic individuals have boomed within the last decade–creating much needed spaces for Autistic people to be understood, welcomed, and cherished. Organizations like the Autistic Self Advocacy Network (ASAN) provide support groups, educational resources, and emphasize justice for Autistic individuals. Groups such as ASAN not only fight for Autistic people, but are also composed primarily of Autistic people from very diverse backgrounds. The saying "Nothing About Us Without Us" is featured proudly on ASAN's website–publicly advocating for the inclusion of Autistic individuals in decisionary actions that involve the future of ASD. In addition to groups such as ASAN, many individuals have come forward with their own stories about being Autistic while also belonging to other marginalized groups. The large increase in the amount of safe spaces created for the autism community provides a great sense of hope for future generations of Autistic individuals–a future where autism is not only better understood, but also celebrated rather than feared.

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About the Author

Amber Baldwin is a member of the CNU class of 2026 majoring in Neuroscience and minoring in Spanish. Through her time at CNU, she has held the position of historian and is currently serving as the vice president of CNU's Disabled Student Union, where she hopes to increase community for disabled students on campus. Undergraduate research has been a fundamental part of her CNU experience, having worked as a Research Apprentice through ORCA for three semesters, and most recently joining the ORCA office as an Ambassador for the College of Natural and Behavioral sciences. She is also a brother of Alpha Chi Sigma—the professional chemistry fraternity on campus. Outside of academics, she is an adamant animal lover and enjoys going on outdoor adventures with friends.

Alexander's Inheritance of the Achaemenid Throne
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Abstract

This paper explores how Alexander the Great of Macedonia justified his takeover of the Persian Empire through propaganda found in the accounts of the ancient Alexander historians and how this propaganda aligned Alexander's image with Achaemenid royal ideology. To delve into this topic, it was necessary to pay close attention to the ancient Alexander sources themselves, comparing one another for inconsistencies, while looking for similarities in how the ancient authors presented Alexander with the Bisitun Inscription's portrayal of Darius I. During his campaigns, Alexander won two major battles against his nemesis, the then-king of the Persian Empire Darius III, and in doing so Alexander bolstered his own reputation as a warrior-king while undermining Darius III's legitimacy to the throne. Alexander also took steps to erase Darius's presence from historical records with the help of Achaemenid collaborators, leaving the substance of Darius's character mentioned in historical accounts to be entirely based upon defamatory propaganda. To secure his reign, Alexander arranged marriages between himself, his Macedonian nobles, and numerous Persian brides to strengthen his support from the Persian collaborators. Alexander was not simply ambitious on the battlefield, he wanted to make an entire empire accept him as their king through Alexander's attempts to appeal to Achaemenid culture, showing a political savvy that was overshadowed by Alexander's heroism in the ancient sources.

Introduction

In the ancient world, there were few figures who had as much of an impact as Alexander the Great of Macedonia. Alexander continued the legacy of his father, Philip II, who had conquered the Greeks, and after Philip's death, Alexander continued his grand plan of invading the Achaemenid Persian Empire and went on to conquer it, taking over the whole of the known world, a deed which would inspire future generals such as Julius Caesar of the Roman Republic. However, despite Alexander's reputation for establishing a worldwide empire, this paper seeks to argue that the Achaemenid Empire survived under Alexander's reign as he made use of its ideologies and systems to maintain control over his new territory.

Ancient historians' accounts of Alexander's life and career, who I will refer to as the Alexander historians, such as Arrian, Quintus Curtius Rufus, Diodorus Siculus, and Plutarch, placed heavy emphasis on Alexander's charisma and personal bravery in battle as being the key reasons for his victory against the Persian Empire and its then-king Darius III. My focus in this paper is to shift away from Alexander's battle tactics and courage and more towards how he was able to hold onto the Persian territory, which had formed the largest empire in the Mediterranean world at the time, unmatched in scale by any other nation or city-state before it. To hold onto his Achaemenid territories, Alexander necessarily needed to make some changes for his occupying forces to stay, but for the most part Alexander left the systems and administration that governed the Persian territories for over two centuries intact. Additionally, to justify his reign, Alexander needed to establish a connection to Achaemenid ideologies of rulership to create a sense of legitimacy and lower the chances of revolt, winning over the remaining Persian nobility who now recognized him as their king. To help with this Alexander undermined the reputation of his predecessor, Darius, to explain his own victory and Darius's loss, to offer a narrative of a legitimate succession as Darius was swept away into historical obscurity.

In this paper, I endeavor to strip away the inherent biases of Greek superiority over the Persians prevalent in the Alexander historians' accounts, as well as challenging prevailing historical narratives of the Persian Empire ending with Alexander's conquest. The goal of this paper is to look past Alexander's charisma to see how he needed to take advantage of the existing Achaemenid systems and ideologies to stabilize his potentially shaky rule, looking at alternative elements such as Alexander's ability to negotiate and cater to his audience. This topic has importance in examining how men in power such as Alexander established their legitimacy to rule by inheriting not only past systems, but ideologies as well, showing how empires succeed and inherit many of their predecessors' customs throughout history.

Summary of Ancient Sources

Almost all the ancient sources available to modern historians that describe Alexander's campaigns against the Achaemenid Empire came predominantly from Greek or Roman sources who wrote several centuries after Alexander's time. No contemporary accounts of Alexander's campaign that came from his court historians such as Callisthenes or Alexander's subordinates like Ptolemy the son of Lagos exist today, though the Alexander historians did refer to them heavily.[1] Even so, a bias that all the Alexander historians shared was that their accounts often tended to be admiring of Alexander and his military prowess and personality, having lived under the umbrella of an empire full of men such as Julius Caesar and Pompey the Great who had admired the Macedonian general-king.[2] Even so, in several cases the historians disapproved of Alexander's behavior, such as his execution of Callisthenes, who was Greek like many of them, though Curtius Rufus tended to write more negatively in his portrayal of

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1   Paul Cartledge, introduction to *The Landmark Arrian: The Campaigns of Alexander*, ed. James Romm and Robert B. Strassler (New York: Pantheon Books, 2010), xv-xvii.

2   Cartledge, introduction to *The Landmark Arrian*, xiii-xv.

Alexander than the other historians.[3]

The Alexander historians I will cover are Arrian, Curtius Rufus, Plutarch, and Diodorus. To clarify on the times when these authors were alive, Arrian lived from around 86 CE to 160 CE, Curtius Rufus died in 53 CE, Plutarch lived from about 45 CE to 125 CE, and Diodorus was alive during the first century BCE. Justin, who wrote an epitome or summary of what other ancient sources have said about Alexander, will not be covered since his account did not go into as much detail as the others.[4] Arrian's account was a biography of Alexander, a history of Alexander's career from his rise to power succeeding his father to his death in Babylon.[5] As praetorial legate of Cappadocia during Hadrian's reign, Arrian was well-versed in military campaigns, and his experience lent him the ability to write extensively about Alexander's command structure and how he had administered his forces, in addition to giving a generally more balanced portrayal of Alexander's character.[6] These were factors which lead to historians regarding Arrian's history as one of the more reliable accounts of Alexander's campaigns.[7] Next, Curtius Rufus, a writer that many historians know very little about other than that he might be the same Curtius Rufus who was a praetor under Tiberius and later a proconsul under Nero.[8] Curtius Rufus was the most skewed of the ancient historians in portraying Alexander, using his history to show Alexander's decline into degeneracy as Alexander assimilated into Persian customs, since Curtius Rufus sought to compare Alexander with the Roman emperor Caligula.[9] Even so, Curtius Rufus went into much detail on Alexander's relationships with his subordinates and his appointments of Persians to key positions in his court, showing Alexander's interactions with high-ranking Persians, information that is key to uncovering how far Alexander went to appeal to his new subjects.[10] Despite Curtius Rufus's bias, he provided a unique view on how Alexander had been drawn toward Persian culture. Compared with the other historians, the Greek historian Plutarch focused most heavily on Alexander's political or public actions in his biography of the conqueror.[11] Thus, it will be useful in understanding the image of himself that Alexander presented to the Persians. The last of the Alexander historians to be covered, Diodorus, wrote about Alexander's career and conquest of the Persian Empire

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3   Waldemar Heckel, introduction to *Quintus Curtius Rufus: The History of Alexander*, tr. John Yardley (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), 1-5; Ernst Badian, "Conspiracies," in *Alexander the Great in Fact and Fiction*, ed. A.B. Bosworth and E.J. Baynham (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 71-73.

4   Cartledge, introduction to *The Landmark Arrian*, xiii-xiv; Arrian, *Anabasis Alexandrou*, in *The Landmark Arrian: The Campaigns of Alexander*, ed. James Romm and Robert B. Strassler (New York: Pantheon Books, 2010); Diodorus Siculus, *The Library of History: Book 17*, in *Library of History, Volume VIII: Books 16.66-17*, tr. C. Bradford Welles, Loeb Classical Library 422 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), https://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/ Texts/Diodorus_Siculus/home.html; Quintus Curtius Rufus, *The History of Alexander*, in *Quintus Curtius Rufus: The History of Alexander*, tr. John Yardley (New York: Penguin Books, 2004); Plutarch, *Life of Alexander*, in *Lives, Volume VII: Demosthenes and Cicero. Alexander and Caesar*, tr. Bernadotte Perrin, Loeb Classical Library 99 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1919), https://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Plutarch/Lives/Alexander*/home.html; Cartledge, introduction to *The Landmark Arrian*, xviii.

5   Cartledge, introduction to *The Landmark Arrian*, xiii-xiv.

6   Philip A. Stadter, *Arrian of Nicomedia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 16-24; Ernst Badian, 2003, "Arrianus," *Brill's New Pauly*.

7   Heckel, introduction to *Quintus Curtius Rufus*, 16.

8   Werner Eck, 2003, "Q.C. Rufus," *Brill's New Pauly*.

9   Heckel, introduction to *Quintus Curtius Rufus*, 1-5.

10   Ibid.

11   Cartledge, introduction to *The Landmark Arrian*, xix.

in his universal history of the world.[12] Diodorus paid special attention to the battles that Alexander fought during his campaign, especially the major victories and their implications at confrontations such as the Battles of Issus and Gaugamela.[13]

Despite this prevalence of Greek and Roman sources, there exist no known Persian records on Alexander's campaigns to balance out the Greek biases of superiority, no accounts from the losing side of the battle that could contradict Alexander's victor's narrative. The closest thing was a Babylonian tablet of an astronomical diary depicting the weather and omens before the Battle of Gaugamela, one of Alexander's major offensives, as well as the results of the battle, but this was written long after the battle itself in October of 331 BCE, after Alexander had taken the city of Babylon later that autumn.[14] The tablet was written between Alexander's takeover of Babylon in late 331 BCE and 330 BCE.[15] Alexander and his forces would have been disposed to erase sources that contradicted the narrative that Alexander wanted to spread, likely resulting in pro-Alexander sources surviving and pro-Darius ones not. Alexander did not tolerate criticism or challenges to his authority, evidenced by his using the conspiracy of several pages as an excuse to have Callisthenes executed, since he became increasingly critical of Alexander and his decisions to adopt Persian customs.[16] Alexander did not hesitate to silence his critics. The most relevant Achaemenid sources were those that helped to display the Achaemenid royal ideologies to which Alexander wanted to connect himself, such as the Bisitun Inscription created by Darius I on the Bisitun mountain to describe his accession to the throne, as well as a Persian seal showing the Persian king victorious in a hunt.[17] Even so, all these sources together should give an idea of the message that Alexander wanted to spread. Many of the Alexander historians referred to Alexander's contemporaries who helped propagate Alexander's messages, so they will be useful in deciphering Alexander's propaganda even as Alexander's contemporaries are lost to historians today.

Persian and local sources of the Achaemenid Empire are much sparser than the Greek ones. Darius I's Bisitun Inscription was his seminal monument of propaganda inscribed over one of the most important routes in the Achaemenid Empire, telling the story of Darius's rise to power.[18] To give some context, Darius I was a king of the Persian Empire who ascended during the late 520s BCE and after him all the members of the Persian royal family would be known as the Achaemenids since Darius linked them to a common ancestor, Achaemenes.[19] The son of a provincial governor or satrap, Darius had killed the previous king in a bloody coup and Darius released propaganda to legitimize his ascension which happened under dubious

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12   C. Bradford Welles, introduction to *Library of History, Volume VIII: Books 16.66-17*, tr. C. Bradford Welles, Loeb Classical Library 422 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), 1-2, https://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Diodorus_Siculus/home.html.

13   Welles, introduction to *Library of History*, 16-19.

14   AD I, in "A Contemporary Account of the Battle of Gaugamela," Livius.org, last modified April 14, 2020, https://www.livius.org/sources/content/oriental-varia/a-contemporary-account-of-the-battle-of-gaugamela/; Robert Rollinger, "The Battle of Arbela in 331 BCE, Disloyal 'Orientals,' and the Alleged 'Panic' in the Persian Army," in *Cross-Cultural Studies in Near Eastern History and Literature*, ed. S. Svärd and R. Rollinger (Munster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2016), 213-215.

15   Rollinger, "The Battle of Arbela," 213-217.

16   Waldemar Heckel, "The Conquests of Alexander the Great," in *A Companion to the Classical Greek World*, ed. Konrad H. Kinzl (Malden; Oxford; Victoria: Blackwell, 2006), 575-576.

17   Darius I, "Bisitun Inscription," in *The Persian Empire: A Corpus of Sources*, ed. Amelie Kuhrt (London: Routledge, 2007), 7-15; Persepolis Fortification Seal 7, in *Seals on the Persepolis Tablets Vol. 1: Scenes of Heroic Encounter*, ed. Margaret Cool Root and Mark Garrison (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 2001), 68-69, https://isac.uchicago.edu/research/publications/oip/seals-persepolis-fortification-tablets-volume-i-images-heroic-encounter.

18   Eran Almagor, "The Political and the Divine in Achaemenid Royal Inscriptions," *Ancient Historiography on War and Empire* 67, (2017): 26-29.

19   Matt Waters, "Darius and the Achaemenid Line," *The Ancient History Bulletin* 10, no. 1 (1996): 11-16.

circumstances.[20] The inscription outlined Darius's military prowess and his incredible of feat of winning nineteen battles in a single year, showing the Persian king's invincibility, the model of the royal image that would be used by all Achaemenid kings after Darius, even Alexander himself as this paper would argue.[21] Darius relied upon shows of force to build up his image and all Achaemenid kings would be impelled to follow suit to prove their worthiness.[22] Darius's own son, Xerxes I, would try to use his Greek campaigns as a chance to not only live up to his father's image, but also to prove his legitimacy.[23] Another source showing Achaemenid ideology was Persepolis Fortification Seal 7 (PFS 7), a seal used by a prominent Persian official in charge of provisioning the king and his court with food supplies.[24] Several dozen seals have survived to form a large corpus, many of them bearing images of the king that show how he wanted to be perceived publicly, outlining Achaemenid ideology.[25] Given the closeness of the seal's official with the Achaemenid king and its excellent surviving detail, PFS 7 was an especially good example of art representing the king's divinity and his relationship with Ahuramazda, the Persian creator god. It also helped to outline the Achaemenid king's martial prowess, showing his victory in a hunt and thanking the divine Ahuramazda for his kill.[26]

Modern Historiography

Modern historians have written a variety of accounts and perspectives reflecting on Alexander the Great and his interactions with his Persian subjects. One such point of debate was the number of administrative systems that Alexander kept in place or changed during and after his conquest. Historians disagreed on how much importance Alexander placed upon the existing Persian structures, as some argued that Alexander was far more heavily influenced by Greek culture.[27] According to A.B. Bosworth in his monograph *Conquest and Empire*, Alexander had kept in place the civil and administrative systems of the satraps while leaving behind garrisons managed by his own Macedonian commanders, embracing a great trend of appointing Persians as satraps to acquire local support for his reign and recognize his legitimacy.[28] Pierre Briant's account of Alexander trying to force away Darius to the background, not granting him a tomb like previous Persian kings or arranging a public funeral ceremony, supported this claim as Alexander relied on securing his power through continuing the legitimacy found in the Achaemenid line and Briant even characterized Alexander as the "last of the Achaemenids."[29] However, many historians such as Ernst Badian could not reconcile

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20   Waters, "Darius and the Achaemenid Line," 12-17.

21   DB, 7-15.

22   Adriano V. Rossi, "Inscriptions of the Achaemenids," in *A Companion to the Achaemenid Persian Empire*, ed. Bruno Jacobs and Robert Rollinger (Hoboken: John Wiley and Sons, 2021), 74-83.

23   Hdt. 7.9-12. https://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Herodotus/home.html.

24   Margaret Cool Root and Mark Garrison, *Seals on the Persepolis Tablets Vol. 1: Scenes of Heroic Encounter* (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 2001), 68-69, https://isac.uchicago.edu/research/publications/oip/seals-persepolis-fortification-tablets-volume-i-images-heroic-encounter.

25   Cool Root and Garrison, *Seals on the Persepolis Tablets*, 1-3.

26   Ibid., 68-69.

27   A.B. Bosworth, *Conquest and Empire: The Reign of Alexander the Great* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 229-235; Pierre Briant, *Darius in the Shadow of Alexander*, tr. Jane Marie Todd (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), 34-40; Ernst Badian, "Alexander the Great between Two Thrones and Heaven," in *Collected Papers on Alexander the Great*, ed. Ernst Badian (New York: Routledge, 2012), 365-37; Michele Faraguna, "Alexander the Great and Asia Minor: Conquest and Strategies of Legitimation," in *Monarchical Representation and the Art of Government in the Empire of Alexander the Great*, ed. Kai Trampedach and Alexander Meeus (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2020), 258-261; Ian Worthington, *By the Spear: Philip II, Alexander the Great, and the Rise and Fall of the Macedonian Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 195-198.

28   Bosworth, *Conquest and Empire: The Reign of Alexander the Great*, 229-235.

29   Briant, *Darius in the Shadow of Alexander*, 34-40; Robin Lane Fox, "Alexander the Great: 'Last of the Achaemenids'?," in *Persian Responses*, ed. Christopher Tuplin (Wales: The Classical Press of Wales, 2007), 267.

some of Alexander's actions with continuing Achaemenid legitimacy, such as the burning of Persepolis, even if Alexander had previously honored the tomb of Cyrus the Great, founder of the Persian Empire, at Pasargadae, as Badian argued that Alexander cultivated his image as a Homeric hero to cater to the Greeks.[30] This would support Michele Faraguna's argument where Alexander had ceased taxation of the Greeks in Asia Minor and granted them autonomy, although she claimed a middle ground where Alexander still demanded their subordination.[31] Ian Worthington, in his monograph, provided a more measured view than Badian, supporting Bosworth's claims by arguing that as Alexander conquered the Persian Empire, he did not intend to dismantle the system.[32] However, Worthington added that Alexander would have needed to make changes since Alexander had inherited the existing problems that came with governing the Persian Empire.[33] It is obvious that many historians have claimed that Alexander did not perfectly adhere to previous Achaemenid policies.

Additionally, historians have often debated how much Alexander himself and his court were influenced by the Achaemenid royal court's customs. Some have argued that the Macedonian court had naturally adjusted itself to Persians customs while others saw this trend as Alexander challenging the power held by influential Macedonian families.[34] Waldemar Heckel traced Persian influences back to Alexander's father, Philip II, claiming that Persia inspired the design of Philip's court and kingdom through Macedonia's interactions with Persia as a client-state and Macedonia's lower degree of xenophobia as compared with the Greek city-states to the south.[35] Unlike Heckel, George Weber argued that adopting Persian customs served to take away power from influential Macedonian noble families who could have threatened Alexander's position.[36] Given the rumors that surrounded Alexander as having a role in his father's death, and Alexander's continued extension in his campaigns to dominate Asia, he needed a solid power base in his newly conquered territory, so Alexander built relations with prominent Persians, adopting many of their customs in the process.[37]

Even so, despite how Weber put it, Alexander's treatment of his Persian subjects has also been a point of contention among historians. Many historians have agreed that Alexander tended to focus more on the Persian elites than the common masses, wanting to instill himself as the new center of their empire.[38] Andrew Monson, in his article on Alexander's tributary empire, portrayed Alexander as being uncaring about the lives of his new subjects, as he took a pragmatic attitude towards ruling and administrating the satrapies.[39] Alexander did not care if the satraps he appointed, such as Cleomenes, exploited the people for their revenue so long as they were loyal to him, if Alexander possessed the favor of the elites, whether they were Greek, Macedonian, or Persian.[40] Yet Alexander did put forth loyalty as the highest priority for his

30   Badian, "Alexander the Great between Two Thrones," 365-375.
31   Faraguna, "Alexander the Great and Asia Minor," 258-261.
32   Worthington, *By the Spear: Philip II, Alexander the Great, and the Rise and Fall of the Macedonian Empire*, 195-198.
33   Ibid.
34   Waldemar Heckel, "Alexander and the Iranian Satraps in War and Peace," in *Brill's Companion to War in the Ancient Iranian Empires*, ed. J. Hyland and K. Rezakhani (Leiden: Brill-DeGruyter, forthcoming), 1-4; George Weber, "The Court of Alexander the Great as Social System," in *Alexander the Great: A New History*, ed. Waldemar Heckel and Lawrence A. Tritle (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 83-91.
35   Heckel, "Alexander and the Iranian Satraps," 1-4.
36   Weber, "The Court of Alexander the Great," 83-91.
37   Ibid., 86-91.
38   Andrew Monson, "Alexander's Tributary Empire," in *Monarchical Representation and the Art of Government in the Empire of Alexander the Great*, ed. Kai Trampedach and Alexander Meeus (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2020), 278-285; Heckel, "Alexander and the Iranian Satraps," 10-14.
39   Monson, "Alexander's Tributary Empire," 278-285.
40   Ibid., 280-285.

subordinates, according to Heckel, who showed cases of Alexander killing Macedonian officials and replacing them with Persian ones due to their disloyalty.[41]

All of these modern historians use the ancient Alexander historians' accounts as the background for the foundation of their arguments. My paper will also consider their perspectives, yet I will focus on what the sources do and do not show, relating it to how Alexander wanted to present himself, since those historians were using the accounts of Alexander's contemporaries as sources. Historians like Bosworth looked past the heroism present in those accounts, yet I want to focus more on the image that Alexander had been trying to mold for himself in the Persians' eyes and the victor's narrative that Alexander wrote. Given that many historians argued that Alexander had bended Achaemenid systems as he needed them, my paper will try to reconcile this with the idea of Alexander continuing the Achaemenid line, to show how Alexander mended his shortcomings as a foreign king taking over the previous system, by changing it as he needed to retain control.

This paper will approach the topic by scrutinizing the battles that Alexander fought against Darius III, the ways that Alexander defamed Darius's character and gained collaborators, and how Alexander built long-lasting connections between himself and the Macedonians with the Persian court. The first section will be dedicated to examining the effects of Alexander's first impressions upon the Persians, in the decisive battles which he waged against the Persian army at battles such as Issus and Gaugamela. Alexander's victories established his reputation and image in the eyes of the Persian elites and altered how many of them approached Alexander's advance. At the same time, Darius's image was undermined and many of his subordinates began to lose faith in his legitimacy and his ability to deal with Alexander. Alexander's victories helped to establish a stronger connection to the ideological appearance of an Achaemenid ruler beyond what Darius could possibly hope to achieve.

1. Alexander the Great's Victories against the Persian Empire

Though Alexander's presence at Darius's side during the latter's dying moments in the Alexander Romance was most likely fiction, we do know that these two nemeses had two significant confrontations against each other that shaped the fate of the Achaemenid Empire, the Battle of Issus and the Battle of Gaugamela.[42] These two confrontations were where the two kings could test their mettle against each other and prove the power of their respective empires in hopes of expanding or securing their holdings of territory. Alexander was victorious at each battle, forcing Darius to run away, tail between his legs, as history would remember him as lesser to Alexander in both virtue and command.[43] However, these battles possessed a greater significance than simply allowing Alexander to further advance into the kingdom that he would eventually call his own. They were opportunities for him to prove his own worthiness to succeed the Achaemenid throne, as Alexander would adhere to the principles of Achaemenid royal ideology as well as undermine Darius's qualifications.

To understand how Alexander appealed to the ideological senses of the Achaemenid royal family and the royal court, it is imperative to clearly outline the tenets and justifications of this ideology. We must look to the monuments built by the Persian kings of the past to dissect the message they hoped to spread as well as the impressions of power that they wanted to convey upon their subjects.[44] The most outstanding example of this is the Bisitun Inscription carved by Darius I.[45] Firstly, the Bisitun Inscription was commissioned by Darius as a means of legitimizing his power to his subjects soon after his accession.[46] The details of Darius's

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41   Heckel, "Alexander and the Iranian Satraps," 10-14.
42   Briant, *Darius in the Shadow of Alexander*, 394-396.
43   Ibid., 266-268.
44   Rossi, "Inscriptions of the Achaemenids," 75-77.
45   DB, 1-3.
46   Almagor, "The Political and the Divine in Achaemenid Royal Inscriptions," 27-31.

accession were obscured and muddied by his propaganda-loaded messaging, which was similar to Alexander's rise to power. Nevertheless, the difference was that Darius had come to power in a bloody coup, with his assassination of the king resulting in empire-wide rebellions incited by nine other kings who claimed to succeed the local royalty of the past, such as Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon.[47]

To justify his succession, Darius claimed to possess a personal connection to the creator Ahuramazda, an all-powerful god which Darius claimed had bestowed on him the right to become the Persian king of kings, as the previous king was an impostor who had ascended to the throne through the assistance of an evil entity called the Lie.[48] The Lie's influence threatened the empire's order and stability whereas the Persian king was supposed to be its guardian and destroy all the Lie's agents who had incited disorder. Through Ahuramazda's influence, the king's victory would be guaranteed whereas the Lie's agents would be doomed to destruction and obscurity.[49] To back up this claim, Darius listed his achievements in battle as he claimed victory against each of the nine rebel kings, their defeated forms chained up and submissive before Darius's regal figure paying respect to Ahuramazda, as was carved above the inscription.[50] Darius had really depended on his subordinates to command his armies to cover such a wide territory, but he claimed that their victories were really his since they would not have won if not for the blessing of Ahuramazda that Darius offered them.[51] If his subordinates had lost, then Darius could claim no fault for it since Darius could claim they were acting contrary to Ahuramazda's wishes. The point of this was to prove the king's military power and discourage further rebellions since if the king was believed to be invincible and backed by a god, then no one would ever try to revolt against him, nor would people aid anyone apparently foolish enough to try it.[52]

The military power of the king was a major theme in Achaemenid art. In PFS 7, the Achaemenid king, adorned with a long beard and striated Persian robes is holding up two monsters by their horns up to the sky in offering to the winged figure above him.[53] PFS 7 was found in the Persepolis Fortification Archive excavated from the fortification wall at the Persepolis ruins in Iran, once used by Persian officials handling the assignments of rations from the stockpiles of food meant to supply workers and travelers along the Persian roads.[54] This winged figure is often thought by scholars to represent Ahuramazda. Here the king is showing his domination of the natural world through subjugating the two monsters capable of ravaging his subjects and thanking the creator god for his ability to keep order since without Ahuramazda's blessing, the king has no ability to rule or keep the peace.[55] It should be said that if the king were to appear to lose, then it would seem as if the king had lost Ahuramazda's blessing and thus his right to the throne, which was what happened with Darius III at Issus and Gaugamela.[56]

In battle, all the Alexander historians claimed that Alexander acquitted himself as most courageous, and Curtius Rufus said that Alexander was just as much of a soldier as he was a commander.[57] Even as early as the Battle of Granicus, over a year before the Battle of Issus, Arrian and Plutarch had showed Alexander throwing himself into the thick of the fighting

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47   DB, 51-54.
48   Ibid., 14-16.
49   Ibid., 58-65.
50   Darius I, "Bisitun Relief," Cabinet.ox.ac.uk, https://www.cabinet.ox.ac.uk/behistun-relief-and-inscription-0.
51   DB, 52-53.
52   Ibid., 58-65.
53   Cool Root and Garrison, *Seals on the Persepolis Tablets*, 68-69.
54   Ibid.
55   Ibid.
56   Rollinger, "The Battle of Arbela," 235-237.
57   Curt. 3.11.7.

and risking his own life, as a Persian had pierced Alexander's shield with a javelin and another had struck his helmet, splitting it and grazing his hair.[58] All the historians' accounts give the impression that Alexander was eager to prove himself, even at the risk of his own life. In their accounts of Issus and Gaugamela, the Alexander historians all showed Alexander leading his cavalry, particularly his elite Companion riders, against the wings of Darius III's forces. Whenever Alexander caught sight of the Achaemenid king, he appeared not only eager to seize the opportunity for unmatched glory but confident that the Persian forces stood no chance against him, giving one the impression that they were just additional digits to Alexander's body count.[59] To always lead his Macedonian forces in charges like this would have been incredibly dangerous, and though Alexander would receive wounds, such as taking a sword's blow at the Battle of Issus, it stretches the imagination to believe Alexander always put himself so directly in harm's way since as the commander of his forces, Alexander's death could easily have spelled the end of the campaign. Due to the claims that Alexander took so many risks in battle, always coming out unscathed to the point where one could say that Alexander was closer to death when he was ill, it is evident that the myth of Alexander as a great hero became intermixed with history at the most basic level of recounting these battles. This was most likely due to Alexander's fixation with the Homeric heroes like Achilles, at whose gravestone he had sacrificed according to Plutarch.[60] Alexander's recorded actions during battle truly fit the mold of the Achaemenid warrior king.

Just as the Persian king was blessed by Ahuramazda, Alexander also appeared to have been blessed by the gods, according to the Alexander historians. The Persian king had not only relied on Ahuramazda for help, but all the other gods were also supposed to be subject to the creator god and offer the Persian king their assistance as well, and this could include a wide range of gods since the Persians were polytheistic and their empire had absorbed various religions and cultures.[61] The Persian king Cyrus had appealed to the Babylonians in the past by claiming their supreme god, Marduk, had given him his blessing to rule the world.[62] It would not be a stretch for Alexander to extend this pantheon to gods such as Zeus and Ammon, whom Plutarch and Curtius Rufus claimed that he had formed connections with them respectively, due to the assistance of the Egyptian priests.[63] Having the gods on his side would give Alexander the kind of invincibility that Darius I had claimed to possess in the Bisitun Inscription. Alexander put much weight in prophecies as before he left Greece, he visited Delphi and would not leave until he got a prophecy saying that he was invincible.[64] Nor, according to Curtius Rufus, would Alexander leave the shrine of Ammon until Alexander heard that he would remain undefeated until he joined the gods.[65] Omens were highly prevalent in the sources' recounting of the Issus and Gaugamela. According to Plutarch, before the Battle of Issus, Darius III received a prophetic dream where he saw Alexander and his cavalry on fire as well as Alexander wearing the garb of a Persian royal courier, like what Darius had worn before he became king.[66] Plutarch's interpretation of the dream was supposed to signify the brilliance of the deeds of Alexander and his army and Alexander's destiny to become the new Persian king, that Darius had received a warning that he could not understand regarding the inevitability of Alexander's victory.[67] After the Battle of Issus was over and done with, Arrian had said that Darius had

58   Arr. *Anab.* 1.15.6-8; Plut. *Alex.* 1.16.1-11.
59   Arr. *Anab.* 2.10.2-3; Curt. 3.11.7; Plut. *Alex.* 1.20.8-9; Diod. Sic. 17.33.5-34.4.
60   Plut. *Alex.* 1.15.8.
61   Pierre Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander: A History of the Persian Empire*, tr. Peter Daniels (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2002), 240-242.
62   Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 40-41.
63   Curt. 4.7.25-29; Plut. *Alex.* 2.27.1-8.
64   Plut. *Alex.* 1.14.6-7.
65   Curt. 4.7.25-29.
66   Plut. *Alex.* 1.18.5-8.
67   Ibid.

refused to accept the larger meaning behind the battle, saying that the result had been chosen by the gods, though Arrian was admittedly very biased against Darius.[68] Both these instances signified that Darius was ignorant of the gods' will, so it would be hard to think that Darius had a connection with them.

As was recorded in the astronomical diary, there was a lunar eclipse a few days before the Battle of Gaugamela, as was also attested by Arrian, Plutarch, and Curtius Rufus.[69] Arrian and Plutarch had claimed that Alexander's priest, Aristander, interpreted the eclipse as an omen predicting Alexander's victory over the Persians.[70] However, Curtius Rufus was more cynical in his retelling of the event since he had said that Alexander ordered his Egyptian priests to interpret this phenomenon and they said that it signified the destruction of both Macedonians and Persians.[71] Yet, Alexander twisted their interpretation, saying that the sun represented the Greeks and the moon the Persians and that the eclipse signified Macedonian victory over the Persians, dispelling the sense of dread that had befallen his soldiers.[72] This was the most explicit example of Alexander exploiting superstition for his benefit, which makes sense since this came from Curtius Rufus's critical perspective. Other examples of Alexander using religion for his benefit seemed more coincidental or almost fated to happen, such as when Plutarch said that Alexander misheard the priest of Ammon thinking he had been called the son of Zeus.[73] This event was likely to be less accidental than Plutarch made it seem, considering how well it lined up with Alexander's tastes, having himself be called the son of a god.[74] Lastly, Curtius Rufus and Plutarch claimed that another omen happened during the Battle of Gaugamela, though they did not seem to have placed much weight in it.[75] The omen was the eagle of Zeus appearing over Alexander's head during his charge against Darius and his bodyguards. Taken literally, Alexander would seem to have been blessed by the king of the gods during his charge against the Persians but given how convenient this would be for Alexander to receive this blessing during the most important battle of the campaign at this point, the two authors did not place much weight in it, which may explain why Arrian or Diodorus did not include this event at all in their accounts. In the Bisitun Inscription and PFS 7, Ahuramazda was depicted as a winged figure floating in the sky, and Zeus was known by the Greeks as the sky god, with his representative animal being the eagle, a bird.[76] It would not be a stretch for Alexander to connect Zeus with Ahuramazda given the similarity of their imagery and the Gaugamela omen could have served as the bestowed right to rule that Alexander needed to claim the throne. In the Alexander mosaic at Pompeii, the Macedonians carried a banner with an eagle on it as they charged against Darius III; the eagle was associated with the Achaemenid royal family, Cyrus had been called the Eagle of the East by the Jewish scribe Ezra and it would have been more appropriate for Darius's army to carry that banner, but one could say that Alexander was already encroaching upon the throne at this point.[77]

Unlike Alexander, who in the Alexander historians' accounts, was both courageous and blessed by the gods, the Alexander historians portrayed his opponent Darius as at worst, a

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68   Arr. *Anab.* 2.14.1-3.
69   AD I, l. The thirteenth; Arr. *Anab.* 3.7.6-7; Curt. 4.10.1-8; Plut. *Alex.* 2.31.6-12.
70   Plut. *Alex.* 2.31.6-12.
71   Curt. 4.10.1-8.
72   Ibid.
73   Plut. *Alex.* 2.27.1-8.
74   Ibid.
75   Curt. 4.26-27; Plut. *Alex.* 2.33.1-3.
76   Cool Root and Garrison, *Seals on the Persepolis Tablets*, 68-69.
77   A. Shapur Shahbazi, "Derafs," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, online edition, 2011, available at https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/derafs, accessed April 1, 2024; Ezra, *Book of Ezra*, Oxford Bible, 18:13.

coward, and at best, indecisive and unlucky.[78] All the Alexander historians, except Diodorus Siculus, had spread allegations against Darius where before the Battle of Issus, he tried to bribe Alexander's doctor to poison him, or at least that was what Parmenion had claimed to Alexander in his letter.[79] However, the doctor was too loyal to Alexander and provided him with the potion necessary to treat Alexander's illness while Alexander had complete faith in him and took the potion before telling the doctor about Parmenion's letter. In providing this anecdote of Alexander having trust in his men and his subordinate helping Alexander in his time of need, it showed that Alexander even at his weakest could inspire a sense of loyalty that even Darius's temptations could not sway. While Diodorus did mention that Alexander was ill and that the doctor cured him, he completely left out this episode of Alexander's trust being tested.[80] This episode did seem highly dramatic, and it would not make sense for Alexander to let a doctor who had been contacted by Darius to keep treating him as in Arrian's account, when he sent a messenger to Darius, Alexander forbade him from speaking with Darius's party, so this seemed inconsistent.[81] It was likely included as a rhetorical device to show Alexander's trust in his men and Darius's cynicism leading him to believe that he could violate that trust. While Alexander had been struggling with his illness, Arrian and Curtius Rufus took time to point out that Darius forced his army to hurry, hoping to get the drop on Alexander while he was sick, further emphasizing his cowardice.[82]

Darius's actions in battle did not paint a very flattering picture of him either, though it must be said that the Alexander historians' accounts of his action were inconsistent. Arrian, who generally had the most negative view of Darius, portrayed the Persian king as losing his nerve at the sight of Alexander's charge during the Battle of Issus, stripping away his bow, cloak, and abandoning his war chariot to go on horseback as to allow him to run away faster. He also claimed that Darius repeated his actions at the Battle of Gaugamela, after being overwhelmed by the sense of dread he had going into the battle.[83] The king's bow and chariot were his tools of war, identifiable as the tools of office and symbols of authority for the Achaemenid throne since the Achaemenid kings based their legitimacy on their military strength.[84] The arms were considered so important that when Darius's captured family had heard they were retrieved by the Macedonians, they had started to weep, thinking Darius had died rather than throw away his tools of war.[85] By showing Darius run away at the first sign of fighting, throwing away his weapons, Arrian showed Darius to not only be an utter coward, but that he also threw away the symbols that had distinguished Darius as the king. Arrian was obviously negatively biased towards Darius, the king did not even appear in his account until Arrian mentioned that Darius put the general Memnon in charge of the fighting in Asia Minor.[86] Arrian's summation of Darius's career was also overly negative, saying that Darius had only ever faced disasters in battle when Darius had previously been successful in reconquering Egypt in 335 BCE.[87]

The other historians did not portray Darius to be as cowardly as Arrian made him sound, but he did not appear the part of a competent or courageous warrior either. Plutarch hinted, yet did not confirm, that Darius inflicted a wound on Alexander's thigh at the Battle of Issus as Alexander charged at him but then Darius quickly ran away, as if Darius tried to get the jump on Alexander but he retreated when he failed to inflict a serious wound, throwing away

78   Carl Nylander, "Darius III – the Coward King Point and Counterpoint," in *Alexander the Great: Reality and Myth*, ed. Jesper Carlsen (Rome: ARID, 1997), 149-151.
79   Arr. *Anab.* 2.4.7-11; Curt. 3.6.1-13; Plut. *Alex.* 1.19.1-10; Badian, "Conspiracies," 70-79.
80   Diod. Sic. 17.31.1-5.
81   Arr. *Anab.* 2.14.4.
82   Arr. *Anab.* 2.6.3-6; Curt. 3.7.1.
83   Arr. *Anab.* 2.11.4-3.14.3.
84   Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 225-228.
85   Arr. *Anab.* 2.12.4.
86   Briant, *Darius in the Shadow of Alexander*, 130-131.
87   Arr. *Anab.* 3.22.2-6.

his arms in the process, which did not seem very honorable.[88] At Gaugamela, many of Darius's bodyguards suddenly ran away at the sight of Alexander and those that remained were being slaughtered, causing Darius to try and turn his chariot around only for the horses to get spooked, forcing Darius to abandon his chariot and his armor.[89] The second instance did not seem to be as much Darius's fault, but it did show that he could not inspire much loyalty in his men nor was Darius very practiced in operating his chariot, fumbling where Alexander was dominating. Curtius Rufus showed Darius to be indecisive, giving a mediocre impression of the man as a commander. At Issus, the horses of Darius's chariot were impaled by lances, so Darius had leapt to the horse that he kept behind the chariot in admittedly clever preparation, but then Darius tore off his royal insignia and fled from the battle, frightened that he might be captured alive rather than consider standing his ground.[90] At Gaugamela, Darius was torn by indecision, and his soldiers had started to scatter as they saw him falter and his forces were starting to be massacred, Darius took flight.[91] Curtius Rufus gave the impression that Darius could not commit to being a commander on the field at the possible risk of his own life rather than being the cartoonish coward that Arrian thought he was. Lastly, Diodorus was the historian who best portrayed Darius as a warrior. Like in Curtius Rufus's account of Issus, the Macedonians wounded the horses of Darius's chariot, but Darius had been trying to move to a second chariot when he had suddenly panicked and fled the battlefield.[92] At Gaugamela however, Darius acted more like a warrior. He even got to throw a javelin at Alexander, which missed, but it was the most warlike thing that Darius did across all the Alexander historians' accounts, only for Darius's chariot driver to get skewered, overturning his chariot, leading to his men thinking that their king had fallen, and thus scattering.[93] Across all the accounts, each of the circumstances from which Darius fled the battlefield were very much different, giving varying levels of weight to Darius's own cowardice for why he fled the battlefield. This lack of consistency made it difficult to believe that propaganda did not twist the portrayal of Darius's actions in some way.

The only non-Greek or Roman account of the battles was the Babylonian astronomical diary, yet even that was likely affected by propaganda since it was written after Alexander's takeover of Babylon.[94] It gave an account showing that Darius only fled after his troop formations started to break up, but it mentioned that they and Darius were panicked from facing Alexander, who from the Babylonian word *hattu*, had seemed to have the presence of a superior king who was destined to win, against whom Darius and his army could only be crushed.[95] This point was made even stronger when one considers that Darius's army far outnumbered Alexander's and yet the former still lost to the latter.

In each of the accounts, after Darius's various flights or mishaps, all or the remainder of his troops would lose their courage and start to scatter.[96] The Persian soldiers believed that their victory in battle depended on the king's power in war and his invincibility bestowed by the divine, if he started to falter, then the soldiers would have started to believe the battle was lost.[97] Thus, as the soldiers had varying loyalties and homelands from subjugated states across the empire, they would put their own lives above the needs of the empires and scatter since

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88   Plut. *Alex.* 1.20.2-9.
89   Ibid., 2.33.8-9.
90   Curt. 3.11.11-12.
91   Ibid., 4.15.30-31.
92   Diod. Sic. 17.34.5-9.
93   Ibid., 17.60.1-5.
94   Rollinger, "The Battle of Arbela," 213-215.
95   Ibid., 237.
96   Arr. *Anab.* 3.22.2-6; Plut. *Alex.* 1.20.2-9; Curt. 3.11.11-12; Diod. Sic. 17.60.1-5.
97   Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 225-230.

they would not risk their own lives for a king that was not even chosen by a god.[98]

Even despite the continued resistance from the satrap Bessus who assassinated Darius and now claimed the throne, Alexander already took numerous steps to secure support from Persian elites to help establish his victor's narrative and legitimize his claim to the throne. Alexander had undermined the authority of Darius in battle, but now he took steps to minimize his presence in Achaemenid history.

2. Alexander's Minimization of Darius III in his Victor's Narrative

Alexander the Great was remembered as one of history's greatest conquerors and Darius III was remembered as the disgraced king who lost to him. The most important ancient sources historians have of Darius III are the Alexander historians' accounts, yet due to the sources they used, those accounts were utterly biased in favor of Alexander, not paying his nemesis anywhere near the same level of attention, as Alexander intended.[99] Alexander had essentially usurped the throne from Darius III and like Darius I in his Bisitun Inscription, Alexander needed to create a narrative that would legitimize his reign. Darius III's failures in battle had proven that he was unworthy of holding the throne along the lines of Achaemenid ideology, and Alexander was now in the perfect position to toss his nemesis into historical obscurity. Minimizing Darius's presence in Achaemenid history while also tarnishing his character, Alexander made use of Persian collaborators to forward his narrative towards his new subjects. This propaganda is alive and well in the Alexander historians' accounts.[100]

Even outside of battle, the Alexander historians portrayed Darius's character to be that of an overly emotional, defeatist man-child who cannot make rational decisions for the sake of his empire. In reducing Darius to this mere caricature, Alexander could further ruin his reputation after his death and make him appear utterly unfit to manage the throne even in a civil capacity. In the accounts from Arrian, Curtius Rufus, Diodorus, and Plutarch, Darius was heavily susceptible to flattery and in the former three's narratives, Darius had his ego bolstered by his courtiers, who convinced him to take the battlefield himself since it would boost the confidence of his troops.[101] Alexander was going to do the same thing and the other historians did not call him foolhardy, although Alexander's death would have caused the defeat of his side just as Darius's would have meant defeat for the Persians. Plutarch claimed that Darius received a prophetic dream, the same one mentioned earlier, but Darius was easily convinced it was a good omen from a Magi's flattering interpretation.[102] It is easier to call this part made up since it involved people's superstitions at the time, but it also showed how easily swayed Darius was by the words of people around him, even if they were suspect. Alexander appeared far more resolute in comparison, rejecting the advice of his subordinates when he did not agree with it, such as rejecting Parmenion's counsel to accept Darius's offer of co-rulership.[103] Darius only seemed to be resolute when he was furious, as when his (exiled) Athenian advisor Charidemus had advised him not to risk his life on the battlefield, and Darius had him executed when Charidemus did not agree with him.[104] Of course, the Alexander historians' Greek bias was truly present here, saying that the most useful advice offered to Darius fell upon deaf ears, giving the impression that even if Darius had Charidemus executed, it might have been for more serious reasons than Darius losing his temper, rather than the stereotype of a Greek's <u>wisdom being ignored</u> by a Persian.

98   Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 507-511; Pierre Briant, *Kings, Countries, Peoples: Selected Studies on the Achaemenid Empire*, tr. Amelie Kuhrt (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2017), 171-174.
99   Briant, *Darius in the Shadow of Alexander*, 130-131.
100   Cartledge, introduction to *The Landmark Arrian*, xv-xvii.
101   Arr. *Anab.* 2.6.3-7; Curt. 2.8.1-5; Diod. Sic. 17.30.1-31.1.
102   Plut. *Alex.* 1.18.1-8.
103   Arr. *Anab.* 2.25.1-3.
104   Diod. Sic. 17.30.1-31.1.

After his defeat at Issus, the historians recounted Darius making absurd offers to Alexander to hand over his family, who were captured at Damascus after the battle.[105] The terms of the offers, as well as their number, vary across the sources, further evidencing their ridiculousness and substantiating the likelihood that they were Macedonian propaganda to prove Darius's instability and cowardice.[106] Arrian had Darius making two offers, the first being to form an alliance with Alexander, recognizing friendship with Macedon, in exchange for handing over his family, however it would be foolish of Darius to truly expect Alexander to hand over his hostages and just leave the empire.[107] The second offer, one that was consistent across all the accounts, was Darius proposing to cede to Alexander half of the empire's territory west of the Euphrates River, as well as his daughter's hand in marriage, giving Alexander the opportunity to co-rule with him, in addition to a ransom of several thousand talents.[108] This offer was in some ways even more absurd. The Achaemenid king claimed to be the ruler of the world, the supreme king of kings.[109] Splitting up the empire would be completely contrary to Achaemenid royal ideology, and it would mean that Darius acknowledged that he was not the king of kings if he decided to co-rule with Alexander. It is doubtful that Darius would have considered a public move so heavily breaking away from Achaemenid ideology, even if it was a ploy to buy time, since Darius's political position was already shaky after his major loss at Issus and the capture of the royal family which put the succession of Darius's line into question. In fact, Alexander's response of rejection to this message was much more in line with Achaemenid ideology since he wanted to rule the entire country, again showing how unworthy Darius was in comparison with Alexander.[110] There were also no precedents to offering territory in negotiations in Persian history.[111] The three offers recorded by Curtius Rufus entitled mostly the same terms. The first letter offered a ransom in exchange for the royal family and asked Alexander to return to the land of his forefathers and enter an alliance with Darius.[112] The second was also a concession of territory, but the boundary was now the lands between the Hellespont and the Halys River instead of the Euphrates[113]. The third letter bumped up the ransom from ten to thirty thousand talents and now put the border to the west of the Euphrates.[114] It should be mentioned that the Greeks believed the separation between Europe and Asia was either at the Euphrates or the Halys.[115] The fact that Darius offered to split his empire at one of these two borders betrays Greek biases instead of historical truth. Plutarch said that Darius only offered Alexander one letter for a ransom, the territory west of the Euphrates, and the hand of Stateira in marriage.[116] Furthermore, the timing of this letter was inconsistent with that of the third letter that Curtius Rufus mentioned. Curtius Rufus's letter was sent after the death of Darius's pregnant wife, but Plutarch recorded his letter as being sent before Darius's wife had died in childbirth.[117] The

105   Arr. *Anab.* 2.14.4-6; Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 831-835.
106   Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 1043-1045; M. Rahim Shayegan, "Contesting the Empire: Darius III and Alexander," in *The World of Alexander in Perspective: Contextualizing Arrian*, ed. Robert Rollinger and Julian Degen (Harrassowitz Verlag; Wiesbaden: Classica et Orientalia, 2022), 285-286.
107   Arr. *Anab.* 2.14.4-6.
108   Ibid., 2.25.1-3.
109   DB, 1-3.
110   Arr. *Anab.* 2.14.7-9; Hilmar Klinkott, "'Great King' or 'Lord of Asia'? Arrian's Understanding of Alexander's Rule in the East," in *The World of Alexander in Perspective: Contextualizing Arrian*, ed. Robert Rollinger and Julian Degen (Harrassowitz Verlag; Wiesbaden: Classica et Orientalia, 2022), 315-318.
111   Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 838.
112   Curt. 4.1.1-10.
113   Ibid., 4.5.1-8.
114   Ibid., 4.11.1-22.
115   Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 831-835.
116   Plut. *Alex.* 2.29.7-9.
117   Curt. 4.11.1-22; Plut. *Alex.* 2.29.7-9.

number of talents offered was different as well, Plutarch said ten thousand while Curtius Rufus said thirty thousand.[118] Lastly, Diodorus had Darius making two offers, but he was offering territory from the very beginning. After Issus, Darius offered to concede land west of the Halys as well as a ransom of twenty thousand talents.[119] With the second offer, Darius bumped up the ransom to thirty thousand and now offered territory west of the Euphrates, as well as one of his daughters' hands in marriage.[120] Given the inconsistency between the sources' offers, it is difficult to lend any credibility to them.

After his wife died in childbirth while in Alexander's custody, Plutarch and Curtius Rufus recorded Darius as not only lamenting his wife's death but offering defeatist prayers to the gods.[121] Given that these lamentations were absent from Arrian's and Diodorus's account, there is some doubt as to their validity. Not only that, but it would be hard to believe that Darius would put into words the possibility of his defeat. Darius's legitimacy as the Achaemenid king was already shaky after his loss at Issus. If Darius was caught talking like this, he would lose what little legitimacy he had left, and Darius might as well have given up his throne for Alexander.[122] Curtius Rufus had Darius saying that if his career was at an end, then he would ask the gods to allow Asia (a term the Greeks found interchangeable for the Persian territories outside of the Ionian territories) to be ruled by no one other than the most merciful and just Alexander.[123] Calling Alexander merciful would be entirely inaccurate given some of the slaughter that he led during his campaign, such as the aftermath of the Siege of Tyre where thousands were massacred and the survivors enslaved.[124] Darius I had said that he would cause no undue harm to the weak or the strong and this speech from Darius III was likely trying to relate this quality to Alexander so as to improve his reputation as a ruler.[125] Plutarch had Darius question his own favorability with the gods through asking the gods if there was a divine jealousy and if there was then no one should sit on the throne but Alexander.[126] Here, Darius might as well have said that he did not have Ahuramazda's favor anymore. Darius's speeches had the feeling of hindsight behind them as he turned into the Greek historians' puppet for propaganda.

To support his tarnishing of Darius's reputation and his claim to the Achaemenid throne, Alexander needed Persian collaborators to lend their support, and he found them in the highest echelon of Persian society: the Achaemenid royal family. They had been captured when Alexander advanced to Damascus after his victory at Issus and his interactions with them in the ancient Alexander historians' account are very notable.[127] The royal family had been fearing for their future after their capture, being surrounded by soldiers from a foreign land intent on invading, yet their worries were apparently put to rest due to Alexander's generosity.[128] Arrian and Curtius Rufus had Alexander promise the royals that they could retain the ranks, privileges, and retinues that they had previously enjoyed under Darius.[129] In other words, the man that the Achaemenid royals had to depend on for their comfortable standard of living was Alexander rather than Darius. Diodorus even showed Alexander returning the jewelry that the

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118   Ibid.
119   Diod. Sic. 39.1-3.
120   Ibid., 17.54.1-55.1.
121   Curt. 4.10.34; Plut. *Alex.* 2.30.1-15.
122   Worthington, *By the Spear: Philip II, Alexander the Great, and the Rise and Fall of the Macedonian Empire*, 169-173.
123   Curt. 4.10.34.
124   Worthington, *By the Spear: Philip II, Alexander the Great, and the Rise and Fall of the Macedonian Empire*, 177-178.
125   DB, 59-64.
126   Plut. *Alex.* 2.30.1-15.
127   Arr. *Anab.* 2.12.3-7; Curt. 3.12.1-24; Plut. *Alex.* 1.21.1-6; Diod. Sic. 17.37.3-38.4.
128   Arr. *Anab.* 2.12.3-7.
129   Arr. *Anab.* 2.12.3-7; Curt. 3.12.1-24.

royal women had lost.[130] One could infer from this that Alexander could bestow and take away their luxuries whenever he wished, according to his favor. Plutarch had said that Alexander was ready to allow the royals to continue their traditions, allowing them to bury the dead at Issus according to Persian burial rituals.[131] This signified that Alexander would tolerate their beliefs and customs. However, the event that showed the Achaemenids' willingness to cooperate with Alexander was an event recorded by Arrian, Curtius Rufus and Diodorus. Darius's mother, Sisygambis, when Alexander and his companion Hephaestion entered the royal family's tent, had bowed to Hephaestion, thinking that he was Alexander since Hephaestion was the taller of the pair.[132] In the Bisitun Inscription, Darius I towered over the rebel kings, meaning that the Achaemenid king was thought to be extremely tall in stature.[133] By bowing to Hephaestion, Sisygambis had essentially signaled her acceptance of Alexander as the new Achaemenid king, an action which Alexander accepted very favorably given the ease with which he forgave Sisygambis's mistake.[134] Given the circumstances that surrounded her family, Sisygambis likely had little other choice but to cooperate with Alexander and support his claim to the throne, but her act of bowing to Hephaestion was likely an exaggeration or a fragment of propaganda. Just before this, Sisygambis had been weeping thinking her son was dead at Alexander's hands, to have such an about-face stretches the imagination.[135] With the royal family's cooperation, it became much easier for Alexander to establish his victor's narrative.

Afterwards, as he would have his audience think, Alexander's relationship with Darius's family seemed to become a familial one, judging from Curtius Rufus's account. Alexander had started to think of Sisygambis as his second mother, on an equal level with his own mother, Olympias.[136] Alexander started to foster a much more intimate relationship with the Achaemenid royal family, shifting away from his image and a conqueror and forcing himself into the position that Darius once claimed in his household. Painting himself as a member of this family and their guardian, when Darius had been killed by his cousin Bessus, Alexander shifted his role from Darius's conqueror to his avenger and his successor. When Bessus was captured, Alexander denounced him for his betrayal of the king who bestowed upon Bessus all his honors, even as Bessus claimed that he had wanted to offer the country to Alexander.[137] Alexander was trying to distance himself in his victor's narrative from his more overt stance of conquest before he captured the Achaemenid royals. Alexander had already accepted into his entourage Persian nobles who were complicit in Bessus's betrayal, including Artabazus who would later become the satrap of Bactria, meaning that Bessus was simply the scapegoat, the punching bag that Alexander could conveniently use to distract everyone from the fact that it had been his two victories over Darius which created the circumstances leading to Bessus's coup.[138]

3. Alexander's Marriages at Susa

After Alexander's victory at Gaugamela, Darius III would retreat to the Median city of Ecbatana, leaving Alexander free to capture two of the other centers of the Persian Empire, Babylon and Susa, while burning another, Persepolis.[139] Having lost the qualifications to sit

130 Diod. Sic. 17.37.3-38.4.
131 Plut. *Alex.* 1.21.1-6.
132 Arr. *Anab.* 2.12.3-7; Curt. 3.12.1-24; Diod. Sic, 17.37.3-38.4.
133 Darius I, "Bisitun Relief," Cabinet.ox.ac.uk, https://www.cabinet.ox.ac.uk/behistun-relief-and-inscription-0.
134 Arr. *Anab.* 2.12.3-7; Curt. 3.12.1-24.
135 Arr. *Anab.* 2.12.3-7.
136 Curt. 5.2.20-22.
137 Ibid., 7.5.38-39.
138 Ibid., 6.5.1-7.5.1.
139 Bosworth, *Conquest and Empire: The Reign of Alexander the Great*, 85-94.

on the Achaemenid throne, Darius was deposed by Bessus, an Achaemenid and the satrap of Bactria.[140] Alexander would march against Bessus to capture Darius but he had been too slow and Bessus had Darius assassinated, leaving him free to put on the royal diadem and declare himself Artaxerxes V, the new king of Persia.[141] However, more and more influential Persians were defecting to Alexander's side, such as Mazaeus the satrap of Babylon, and as Alexander proceeded with his march against Bactria, more and more of Bessus's supporters would leave him to side with Alexander who seemed unstoppable.[142] Eventually, Alexander captured Bessus and punished him for his betrayal of Darius, treating him like Darius I had punished the rebel king Fravartish by having him mutilated, put on display for public humiliation, and impaling him.[143] Bessus's execution was overseen by Darius III's brother, Oxyathres, who had allied himself with Alexander shortly after Darius's death and Alexander allowed Oxyathres the opportunity to avenge his brother, helping Alexander to shift his image from being Darius's nemesis to his avenger and successor.[144] Even after killing Bessus, it took two years for Alexander to put down the revolts in Bactria and Sogdiana, ending them with his marriage of Roxane, the daughter of the Bactrian magnate Oxyathres, in 328 BCE.[145] Wanting to proceed with his plans to become king of Asia, Alexander accepted an invitation from the Indian noble Taxiles to expand his territory into India.[146] Alexander would start his return after his troops refused to cross the Hyphasis River in 326 BCE, desiring to return home.[147] After a grueling march through the Gedrosian Desert, Alexander returned to the empire, only to hear news of revolts against him, leading him to dismiss massive forces of mercenaries and purge several Iranian satraps.[148] Coming back from his long absence, Alexander realized he needed to strengthen his ties with the Persian nobility.[149] Despite the mockery of Darius in the ancient sources, Alexander would build extremely strong ties with his family, even inducting the Achaemenid Oxyathres into the Companions.[150] To win over the support of the Persian elites to accept him as the new king, Alexander would also adopt several Persian customs to appear more favorable with his new subjects and vassals.

Soon after he returned from his campaign in India, Alexander held a mass marriage ceremony at Susa. Alexander himself married Darius's eldest daughter Stateira to create a link with the Achaemenid line.[151] Alexander waited six years to marry Stateira given the circumstances that had engulfed his army and the empire during and after his Indian campaign.[152] Alexander's troops had mutinied against him after multiple years of hard campaigning and Alexander had to purge several Persian satraps who had revolted against him during his absence, so not only did Alexander need to strengthen his relationship with the Persian nobility, but he also realized he could not rely on the Macedonian veterans anymore, thus Alexander had to shift

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140   Ibid., 94-97.

141   Ibid., 98-100.

142   Ibid.

143   Ibid., 108-112.

144   Rudiger Schmitt, "Oxyathres," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, online edition, 2002, available at https://iranicaonline.org/articles/oxyathres, accessed April 10, 2024.

145   Bosworth, *Conquest and Empire: The Reign of Alexander the Great*, 115-117.

146   Ibid., 119-120.

147   Ibid., 125-130.

148   Bosworth, *Conquest and Empire: The Reign of Alexander the Great*, 146-151; Adrian Goldsworthy, *Philip and Alexander: Kings and Conquerors* (New York: Basic Books, 2020), 465-470.

149   Peter Green, *Alexander of Macedon, 356-323 B.C.: A Historical Biography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 435-446.

150   Schmitt, "Oxyathres," https://iranicaonline.org/articles/oxyathres.

151   Arr. *Anab.* 7.4.4-6; Curt. 10.3.12; Plut. *Alex.* 7.70.1-72.1; Diod. Sic. 17.107.6-108.1.

152   Bosworth, *Conquest and Empire: The Reign of Alexander the Great*, 125-151; Goldsworthy, *Philip and Alexander: Kings and Conquerors*, 465-470.

the balance of power away from the Macedonians in his army.[153] When Darius I took the throne, he married the daughters of Cyrus the Great to continue the Achaemenid line and create a sense of an ongoing legitimacy.[154] Alexander followed in Darius's footsteps, a step even more necessary for Alexander given his origins from outside the empire, in addition to the benefit of having heir with Stateira as the mother that will be part of the Achaemenid line. The marriage at Susa did not only establish a link for Alexander, for he also had eighty-six of the most prominent Macedonian nobles marry over eighty of the noblest and most distinguished Persian women.[155] Alexander was trying to create long-lasting connections and intermixing between the Macedonian side of his royal court and the Persian side. Some of these marriages included Alexander and the youngest daughter of Artaxerxes III, Parysatis, Hephaestion and the younger daughter of Darius III, Drypetis, and Perdikkas, a Companion commander who led battalions in the Battles of Issus and Gaugamela, and the daughter of Atropates, the satrap of Media.[156] Alexander marrying the daughter of another Achaemenid king would strengthen his ties to the royal family, Hephaestion marrying Drypetis would establish another link to the Achaemenid for Alexander's closest Companion, as well as make the two of them in-laws, and Perdikkas would marry the daughter of the satrap of one of Persia's most central satrapies. Persian culture strongly influenced the marriage ceremony. As Arrian had described the ceremony, the chairs were placed in the order of the bridegrooms and after the toasts were drunk, the brides would arrive and sit down beside her groom, then the groom would take their brides by the hand and kiss them.[157] Alexander also gave dowries to the Persian brides, and he gave gifts to the Macedonians who already married Asian wives.[158] Alexander even wore Persian dress to the ceremony.[159] In conducting the ceremony in this manner and adopting that sort of dress, Alexander was adjusting his court to be more inclusive of Persian customs, to make his new Persian subordinates feel at home. Alexander had taken Darius III's tent after Issus, which was seen to be the center of the Persian court, and now with these ceremonies and the customs he was adopting, Alexander was now trying to become the new center of this Macedonian-Persian court.[160] Additionally, Alexander also took steps to integrate his armies, recruiting thirty thousand Persian boys that had been trained in Macedonian warfare, replacing the aging Macedonian veterans when previously the Persians' participation in Alexander's new regime had mainly been administrative.[161] Now that his campaigns were basically over, Alexander was trying to create a new regime that would stand the test of time, one that would appeal to his new Persian subjects.[162]

Conclusion

Despite what the ancient Alexander historians have said, Alexander the Great did not take over the Persian Empire through bravery and charisma alone; the struggle to take over the empire was not just a military one but a political one as well. Alexander and his court historians spun Darius's failures to win against the Macedonians at Issus and Gaugamela as being due to his cowardice and unworthiness to be king. Darius's conduct outside of the battles was not safe either, as with the coerced support of the captive Achaemenid royal family, Alexander tarnished Darius's character into being emotional and defeatist, qualities unsuited for the king of kings. Then to improve his relationship with the Persian nobility and shift the

153 Ibid.
154 Hdt. 3.88.
155 Arr. *Anab.* 7.4.4-6.
156 Ibid.
157 Ibid., 7.4.7-8.
158 Ibid., 7.5.1-3.
159 Ibid., 7.5.2.
160 Ibid., 2.12.3.
161 Ibid., 7.6.1-5.
162 Robin Lane Fox, *Alexander the Great* (London: Penguin Books, 1975), 417-420.

balance of power away from the Macedonians in his army, Alexander strengthened his ties with the Persian nobility by marrying the Achaemenid ladies and marrying the Macedonian nobles with Persian brides, trying to mix the two sides of his court to lay foundations for a long-lasting empire spearheaded by him and his Achaemenid heirs. Alexander was not simply ambitious on the battlefield, he wanted to make an entire empire accept him as their king through Alexander's attempts to appeal to Achaemenid culture, showing a political savvy that was overshadowed by Alexander's heroism in the ancient sources.

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Originally from Virginia Beach, **Christopher Bandy** is a May 2024 graduate of Christopher Newport University. Christopher is a history major and an economics and Asian studies minor. Christopher has learned Mandarin during his time at Christopher Newport University. He has been inducted into three honors societies, Alpha Chi for honors students, Phi Alpha Theta for honors in history, and Omicron Delta Epsilon for honors in economics. Christopher studied abroad in Greece during the summer of his sophomore year. He has also previously won the Military History Award in 2023 for his paper on Julius Caesar during the Gallic Wars and was the runner-up in 2024. Christopher is also the co-winner of the 2024 William Parks Award for having one of the highest grade point averages in history coursework. After graduating from Christopher Newport University, Christopher plans to study abroad in Japan to learn about East Asian history and culture.

The Power of a Girl's Voice As Shown By Little Red Riding Hood

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Abstract:

Since its earliest recorded versions by Charles Perrault and the Brothers Grimm, "Little Red Riding Hood" has been a story warning young girls about the dangers that await them beyond their front door. In Perrault's telling, the protagonist was helplessly susceptible to the wolf's tricks. She dies because of this. The Brothers Grimm changed the story slightly, having Little Red be rescued by a huntsman in the woods. They propose that it doesn't matter if a child cannot help themselves, there will always be a man around to save her. Versions from the last century, including those by Mia Sim, Bruno de La Salle, and Claude Clément, adapt the tale to a much greater extent. These authors attempt to have the child rescue herself by way of her voice. Their Little Reds learn, unlike the Grimm's protagonist, that help is only sure to come if they cry out or speak up. By referencing both Perrault's tale and the version written by the Brothers Grimm, these versions emphasize their new, adapted morals: that children do find themselves in risky situations, but if they are brave and use their minds, they can find their way out of them. These stories do, however, also provide limits. Often there is an intermediary between Little Red's voice and the action that stops the wolf. Ed Young, author of *Lon Po Po*, rids his story of a middleman, giving his Little Red the same power that the wolf uses to trick her.

Charles Perrault, the French writer who authored the first recorded version of "Little Red Riding Hood," characterizes his protagonist in only a few words. He says she is "a little country girl, the prettiest creature who was ever seen." She is not careless or disobedient, she is not intelligent or brave. The first Little Red Riding Hood is only one thing: innocent. Carole and D.T. Hanks say, "The tale's brevity makes it clear that Perrault is here unconcerned with character development or an elaborate plot" (68). Instead, he writes about the dangers that await little girls and young women in the real world. He includes an explicit moral at the end of the story, stating that "Children, especially attractive, well bred young ladies, should never talk to strangers" (Perrault). His story, with its unfortunate ending (Little Red Riding Hood gets eaten, just like her grandmother, never to see the light of day again) implies that once a child gets into danger, there is no way out of it. But centuries later, in a time where it is more appealing if Red Riding Hoods do survive, the tale has changed.

In some adaptations (particularly the Grimms'), the child is rescued by an adult man, whether a hunter or a woodcutter. But in many other, even more recent versions, she learns her own power. She is intelligent and quick-witted, she knows how to save herself, whether that is on her own, or by asking for help. Four of these newer versions, including *The Little Girl Who Knew How to Fly* by Bruno de la Salle, *Pooh! How Did She Know? A Story of a Little Red Riding Hood Who Escaped from Her Abductors* by Mia Sim, *A Little Red Riding Hood* by Claude Clément, and *Lon Po Po* by Ed Young, increase the child's agency, presenting Little Red Riding Hood as someone who can get herself out of a dangerous situation by using her voice. Many of these modern Red Riding Hoods know the story as readers might, and so they play off of the old image of a helpless girl in the woods. By referencing both Perrault's tale and the version written by the Brothers Grimm, these versions emphasize their new, adapted morals: that children do find themselves in risky situations, but if they are brave and use their minds, they can find their way out of them. These stories do, however, also provide limits. Often there is an intermediary between Little Red's voice and the action that stops the wolf. Ed Young, author of *Lon Po Po*, rids his story of a middleman, giving his Little Red the same power that the wolf uses to trick her.

Before looking at these new adaptations, it is necessary to remember the Grimms' version, as many of these stories are influenced by theirs as well. It was supposedly taken from the German oral tradition, but was most likely adapted to fit the authors' ideas of what it should look like. The first of their changes to Perrault's story is that Little Red Cap gets into danger because of her disobedience. While Perrault's Little Red Riding Hood didn't do anything to spark danger, the Grimms' protagonist ignores her mother's warning: "when you are going, walk nicely and quietly and do not run off the path" (Grimm). At the wolf's comment, "See Little Red Cap, how pretty the flowers are about here -- why do you not look round?" (Grimm), Little Red Cap wanders about, disobeying her mother and giving the wolf an opportunity to run off to eat her grandmother. The Grimms' Little Red Cap feels odd entering her grandmother's house ("how uneasy I feel to-day"), but she cannot figure out why, like future Red Riding Hoods must if they are to survive, so the wolf eats her. This version ends when a huntsman passes by, and, feeling something is off, goes to investigate the grandmother's house. He finds a wolf, slays it, saves Little Red Cap and her grandmother, and all is well again. Little Red Cap has learned her lesson. While Perrault's version warned readers to be careful of the inescapable danger in the world and to learn where Little Red can't anymore, the Grimms' version adds firstly that children should obey their parents, and secondly, that there will always be a man around to save the day.

In the 2010 Korean version by Mia Sim titled *Pooh! How Did She Know? A Story of a Little Red Riding Hood Who Escaped from Her Abductors*, Little Red encounters many potentially dangerous people, though she only suspects one of them: the wolf. Beckett states, "The lengthy, descriptive subtitle clearly establishes that this retelling is a tale of abduction" (39). In each

encounter with a stranger, Little Red Riding Hood is tempted to fall prey to the dangerous traps, but every time, she hears her mother's voice echo in her head: "Little Red Riding Hood, wait!" (Sims 43). Then she rethinks her actions and switches course back to safety. The final time she's approached, a cat grabs her arm. This time, she cannot rethink herself out of trouble, so first, she panics. Then, her mother's voice echoes, with an additional message: "You are a courageous girl!" (Sims 43). And with this encouragement, Little Red Riding Hood screams for help. Beckett states that "Korean children, like many Asian children, are taught to be quiet and well-behaved, so shouting is not customary behavior" (42). Sim expresses that calling for help is not disobedient, but rather brave (Beckett 42). Others do come to save this Little Red, just like in the Grimms' version, but without her action, they wouldn't have. Unlike the Grimms' Little Red Cap, who received help without asking for it, Sims' Little Red Riding Hood uses her own resources—even if it is only her voice—to save herself. Instead of advising "don't get yourself into trouble," this tale assumes that trouble will inevitably come, and informs readers to use their smarts and their voices to get themselves out of it. Sim's characters says this explicitly on the back cover: "When you are in danger,/shout fearlessly: 'Help!'" (Sims, qtd. in Beckett 41). Asking for help and using one's voice is a choice that a child has to make independently, and so by shifting this idea into a good light—it is the single action that saves the child—Sim tries to tell readers that shouting and screaming is not always bad.

In a 1996 French version of Little Red Riding Hood by Bruno de La Salle, titled *The Little Girl Who Knew How To Fly*, the protagonist knows an old version of the tale. She is headed on a long journey to see her grandmother, not through the woods, but through the sky. She stops in a little town and meets a kind man, who offers her hot chocolate. He asks her her name, and she says, "for fun, 'I am Little Red Riding Hood.' To show he also knew the story, he said, 'Then I am the Big Bad Wolf.' And they both laughed" (La Salle 76). By explicitly referencing the old fairy tale, the author brings attention to the connections between his story and the original. This is a Red Riding Hood story, whether the characters realize it or not. Later on, the story progresses in a somewhat expected manner, and the girl finds herself in her grandmother's house with that same man, disguised as her grandmother. This version maintains an aspect of Perrault's, where the wolf asks the girl to strip and get in bed with him. But unlike Perrault's Red, she realizes that he is not who he says he is. She asks to go to the outhouse, escapes, and informs adults of the dangerous wolf. "She told them what the man… was like, where he was, and how they had to catch him" (La Salle 79). With her information, they take care of him. Perrault's version alerts readers to the danger of what lies beyond home. The Grimms' additionally warns readers not to disobey their parents. La Salle was aware of these stories when writing his own: "While he felt it was necessary to transpose the tales into the contemporary world, he also recognized the danger of destroying their fragile symbolic meanings" (Beckett 72). So La Salle's version retains these morals, but also adds the message that with resourcefulness, a girl can get herself to safety. Even if she cannot finish the job by herself, she is capable of at least escaping. By referencing more commonly known versions, La Salle emphasizes the changes he makes. His protagonist escapes, as other girls in danger can, by using their voice to find a way out of immediate danger and asking for help in addressing the problem.

A 2000 poetic version of the story by Claude Clément and illustrated by Isabelle Forestier, appropriately titled, *Little Red Riding Hood*, really focuses on the trauma that comes from an experience like Little Red Riding Hood's. Clément intended to make this story into one about "overcoming the silence and shame experienced by the victim" of sexual abuse (Beckett 30). Before setting off, this child is told by her mother, "I have confidence in you:/you are a resourceful Riding Hood!" (Clément 34). This child is not only sweet and kind, as Perrault's and the Grimms' are, but she is also *resourceful*. This statement is a clue that her ending will not be the same as in the oldest recorded versions. Late in the story, when the wolf asks her to

get in bed with her, she outright refuses. And when she makes the connection that the wolf is not her grandmother, she runs far away. The story diverges from the original in its ending. Little Red returns home safely, due to her quick wits, but she's lost her voice, which is the girls' most powerful resource in the previous two stories. Over time, and with her mother's coaxing, Little Red begins to open up and share her traumatic experience, in hopes that with it, the wolf will be prosecuted. With her words, with the power of her voice, the wolf is sentenced, and eventually throws up the grandmother whole. One of the last stanzas says, "Instead of keeping the incident secret,/everyone decided to talk about it,/so that it would never happen again" (Clément 38). There are obvious echoes of true stories about sexual assault. "Through this Riding Hood's story, the author and illustrator explore the psychological consequences of sexual abuse, as well as its judicial implications" (Beckett 30). Clément takes remnants of Perrault's version, which is subtextually about rape, and makes them much more noticeable. Even though he doesn't use the word "rape"—he instead uses "devour" to go with the typical action of eating—he lets Little Red be traumatized, and experience that trauma through the loss of her voice. While no child will meet a literal talking wolf in the woods, plenty do meet metaphorical wolves who take their voice away. Children who have experienced trauma like this Little Red will ideally recognize themselves in the work and realize the power that they have in their words. This story aligns much more obviously with real-world situations than the previous couple, but it too highlights the power of a girl's words. Speech is a type of power that many girls in Perrault's time, and even the Brothers Grimm's probably didn't have. Like the Korean children Beckett and Sim talk about and to, they were taught that being quiet is most respectable. Voices in today's world, as Sim, La Salle, and Clément try to express, have an undeniable power.

Ed Young's Caldecott-winning picture book *Lon Po Po*, translated as "Grandmother Wolf," does indicate the power of the voice, but in a very different way. The three Little Red Riding Hoods, siblings named Shang, Tao and Paotze, do not traverse through the woods. Their mother does instead, leaving the children alone for the night. The wolf, seeing that they are alone, approaches the door, acting as their grandmother. Shang, the oldest child, questions the wolf from the start. She asks, "why did you blow out the candle? The room is now dark" (Young 11). She asks about the bushy tail she finds in the bed, and the claws she finds on Po Po's hands. Her instincts are on high alert. When she is certain that "Po Po" is actually a wolf, she devises a plan to get her and her siblings out of danger. Skillfully, she carries it out, and when her mother returns, the wolf is dead.

Lon Po Po drastically changes the story of "Little Red Riding Hood." One child becomes three, they are stationary instead of traveling, and they never, not once, require any adult assistance in solving their problem. The roots of the story are still obviously there, most clearly in the wolf-grandmother disguise trick. Because the intertextual references exist, Shang's wariness compares to Perrault's Little Red's lack of any about the wolves and the woods. Perrault calls his protagonist "the poor child, who did not know that it was dangerous to stay and talk to a wolf." The Brothers Grimm said theirs "did not know what a wicked creature he was, and was not at all afraid of him." Though the Grimms' is conscious of her unsettling discomfort in her grandmother's house, she can't identify why it is there. Shang, on the other hand, questions "Po Po" until she figures out what's happening.

Sim's, La Salle's, and Clément's adaptations focus on the power of the voice, including how shouting can call attention to a child when they can't get away on their own, and also how sharing information and spreading the word can help to stop a "wolf" for good. Young's version does emphasize the importance of the voice, but in a different way. Shang and her siblings do not have anyone around them who might be able to help. They live in the remote countryside. Calling for help will not do anything. Neither will sharing their story with the air. The only people they can talk to are each other and the wolf. So, they choose to use their voices

in the same way that the wolf often uses his: in trickery.

In many adaptations, the wolf is known to make conversation with the girl in the woods. He asks her what she's doing and where she's going, and then often points out something to distract her, whether flowers, or hot chocolate. In some versions he proposes races he knows he will win, because he knows shortcuts. He tricks her into letting him have an advantage. He uses his voice later to deceive her grandmother, by pitching it higher, and tricks Little Red by saying he has a cold. He uses his voice to affect the way that she behaves, to influence her to act a certain way that benefits him. While he is physically frightening, the wolf's power has always come from his voice, though in a very different way than Little Red's.

Thus far, her voice's power has relied on the presence of other people. In La Salle's version, for example, Little Red can escape on her own, but she has to get help to defeat the wolf entirely. In Sim's, she yells for help. In Clément's, she learns to spread the word about danger, so that others won't find themselves in the same situation she did. Using one's voice to ask for help or to spread the word is a type of power. Those girls take initiative; they don't let the wolves take advantage of them like Perrault's and the Grimms'. But Young's Little Red? *She* has power like the *wolf*. She uses her words to trick him, like he tries to trick her. She tells him that they will pick delicious nuts for him. He lets them go up the tree. Then she tells him that he must pick them for himself, but they'll help him up. He obliges, letting her and her siblings pull him up and drop him back to the ground, three times, until he is dead. Shang uses her voice not to escape, but to outsmart the wolf, defeating it herself.

In two of the oldest recorded versions of the Little Red Riding Hood story, those of Charles Perrault and the Brothers Grimm, Little Red was either fated for death, or could only survive with the help of a man. Newer versions attempt to have her save herself, most often with the power of her voice. They try to promote the message that great action can come from any child's words. Because they build off of the classic versions where Little Red doesn't have agency, her power in these new stories is emphasized. But they too place a limit on what the child can actually do. Little Red asks for help, and someone else comes to rescue her. She shares how to slay the beast, and someone else carries out her instructions. She tells her story, and the judge does the sentencing that ends up saving her grandmother. They try to make the connection direct, where because of her voice, she and others will be kept from danger, but there's always someone else between her words and the wolf's fate. Ed Young's *Lon Po Po* gives the child more power than one of asking for help. His Little Red, Shang, takes the wolf's vocal power, that of trickery. She doesn't need her voice to communicate with others, instead, she uses it to deceive the one trying to fool her. Shang has the ultimate agency, a quality unable to be reached by the other modern Little Red Riding Hoods.

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"Do You Guys Ever Think About Dying?"
The Prevalence and Implications of Gender, Race, and Class Identity in Contemporary Existentialist Film

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Abstract

Whereas traditional Existentialism tied consciousness of one's existence exclusively to the question of mortality, contemporary existentialist films demonstrate this relationship is also inextricable from factors of identity like gender, race, and class. This leads one to wonder, can modern expressions of Existentialism be understood by awareness of man's existence alone? The answer, in short, is no. Using a phenomenological methodology, this paper looks to trailblazers of traditional Existentialism, such as Martin Heidegger and Jean Paul Sartre, to consider their engagement with free, authentic identity. Then, it explains how Existentialism has long used art as a medium for helping us understand both traditional and evolving existentialist ideals, thereby making film an appropriate representation of the field. Finally, two stark examples of contemporary existentialist film – *Barbie* and *Poor Things* – will be explored, revealing that issues of identity are explicitly credited for the characters' growing consciousness of their existence. This analysis confirms that contemporary depictions bring a new light to Existentialism, one that must include gender, race, and class identity in the understanding of existence and mortality. These findings do not mean to invalidate traditional Existentialism, but rather serve to indicate an important shift in how this field is contemplated today.

Introduction

All eyes turn to look at Barbie as she blurts out, "Do you guys ever think about dying?" over the sounds of dancing and celebration at her party. In another cinematic universe, *Poor Things*, Bella Baxter is confronted by her mortality as she is brought back to life from suicide and forced to contemplate exactly what motivated her death in a past life. As both of these films unfold, it becomes clear that their characters struggle with not only issues of life and death, but gender, race, class, and other aspects of identity. Existentialism is a branch of philosophy that deeply considers these notions of mortality and human existence, especially regarding how that should influence the way we live once we become conscious of them. The choice to depict these concepts through forms of art such as film is not new by any means, but contemporary films such as *Barbie* and *Poor Things* seem to suggest that other factors of what it means to be human are increasingly at play.

Traditionally, consciousness of one's existence and mortality has been regarded as extremely abstract; so much so that it cannot be understood in terms of constructs like gender, race, and class. Modern-day film depicts Existentialism in a way that attempts to close this gap. Feelings of life and death are instead expressed through questions of identity – such as gender, race, and class – and what it means to live with that identity. In other words, whereas traditional Existentialism and its early cinematic depictions tied authentic identity exclusively to the question of mortality, contemporary existentialist films demonstrate that this relationship is inextricable from other issues of identity politics like gender, race, and class. This leads one to wonder, can contemporary expressions of Existentialism be understood by contemplating man's mortality alone?

The answer, in short, is no. Contemporary films such as *Barbie* and *Poor Things* demonstrate that existential autonomy cannot solely be explained in relation to one's mortality (as shown in traditional Existentialism), but by one's complex position within the identity politics of race, gender, and class. In this paper, I will first look back to trailblazers of traditional Existentialism, such as Martin Heidegger and Jean Paul Sartre, to consider their engagement with the field and its central understanding of free, authentic identity. Next, I will explain why film is an appropriate medium for helping us understand both traditional and evolving existentialist ideals. The answer to this lies in the fact that Existentialism is a movement that has always been defined by the overlap of art, philosophy, and literature; film is therefore no exception. Several traditional existentialist films will be discussed to support this. Then, two examples of contemporary existentialist films, *Barbie* and *Poor Things,* will be explored in-depth. In analysis of each film, issues of identity are explicitly credited for the characters' growing consciousness of their existence. Ultimately, I will assert that while the notion that consciousness of finitude is independent of gender, race, and class identity may have been accepted in the past, contemporary depictions of Existentialism demonstrate that it has taken on a new lens, one that must include other considerations of what it means to be human.

Traditional Existentialism: Connections Between Identity and Consciousness of Finitude

Broadly defined, Existentialism is an area of philosophy that contemplates the nature of human existence, and how humans are free to define this existence. A major theme of Existentialism revolves around the notion that human existence, particularly concerning the fact that it makes us consciously aware of our finitude, provokes a deeply uncomfortable reaction in man. Martin Heidegger, a trailblazer in existentialist philosophy, positioned these feelings of uncomfortability at the core of his understanding. As Glenn Gray, author of *The Idea of Death in Existentialism* notes, "Death is in fact, with Martin Heidegger, near the center of his interpretation of reality and human existence. They assert emphatically that a proper understanding of, and right attitude toward, death, one's own death, is not only a *sine qua non*

of genuine experience, but also of gaining any illumination about the nature of the world."[1]

Traditionally, the consciousness of one's finitude comes about as the individual wrestles with the tension of living despite existing in a meaningless world that is bound to end someday. It is not referenced as being in connection with other parts of the human body or mind, but rather something separate, so abstract that it must be considered independently of other factors. As Gray depicts, "If someone asks us what is troubling us when we are oppressed with the feeling of the uncanny, we are likely to answer: 'It is nothing.' For what has oppressed us is the primary institution that we are not sustained by infinite power and plenitude of being, as so many philosophers have taught."[2] When we feel 'anxious,' we cannot seem to point to any particular reason. Rather, according to traditional Existentialism, this anxiety is an implicit demonstration of man reckoning with their finitude. This, for Heidegger, can be described as literal nothingness, for "exist[ing] as a human being means to be[ing] exposed to the Nothingness."[3] Ultimately, this understanding of existence has come to be widely acknowledged by the field of Existentialism.

This is seen through the work of another major existentialist philosopher, Jean Paul Sartre. In a 1946 lecture, he emphasizes, "All humans are autonomous and therefore free to act as they wish. As a result, we must limit ourselves to reckoning only with those things that depend on our will, or on the set of probabilities that enable the action."[4] Essentially, true consciousness of our existence – or *despair* – can only come about by acting on the things that are directly within our control, and recognizing that others have the freedom to realize the same. Though identity is a topic of interest for traditional philosophers like Sartre (and Heidegger, too), his understanding of the term was almost exclusively considered through the concept of authentic and inauthentic identity. For instance, failing to express one's freedom by not engaging in experiences that would lead to the gain of greater consciousness would be considered inauthentic. Nevertheless, today's concept of identity is understood on a much broader level, with this paper focusing on the term in relation to certain aspects of one's way of living such as gender, race, and class; this notion seems to be much less present in traditional Existentialism.

It is important to note that while this was the dominant opinion of the field of Existentialism at the time, many philosophers did work to incorporate other conditions of being human into the awareness of one's existence. Simone de Beauvoir, for example, presented an incredible argument for how identity – particularly gender – can influence one's understanding of anxiety. In *The Second Sex,* she writes, "[A woman's] destiny is outside her, scattered in cities already built, on the faces of men…The young girl throws herself down into things with ardor, and the fact that she accomplishes nothing, that she is nothing, will make her impulses only the more passionate. Empty and unlimited, she seeks from within her nothingness to attain All."[5] In other words, man's mortality still brings about this concept of nothingness because of life's temporality and life's implications. A woman ultimately gains consciousness of her finitude as she understands her place in society. By acknowledging the onset of nothingness that the realization of one's finitude brings, de Beauvoir appeals to notions supported by traditional philosophers like Heidegger and Sartre, making her undoubtedly existential. Nonetheless, her choice to focus on gender and nothingness is rather unique, proving the role of identity (in regards to aspects like class, race, and gender) to be present, but not dominant at this time.

Franz Fanon, on the other hand, was a black exzzistentialist philosopher who articulated how his consciousness of existence was felt in connection to his identity, specifically his race.

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1   J. Glenn Gray, "The Idea of Death in Existentialism." The Journal of *Philosophy* 48, no. 5 (1951): 114. https://doi.org/10.2307/2020575.

2   J. Glenn Gray, "The Idea of Death in Existentialism," 116.

3   Martin Heidegger, "What is Metaphysics," *Existence and Being*, 32.

4   Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism* (Yale University Press, 2007), 34.

5   Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (London: Vintage Classics, 2015).

In his work *Black Skin, White Masks,* Fanon touches on the tension between his identity as a black man and the quality of his existence in a society that views this identity as inferior. He writes, "The black man wants to be white. The white man is sealed in his whiteness…Society cannot escape human influences. Man is what brings society into being. The prognosis is in the hands of those willing to get rid of the worm-eaten roots of the structure."[6] Essentially, Fanon is acknowledging that man is free to act in ways that pit black men against white men, but that does not stop man from also feeling uncomfortable with how this freedom plays out. By centering the concept of existence in his philosophy, especially regarding the freedom that is granted to us by our existence, Fanon is undoubtedly a traditional existential philosopher. However, his choice to narrow in on being through the lens of aspects like race signals that identity was a worthwhile component in gaining consciousness of the self, which was less supported at this time. A shift in the value of the relationship between identity and consciousness of finitude was not only possible, but likely.

Ultimately, the prominence of Simone de Beauvoir's and Franz Fanon's philosophies at the time of their writing seems to suggest that a relationship between one's consciousness toward their mortality and identity has already been established. Yet, while their works were widely read, the ideas contained within them were much less agreed upon. The nature of these two authors' philosophers can therefore be considered the minority opinion, one that was crucial for the advancement of Existentialism, but not quite ready to be fully acknowledged yet. Instead, Fanon and de Beauvoir demonstrate that a shift in understanding of consciousness as an independent being to consciousness as a direct result of identity was possible, and even more importantly, oncoming. Fanon and de Beauvoir were consequently trailblazers in their field, as they were able to push the boundaries of existence and finitude while remaining traditionally existential.

Finally, it is worth noting that major traditional existentialist philosophers like Martin Heidegger and Jean-Paul Sartre also came to familiarize themselves with this more postmodern concept of identity as time went on. By undergoing his own experiences, Sartre became more concerned for the self in the political realm, which often incorporates gender, race, and class. Heidegger, on the other hand, came to release work that advocated for man's connection to the external world, known as *The Fourfold.* This proves that even traditional existentialist philosophers were capable of noticing an incoming shift to the field. Existentialist films have continued to depict this over time.

Film as a Valid Expression of Philosophy

These concepts of Existentialism have long been expressed by various mediums of art like theater, poetry, and cinema. The use of fiction plays a particularly important role here, as it allows the audience to imagine perspectives and situations that are not necessarily able to be portrayed in real life, such as questions of death and the afterlife. Prominent existential philosophers like Jean Paul Sartre and Frederich Nietzsche provide notable examples of this. Sartre's *No Exit* is a play that depicts the obstacle that comes with one's radical freedom to do as they please - the fact that other people are free to act as well. This work illustrates three people who are trapped in hell and forced to recollect the actions that got them there. By watching the lives of these three characters unfold, one can consider the possible consequences of their actions, and especially contemplate how they would act in the situation themselves. As Adrian Van Den Hoven, author of *Sartre's Conception of Theater* points out, "In [*No Exit*], Sartre's theater functions as a privileged space in which the imagination - unreality - reigns supreme and where the dramatist can entertain situations that are impossible in reality, and

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6   Fanon, Frantz, 1925-1961, *Black Skin, White Masks.* New York : [Berkeley, Calif.], Grove Press ; Distributed by Publishers Group West (2008): 11-13.

hence, remain closed to him as a philosopher."[7] This proved to be quite successful, as *No Exit* continues to be viewed as a major work in the field of Existentialism.

Another major philosopher, Frederich Nietzsche also heavily relied on the use of art to express his understanding of existence. One notable example is *Thus Spoke Zarathustra,* a fictional story depicting a conversation between a man, Zarathustra, and a group of animals. Here, Nietzsche presents work that is dramatic in performance, but contemplative in nature. For example, as Zarathustra comes to terms with the idea of his mortality, he exclaims, "I, Zarathustra, the advocate of life, the advocate of suffering - I call you, my most abysmal thought! My abyss speaks, I have turned my ultimate depth into the light!"[8] Art serves to depict real questions being asked in Existentialism at this time. Considering traditional Existentialism was quite divided between how one should react to their radical freedom (either optimistically or pessimistically), *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* provided readers with a space to consider how they wish to react to their finitude without directly facing it themselves. This, like Sartre's *No Exit,* was widely embraced. Art stands to be an appropriate depiction of widely accepted ideals in existentialist philosophy.

Cinema is a particularly useful method of painting existential scenarios. Jean Paul Sartre felt as though film was one of the greatest ways to express current trends in philosophy. According to the authors of *Existentialism and Contemporary Cinema,* "[Sartre] claimed that film offers a broader horizon than theater, pointing out that one can embrace more realistically in film the collective and the crowd."[9] Another film scholar, William Pamerleau, writes, "In advocating that film can be a tool for understanding existentialist themes, there are two levels at which filmic insights can be directed: the theoretical…and the personal."[10] In other words, film allows one to digest concepts of Existentialism by engaging in portrayals that run parallel, but do not come in direct contact with, the person engaging in the thought experiment. Although this is performed through several forms of art, cinema is especially effective at this because it depicts characters and instances that are relatable and coherent to us as humans, although the concepts being contemplated are rather challenging.

A plethora of philosophical films across a wide range of time exist to support this notion. In line with traditional existential philosophy, many of these films address major concepts like consciousness of existence with minimal connection to aspects of identity like gender, race, and class. Jean-Luc Godard's *Breathless* (1960) illustrates the reckless life of Michel Poiccard, a man who, in light of embracing his finitude, strived to live life to the fullest (though sometimes in inappropriate ways). *Shame* is a 1968 Swedish film that follows the story of a young, apolitical couple during a period of civil war. Though they do eventually engage in political conversation as the war progresses, the fact that they were able to notice feelings of discomfort regarding finitude while remaining outside of their political context for some time suggests that true awareness of one's existence, and therefore finitude, comes on independently of other factors. *Elevator to the Gallows* (1958) is another major existentialist film. In this film, a businessman chooses to murder his boss, who also happens to be his mistress' husband. This leads to a rather peculiar chain of events that forces the characters to consider the complexity of life and death, but not necessarily through the lens of how identity plays into it. Lastly, the 1972 film *Solaris* depicts a man's mission to a space station on a distant planet, in which he must investigate why the crew members aboard the station are going mad. This forces him to undergo the very conditions that are leading others to become radically conscious of themselves. Regardless, this

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7   Adrian Van Den Hoven, "Sartre's Conception Of Theater: Theory And Practice," *Sartre Studies International* 18, no. 2 (2012): 60. http://www.jstor.org/stable/42705197.

8   Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, 1883-1885, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: a Book for All and None* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 233.

9   Jean-Pierre Boulé and Enda McCaffrey, eds, *Existentialism and Contemporary Cinema: A Sartrean Perspective* (New York, NY: Berghahn Books, Incorporated, 2011), 6.

10   William C Pamerleau, *Existentialist Cinema* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 36.

film, as well as all of the others mentioned so far, does not place the influence of identity at the center of the plot.

These films narrow in on issues of authenticity and mortality as being of primary importance, while factors like gender, race, and class are merely secondary to the story. Traditional existentialist film is compatible with the philosophical notions it attempts to depict, such as the disconnect between the consciousness of existence and gender, race, and class. The fact that some of the individuals creating these films – such as Jean-Luc Godard – have been noted referencing existentialist thinkers like Martin Heidegger and Jean Paul Sartre at the time of their works' production provides even more support for this.

Nonetheless, traditional existentialist film does not only portray instances in which consciousness is considered disconnected from other human conditions. *The Last Laugh* (1924) tells of a man who loses his job as a hotel doorman. To him, this job is everything; by losing it, he loses part of his identity. Consequently, the man is ultimately forced to reconcile with the uncomfortable feelings that follow. The existence of this film indicates that at least some traditional existentialist philosophers were beginning to consider the relationship between one's consciousness of their finitude and identity – particularly those things that involve class, race, and gender. However, the overwhelming majority of films during this early period did not include identity in their contemplation, and therefore only suggest that a shift was coming. Instead, the inclusion of identity in depicting existence and mortality through film would come to popularization much later; expressions of Existentialism today are much more plentiful and explicit about their connection to identity.

Barbie: Identity as Gender

Greta Gerwig's *Barbie* (2023) depicts the story of Stereotypical Barbie venturing from Barbieland – a place where all of the Barbies and Kens live – to the "real world," in Los Angeles, California. In Barbieland, women are taken to be superior to men. In other words, "she's Barbie," while, "he's just Ken."[11] Barbie was incredibly content with this kind of societal structure, as she never knew anything different. Yet, she begins to experience feelings of death and anxiety that she cannot quite place. Even in times of great celebration, she was left to wonder whether those around her also contemplated the absurdity of human life. Eventually, she discovers that she must enter the real world and find the human girl who is playing with her, as she (the human) is the one having these irrepressible thoughts of death. Once in the real world, she quickly learns that gender roles are quite reversed, and is forced to decide how to react.

Shortly after arriving in the real world, Barbie says, "I feel kind of ill at ease. I don't know the word for it, but it's like I'm conscious, but it's…myself that I am conscious of."[12] Ken (who somehow managed to tag along on Barbie's journey), responds, "I'm feeling what can only be described as admired, but not ogled at, and there's no undertone of violence."[13] Barbie notes, "Mine very much has an undertone of violence."[14] This is Barbie's (and Ken's) first clue that the real world's structure is nothing like Barbieland. Immediately upon realizing this imbalance, and her position in it as a woman, she starts to feel poorly. This feeling only continues later in the film, as Barbie notes, "I am starting to get all those 'weirdo' feelings like I have fear with no specific object. What is that?" Somebody behind her responds, "It's called anxiety. I have it too."[15]

Heidegger would consider this to be the phenomenon of *Angst*, in which man must reconcile with the feelings that invade Being, the consciousness of our finitude, and the fact

11   *Barbie,* directed by Greta Gerwig, Warner Bros, 2023.
12   *Barbie,* directed by Greta Gerwig, (Warner Bros, 2023), 1:25:00.
13   *Barbie,* 1:25:00.
14   Barbie, 1:25:00.
15   Barbie, 1:15:00.

that there is no metaphysical foundation to the world. This type of reaction, however, is rather unrelated to Barbie's identity as a woman according to *Angst*. It is instead connected to the absurdities that come with being human, such as mortality. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger writes, "The fact that what is threatening is *nowhere* characterizes what *Angst* is about. Angst 'does not know' what it is about which it is anxious. But 'nowhere' does not mean nothing; rather, region in general lies therein, and disclosedness of the world in general for essentially spatial being-in."[16] Essentially, anxiety is not brought about by external-facing factors like identity for Heidegger but is rather the direct result of one's internal contemplation of oneself as a human.

Yet, Barbie proves otherwise. It is not until her understanding of her place in the real world as a woman comes along that she begins to feel anxious. She may not be able to place the cause of her anxiety herself at the time, but it presents clear ties to her realization that women are not perceived as gracefully in the real world compared to Barbieland. Heidegger posits that man is only able to cope with their consciousness of being through an experience of their own. He writes, "Existence is decided only by each Dasein (being) itself in the manner of seizing upon or neglecting such possibilities. We come to terms with the question of existence always only through existence itself."[17] This rings true for Barbie, as it is not until she is forced to experience inequality according to gender that she is thrown into feelings of discomfort and radical consciousness herself. Ultimately, this suggests that certain tenets of traditional Existentialism do persist today, and are being activated by contemporary films like *Barbie,* but that concepts such as identity (in direct relation to these tenets) are also increasing in relevance. This shift deserves to be addressed.

It is safe to say that Barbie did not initially cope well with this realization. At one point in the film, Ken returns to Barbieland without Barbie to tell all of the other Kens what he has learned about the real world. By the time Barbie returns, the Kens have turned Barbieland into "Kenland," and the men have transformed the social structure of men and women to match that of the real world. In response, she turns to the woman who was playing with her in the real world and cries out, "Why did you wish me into your messed up world using your complicated human thoughts and feelings? Barbieland was perfect before. I was perfect before."[18] She then lies down on the ground and refuses to get up, stating, "I am just going to sit here and wait and hope that one of the more leadership oriented Barbies snaps out of this."[19] She proceeds to stay like this for a considerable amount of time as those around her try to restore the past conditions of Barbieland. Nonetheless, she is eventually convinced that saving Barbieland is something she needs to be a part of and returns to her role as a key leader in the situation.

This chain of events appeals to a kind of optimism that Jean Paul Sartre takes in traditional Existentialism. In a lecture titled *Existentialism is a Humanism,* Sartre notes, "[Existentialism] cannot be called a pessimistic description of man, for the doctrine is more optimistic, since it declares that man's destiny lies within himself. Nor is Existentialism an attempt to discourage man from taking action, since it tells him that the only hope resides in his actions."[20] The fact that man is free to do as they wish should provoke positive, act-forward feelings, rather than bring man down regarding the idea of death. Though she does not initially respond this way, Barbie does eventually come to accept this kind of thinking – so much so that she decides to commit to humanity wholeheartedly in the end. *Barbie* is therefore undoubtedly existential and is quite compatible with several traditional existential philosophers' theories. However, this contemporary film takes the field of Existentialism one step further. It is not the simple fact that life is uncomfortable, as traditional philosophers like Heidegger and Sartre would

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16   Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (1962), 174.
17   Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time,* 54.
18   *Barbie,* 48:00.
19   *Barbie,* 48:00.
20   Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism* (Yale University Press, 2007), 40.

argue, but the evolution of Barbie's identity as a woman that compels her to realize these tenets of Existentialism. Considering Barbie viewed Barbieland as "perfect" before this shift, it is unlikely that this kind of realization would have come upon her without the impact of coming to understand her gender identity.

Poor Things: Identity as Gender and Class

Yorgos Lanthimos' *Poor Things* (2023), on the other hand, illustrates the life of Bella Baxter, a woman who is brought back to life by an unorthodox scientist after committing suicide. The scientist revives Bella by replacing her former brain with that of a newborn child's, thereby giving her a second chance at life from the ground up. Once she is quite developed, she decides to set out and reacquaint herself with the world. However, throughout this journey, she encounters many male characters who wish to exhibit control over her. This leads her down an incredible path of self-discovery, in which she is forced to reconcile the relationship between her identity – especially through issues of gender and class – and the feelings of consciousness that at one point drove her to suicide.

Godwin Baxter, the scientist who revived her from suicide, is the first man to express a desire to control Bella in her new life. This could be considered, at least partially, a fatherly type of supervision. The life that Godwin has built for Bella is all her new brain has ever known, leading him to be apprehensive about her desire to travel without him. Yet, when Godwin voices this hesitation, Bella responds, "You hold Bella too tight. I must set forth into the waters…Kiss me and set me forth. If you do not, Bella's insides shall turn rotten with hate."[21] As Bella expresses an awareness of the scientist's control over her, and the desire to end it, she demonstrates that she is coming to understand pieces of her identity that directly influence how she reacts to life. Nonetheless, this identity is not completely realized until she is separated from Godwin and the lifestyle that once surrounded her.

Bella first travels to Lisbon, Portugal with a man named Duncan Wedderburn. Mr. Wedderburn had previously come to assist Godwin in drafting a contract, in which he met Bella and ultimately proposed they run away together. Interestingly, Mr. Wedderburn is the first man that Bella engages in sexual intercourse with. She instantly becomes enamored by the act, shaping herself by the experiences that came of it. As a result, her identity as a woman begins to harden. Eventually, Duncan Wedderburn comes to be the second man who tries to exhibit control over Bella, causing her to double down on her developing identity. At one point, as he is expressing frustration that Bella keeps running off without him, she answers, "You are crossed at Bella's outings and adventures, and yet we must discover by whim, as spoken by Duncan Wedderburn to Bella Baxter on day one of our Lisbon love affair."[22] Here, Bella points out the irony in Mr. Wedderburn's asking Bella to stop behaving in a way that he would, and at one point did, support himself.

The pair continued to travel to several other places – many of which by ship, as Mr. Wedderburn had tricked Bella into boarding a cruise in hopes of limiting her outings – and ultimately ended their journey together in Paris, France. The two had no funds left to move forward, so as a solution, Bella resorts to prostitution. Mr. Wedderburn was not happy with this course of action at all, for he could not imagine a woman that he had claimed for himself lying with another man. Yet, Bella does not care. In response to his anger, she calmly and confidently states, "We should definitely never marry. I am a flawed, experimenting person and I will need a husband with a more forgiving disposition."[23] Keeping in mind that Bella was driven to suicide in her previous life, it would seem that she was once quite unforgiving of herself. Nonetheless, by coming to understand her identity as a woman, and remaining firm in it, she was able to maintain her autonomy against numerous male captors. Overall, this

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21   *Poor Things*, directed by Yorgos Lanthimos (Searchlight Pictures, 2023), 37:40.
22   *Poor Things*, 54:20.
23   *Poor Things*, 1:30:00.

demonstrates the growing prevalence of aspects like gender and class in understanding one's finitude.

The last man to try and control Bella is her husband from her previous life, General Alfred Blessington. At this point, Bella is aware of the fact that her previous life ended in suicide, and she yearns for a greater understanding of it. Consequently, after noticing a photograph of her in the newspaper, General Blessington immediately arrives to bring her back home, and she quickly obliges. Once there, she realizes that this past life is no longer who Bella is. At one point, the General mentions that he is aware of Bella's history with prostitution. In response, Bella simply and shamelessly responds, "I was [a prostitute] in Paris. I tired of it, but it was fascinating."[24] Rather than General Blessington lightening up at this remark, he doubled down, expressing that he plans to never let her go now that she is back in his life. Yet, she fearlessly responds, "I am not territory."[25] It is here that she truly comes to understand not only what led her to suicide in her past life, but what caused her to live so optimistically despite it in her new life. Her identity as a woman, built by the experiences she was given by truly exploring what it means to be human, granted her an entirely distinct relationship with mortality.

Bella's constant need to escape the men that entrap is deeply resemblant of the traditional existentialist notion known as *despair*, coined by Jean Paul Sartre. Simply put, *despair* comes with the realization that "hell is other people."[26] Though one is free to act in whichever they choose, so too is everyone else. There is a possibility of being made unhappy, even if one makes it a point to live exactly according to their will. Although Bella refused to act in any way other than her own, all of the men in her life possessed the freedom to try and change this, and they shamelessly did so. This only becomes more prevalent as the concept of identity is introduced. The men feel as though they have a right to control Bella. Yet, as she comes to embrace her gender identity, she can fearlessly and cleverly escape their grip at times of near-death. Overall, the fact that both Bella and the men in her life had the freedom to act in ways that were in direct tension with one another seems to assert that Sartre's traditional concept of *despair* is present, but that the concept of identity concerning one's comfortability with their humanity is also very much at play.

While Sartre would likely agree with the freedom by which Bella Baxter lives in her new life, it is important to note that he would be much less approving of the fact that she chose to end her first one. In his work *Being and Nothingness,* he notes, "Sucide cannot be considered as an end of life…Since it is an act of my life, indeed, it itself requires a meaning which only the future can give to it; but as it is the last act of my life, it is denied the future. Suicide is an absurdity which causes my life to be submerged in the absurd."[27] Essentially, Sartre feels as though suicide eliminates the opportunity for one to truly realize, and therefore embrace, the discomfort of mortality. Nevertheless, the role of identity could provide an important link to this gap. Bella can embrace the notion of death in her new life, and live boldly despite it, only by coming to understand her gender identity. The concept of identity therefore proves to be growing in prevalence within the field of Existentialism[28].

Class plays a similar role in influencing Bella's identity, influencing how she regards her mortality. Bella is far from poor in her new life, though she is not terribly wealthy either. This leads her to live life more humbly, as seen by the experiences she has while on the ship with Duncan Wedderburn. On the cruise, Bella befriends a man by the name of Harry Astley. He proved to be great company for Bella, but he also thought her to be quite naive, and too

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24   *Poor Things*, 2:02:20.
25   *Poor Things*, 2:02:20.
26   Jean-Paul Sartre, 1905-1980, *No Exit, (Huis Clos) a Play in One Act: & The Flies (Les Mouches) a Play in Three Acts* (New York, A.A. Knopf, 1975).
27   Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (Washington Square Press, 1956), 691.
28   It is important to note that though he is not mentioned in this analysis, Albert Camus was also deeply influential to the topic of suicide in traditional Existentialist philosophy.

optimistic considering the horrors of the world. In an attempt to show Bella just how cruel the world can be, Harry takes her to a high-class hotel that sits atop a hill. Down below this hill, he reveals, are hundreds of starving people who cannot afford to live. Shocked, Bella yells, "We have to go down there and help them!" Yet, Harry only replies, "How will we do that? [If] we go down there, they will rightfully rope us, rob us, and rape us, and if they were here and were there, we'd do the same to them."[29] This quickly throws Bella into an episode of anger and sadness as she tries to run to the starving class, but ultimately falls to her knees, sobbing. Once back on land, she gathers all of the money in her suite and asks an employee on the ship to deliver it to the poor by the hotel. When asked why, she simply answers, "Who am I? Lying in a feather bed, while dead babies lie in a ditch."[30]

Many traditional existentialist philosophers like Martin Heidegger believed that the realization of one's being, and therefore one's finitude, can come only after a radical realization of the self and its purpose in the world. This is often provoked by the challenging experiences that we are forced to endure as humans. For Bella, the image of severe inequality between the rich atop the hotel and the poor below it was enough to throw her into a more elaborate consideration of her existence. Why does she somehow get to live well, while others do not? For Heidegger, it is precisely this contemplation that brings about true being. In his work *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, he writes, "Thinking only begins at the point where we have come to know that reason, glorified for centuries, is the most obstinate adversary of thinking."[31] Existence cannot be explained by reason alone, as it is much more complex than that. Reason does not call for men and women to be placed at structural odds with each other, nor does it call for the same inequality in class structure, yet we have made a world that reflects so. It is therefore necessary to understand that life is not defined by a strict standard of expectations, for once this is realized, one can truly begin to live for Heidegger. This traditional concept is undoubtedly depicted in *Poor Things,* as the fact that Bella is even able to live a second life in this way seems to defy reason enough. Nevertheless, this notion is much more enhanced by the concept of identity, as she is only able to entertain these realizations by processing certain aspects of herself like class and gender.

Finally, Bella is forced to consider her existence and aspects of identity like class by learning of the way she used to carry herself in her past life. Upon agreeing to reconnect with her previous husband, General Blessington, she is brought back to their once-shared home and reminded of the wealth she used to have. Even further, the General recollects times in which they used to disadvantage those who were of a lesser class than them. For instance, as a server came in to prepare the table for dinner, the General signaled his dog to bark in a way that would frighten the woman. It did, causing her to drop all of the food she had been carrying in. Bella was appalled at this scene; she could not stand to consider a life where she would be okay with this mistreatment simply based on wealth. Yet, this observation is exactly what leads her to understand her choice to commit suicide in the first place. Bella had minimal connection to her identity in her past life, so much so that she preferred to eliminate it. Now, as she has come to understand herself through aspects of identity like class and gender, she can feel much more dedicated to developing her existence. Moreover, the optimistic nature by which Bella operates in her new life is closely resemblant to the optimism that Sartre advocated for in works like *Existentialism is a Humanism.* Identity is therefore proving to be a crucial component in contemporary Existentialism's understanding of man's response to existence and mortality, as shown by recent films like *Poor Things.*

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29   *Poor Things*, 1:16:55.
30   *Poor Things*, 1:19:15.
31   Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, First ed, (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 112.

Connections and Contrasts Between *Barbie* and *Poor Things*

These two films demonstrate the opposing ways that man can choose to react to the gaining of consciousness of their existence. In *Barbie,* although she ends up being so enamored by the concept of humanity that she decides to become human herself, she initially responds with great pessimism. She physically lies down on the ground, refuses to move, and tells all those around to "go on without her."[32] Upon realizing that her identity provoked a certain type of treatment from the world, and therefore a greater consciousness of her mortality, she is overwhelmed with inaction. Bella Baxter, on the other hand, saw this realization of her identity as a type of liberation. Upon discovering aspects of her past life, she realizes that she is much happier with the quality of her new identity. She therefore takes on a rather optimistic response to being, one that is likely to be praised by influential existentialists like Jean Paul Sartre. As he emphasizes in his work *Being and Nothingness*, "By being interiorized, death is individualized. Death is no longer the great unknowable which limits the human; it is the phenomenon of my personal life which makes this life a unique life. I become responsible for my death as my life."[33] In other words, one's realization of their finitude does not have to be a limitation on life. Instead, it should be taken as an opportunity to live how you truly wish, in ways you can directly control.

The difference in reaction between Barbie and Bella Baxter demonstrates that film continues to be a prominent illustration of Existentialism today, though their respective emphasis on identity through gender, race, and class indicates a shift on how that imagery is perceived. Nonetheless, it is just as important to note that Barbie does eventually take an optimistic stance on life as well. Despite the unfortunate truths she was exposed to, and the passive reaction she gave in response, Barbie chose to become human in the end. Once she came to truly understand her identity as a woman, she chose to live freely amongst them. Ultimately, this similarity between Barbie and Bella is valuable because it depicts the shift in philosophy according to identity, while still managing to maintain many traditional existentialist ideals like optimism and freedom.

Broad Counters

Despite all of this, critics may still be inclined to argue that while this assertion that Existentialism is closely connected to identity may be somewhat true, it is mortality that remains at the forefront of the issue. This remains in line with traditional Existentialism. This may be true, but as we have seen through this in-depth analysis of contemporary existentialist film, features of Existentialism and issues of identity politics have become so entangled over time that it becomes nearly impossible to designate one component as being more important than the other in humanity. This line of thinking has also gone so far as to influence other major fields of philosophy such as Posthumanism, which advocates for a decentering of humanity in relation to other life forms. Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex,* for instance, ignited a spark in many other disciplines to explore the role of identity in existence. As Christine Daigle, author of *Can Existentialism Be a Posthumanism? Beauvoir as a Precursor to Material Feminism* reveals, "The phenomenological ontology upon which [*The Second Sex*] rest allows for this shift to occur and has inspired numerous philosophers to explore and develop the themes launched by Beauvoir."[34] The concept of identity with aspects like gender, race, and class, has not only grown in prevalence in the field of Existentialism, but has also started to bleed over into other fields of philosophy. This indicates that the connection between one's identity and the consciousness of their finitude is just as vital as mortality in understanding the evolution

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32   *Barbie,* directed by Greta Gerwig, (Warner Bros, 2023).

33   Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (Washington Square Press, 1956), 682.

34   Christine Daigle, "Can Existentialism Be a Posthumanism? Beauvoir as Precursor to Material Feminism." *Philosophy Today*, 64, no. 3 (June 1, 2020): 764. https://search-ebscohost-com.cnu. idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=phl&AN=PHL2407312&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

of Existentialism.

Moreover, some may be inclined to argue that considering society has come to understand aspects of identity like gender, race, and class as social constructs that we create ourselves, Existentialism is an outdated field of philosophy anyway. If so, these assertions would be better positioned in philosophical areas. Nonetheless, given the number of existential cinematic examples that continue to be produced and contemplated today, advancements in the field of Existentialism are still occurring, and therefore very much worth addressing.

Conclusion

Overall, these findings do not mean to invalidate traditional Existentialism in any way, but rather serve to indicate an important shift in how this field is contemplated today. The examination of contemporary existentialist films such as *Barbie* and *Poor Things* reveals a significant development in the portrayal of human existence, one that considers identity with the way it brings about our consciousness, rather than exclusively about how we live. Consequently, while traditional Existentialism focused primarily on the abstract contemplation of finitude apart from other conditions of the human body/mind, contemporary existentialist film narrows in on the complexities between aspects that shape identity (such as gender, race, and class) and consciousness of existence. Therefore, the characters in films like Barbie and Poor Things confront not only the awareness of their finitude but also the intersections of their identities. This suggests that viewers should reconsider traditional understandings of Existentialism, as film is a useful medium for depicting supported trends in philosophy. Ultimately, when asked, can contemporary expressions of Existentialism be understood by the contemplation of man's mortality alone? The answer is simple: modern existentialist films such as *Barbie* and *Poor Things* demonstrate that existential autonomy cannot solely be explained in relation to one's mortality but by one's complex position within aspects of identity like race, gender, and class.

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About the Author

Katelyn (Kate) Bennett is a senior majoring in International Affairs and Philosophy with minors in Leadership Studies and Philosophy of Law. Throughout her time here, she has engaged in a number of involvements, such as the Student Government Association, Phi Alpha Delta Pre-Law Fraternity, the Student Diversity and Equality Council, and Greek Life. She has also dedicated a number of years to conducting research with the Reiff Center for Human Rights and Conflict Resolution. This project served as her Senior Defense for the Philosophy Department, after she was inspired by the practice of engaging with existentialist philosophy through cinema in Dr. Joe Balay's Existentialism course the year prior. Following graduation at Christopher Newport University, she will be attending the University of Richmond Law School to study International Human Rights.

Mystery of the Minoans: The Snake Goddess, Her Identity, and Legacy
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Abstract

The Minoan snake goddess is one of the most well known figures amongst ancient Mediterranean art historians. Appearing in sculpture, wall painting, and on jewelry, the snake goddess is a well-established art historical figure, though it is highly debated what she truly represents. Sir Arthur Evans, who put forth the canonical interpretation that is held today, argued that she was a goddess and the Minoan peoples operated under a priest-king, Minos, hence the name "Minoan." Rejecting the androcentric views of Evans, I argue that she is not a goddess at all, but a representation of the priestesses of the ancient Minoan religion. Analyzing the form and context of the figure of the Minoan snake priestess through art historical sources, I situate the Minoan snake priestess as an important figure in a Minoan society that operated under a more egalitarian social hierarchy. By formally analyzing three main representations of the Minoan snake priestess, as well as other supplemental works, I will use this information to support my argument. In this reinterpretation, my research will show that women held positions of power in this ancient Mediterranean society. Ultimately, my research will add nuance to how we understand gender roles in ancient Mediterranean society and how this ancient figure has even contributed to feminist movements today.

Introduction

Ancient art is filled with ambiguity. The lack of deciphered written records in most ancient civilizations makes it difficult to understand the meanings behind many artforms. This leaves many pieces of art, such as the Minoan Snake Goddess, open to interpretation when it comes to their exact identity or meaning. From the moment the snake goddess was discovered in the Palace of Minos at Knossos by Sir Arthur Evans, there have been assumptions made about her identity as a supposed "goddess," as well as about Minoan society as a whole. This has led to many misconceptions about the way the Minoans operated as a civilization, their religion, and their social hierarchy. I posit that the snake "goddess" is, rather, a priestess, as newfound evidence supports the fact that women held these specific positions of power. In order to support this claim, I will be analyzing multiple depictions of the Minoan Snake Goddess and identify key attributes that allude to her being a priestess rather than a goddess. In turn, this will inform our understanding of Minoan society as a whole, as I propose women held more important roles than previously believed by Evans. I will also be analyzing the ways the snake goddess figure has continued to inspire artists and the legacy the figure has established since her discovery at Knossos. Not only this, but the snake goddess statuette has had a continued influence that holds a special place in art history and is an important figure to modern day feminism. By rejecting the original androcentric ideas of Sir Arthur Evans and utilizing formal analysis, we can determine that the Minoan Snake Goddess actually represents the priestesses of the Minoan religion; this information therefore supports the idea that women held elevated roles in Minoan society, as they were not only limited to domestic roles.

The Minoans

The Minoans were a thriving Mediterranean civilization located on the Greek island of Crete from 3100 BCE to about 1000 BCE.[1] Crete is the largest Greek island and the fifth largest in the Mediterranean, spanning 160 miles from east to west; the terrain varies from snow capped mountains to fertile plateaus and sandy beaches.[2] The diverse landscape and its location at the crossroads of three different continents, has attracted traders and visitors for tens of thousands of years.[3] The Minoans were skilled in the arts and produced pottery, sculptures, seals, wall paintings–specifically frescoes–and remarkable architectural sites. Frescoes were possibly one of the most common art forms of Minoan civilization, as they were used to decorate the walls of buildings. Frescoes are made by mixing pigment directly into wet plaster, allowing artists to create beautiful murals that were embedded directly into the wall. The Minoans utilized a primary color palette and depicted landscape and leisure scenes.

The Minoans, referenced by some as "the first great civilization of Crete," were suggested by Sir Arthur Evans to have been refugees forced to the island from northern Egypt by invaders over 5,000 years ago.[4] Though scholars do not know for sure where the Minoans came from, Evans made this assumption due to the fact that, in the era he was working, it was impossible to fathom a thriving and sophisticated Aegean civilization that did not in some way tie to Egypt, whose extensive religious complexity, politics, and antiquity had been renowned.[5] In fact, Arthur Evans divided the chronology of the Minoan civilization into Early, Middle, and Late, similarly to the Old, Middle, and New Kingdom model of Egypt.[6] For the purposes of this paper, we will be focusing on the Middle Minoan period, also referred to as the Bronze Age, and the Palace of Minos, excavated by Evans in the early 20th century.

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1 Jarrett A. Lobell, "The Minoans of Crete," *Archaeology* 68, no. 3 (2015): 30-31.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
4 Jarrett A. Lobell, "The Minoans of Crete," *Archaeology* 68, no. 3 (2015): 30.
5 Ibid.
6 Ibid.

Sir Arthur Evans: An Introduction

Sir Arthur John Evans was born on July 8th, 1851, in Hertfordshire, England.[7] He was the son of John Evans, an extremely successful paper manufacturer, antiquary, and explorer.[8] He grew up wealthy, facilitating his knowledge of antiquity and artifacts.[9] Specifically interested in ancient coins, Arthur continued his research and he published his first paper at Oxford in the *Numismatic Chronicle* at age twenty.[10] At age twenty-four, after graduating with an education in History, he traveled to the Balkans in 1875 in order to expand on European travels; there, he studied ancient sites and their antiquities.[11] His archaeological work was published in *Archeologia* 48 and 49 in 272 pages.[12]

He eventually married Margaret Freeman, daughter of Edward Freeman, a historian, in September of 1878, and the couple relocated to Ragusa, Sicily.[13]In 1882, the couple made Oxford their home where, in 1884, Evans became Keeper of the Ashmolean, and is considered to be the museum's second founder; throughout this time he still continued on with his research, publishing papers on numismatics and on excavations.[14] Unfortunately, Margaret passed away in 1893, after fourteen years of traveling around the Mediterranean, helping Arthur with his research.[15]

In 1892, Evans met and became friends with Federico Halbherr, an Italian anthropologist, who ultimately inspired Arthur's fascination with the island of Crete. In March of 1894, the two would arrive on the Greek island, where they would survey the site of Knossos throughout the 1890s, along with the help from archaeologist Joseph Hatzidhakis.[16] In 1900, Evans and a team of archaeologists began excavating the Palace of Minos at Knossos, and they continued working there until 1931.[17]

The Palace of Minos and The Labyrinth

The Palace of Minos itself is large and complex, and has been considered to be maze-like, with no single straightforward point of entry.[18] The design of the palace is likely what connected it to the myth of the Labyrinth. According to this myth, King Minos of Crete had proclaimed that he would sacrifice a bull to the god Poseidon; however, he had grown fond of the bull, so he did not sacrifice it.[19] Poseidon, a vengeful god, therefore caused Minos' wife to fall in love with the bull, a union which ultimately produced the Minotaur, a half man half bull named after King Minos.[20] In order to house the monster, a Greek in the court of Minos named Daidalos created a maze-like structure in which the Minotaur was kept in the center;

7   Peter Warren, "Sir Arthur Evans and His Achievement," *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies,* 44, (2000): 199.
8   Ibid.
9   Ibid.
10   Ibid.
11   Ibid.
12   Ibid.
13   Peter Warren, "Sir Arthur Evans and His Achievement," *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies,* 44, (2000): 199.
14   Ibid., 200.
15   Ibid.
16   Ibid.
17   "Rebuilding the Palace of Minos at Knossos," Ashmolean Museum, Accessed April 3, 2024. https://www.ashmolean.org/article/rebuilding-the-palace-of-minos-at-knossos#:~:text=Sir%20 Arthur%20Evans%20began%20excavating,BCE%2C%20using%20modern%20building%20 materials.
18   Sterling Dow, "The Minoan Thalassocracy," *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 79 (1967): 5.
19   Ibid., 4.
20   Sterling Dow, "The Minoan Thalassocracy," *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 79 (1967): 4.

this maze was called the Labyrinth.[21] On every eighth year, the Minotaur is fed seven youths and seven women who are sacrificed to the beast.[22] Theseus, a young Attic hero likened to Hercules, volunteered to sail to Crete to be a sacrifice to the Minotaur; there he falls in love with Minos' daughter, Ariadne, who aids him in finding his way out of the Labyrinth after he slays the Minotaur.[23]

With the maze-like design of the Palace of Minos, the presence of a bull fresco found in the palace the myth surrounding the Labyrinth and the Minotaur, along with the fact that all of these features are found in no other excavated site on Crete, it seems as though there are clear ties to the structure and mythology. Evans himself even believed he had discovered archeological proof of the mythological tale.[24]

Sir Arthur Evans, The Palace at Knossos, and the Snake Goddess

Inspired by this belief, Sir Arthur Evans began excavating the palace at Knossos in the early 20th century and this process led to the discovery of key artworks of Minoan culture, the most notable of which being the Minoan Snake Goddess, which has become one of the most well known ancient Greek figures.[25] It wasn't until late May 1903–an entire three years after the beginning of the excavation–when the snake goddess was discovered in a previously overlooked space lined with stone and covered by gypsum slabs.[26] Throughout his excavation at Knossos, Evans found many different artifacts including pottery and glazed earthenware ceramic figures known as faience figures, the Minoan Snake Goddess and Votary being two of them. The Snake Votary is particularly interesting because it is quite similar to the Snake Goddess figure, however it is indicated by Evans to be a figure of devotion, usually commissioned by a wealthy member of society who wishes to express their faithfulness, typically to a deity.

Though widely credited with discovering the Minoans, Arthur Evans actually borrowed terms such as "Minoan" from Karl Hoeck, who asserted that the island of Crete was inhabited by non-Hellenic peoples.[27] Using these ideas from Hoeck, Evans referred to the people of Crete as both Minoans and Mycenaens, and differentiated between the two by time period rather than racial and ethnic indicators.[28] The Palace at Knossos was considered to have been a Minoan palace, according to Evans, placing it in the time period from 2100-1600 BCE.[29] Of the faience figures discovered by Evans at Knossos, the most well known figure of the Snake Goddess (Figure 1) is the smaller of the two. It is freestanding, wearing a flounced skirt, a bare-breasted bodice, an elaborate headpiece, holding her arms upright with two snakes, one in each hand.

The figure, asserted by Evans to be "The Snake Goddess" or "Snake Mother" gave insight to the Minoan religion and the possible deities that were worshiped based on his assumptions. Evans describes the Snake Goddess and her role in the religious practices of Crete stating, "She is, in fact, the divine 'house-mother' of a cult still closely related to the simple domestic form in which the snake itself stands as the material incarnation of the household Spirit."[30] He seems

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21   Ibid.
22   Ibid.
23   Ibid.
24   Rachel Herschman, *Restoring the minoans - introduction*, Accessed April 5, 2024. http://assets. press.princeton.edu/chapters/i11119.pdf.
25   Diane Boze, "Creating History by Re-Creating the Minoan Snake Goddess," *Journal of Art Historiography* no. 15 (12, 2016): 1-31.
26   Kenneth D.S Lapatin, "Snake Goddesses, Fake Goddesses," *Archaeology* 54, no. 1 (2001): 33.
27   Ilse Schoep, "Building the Labyrinth: Arthur Evans and the Construction of Minoan Civilization," *American Journal of Archaeology* 122, no. 1 (2018): 6.
28   Ibid., 7.
29   Ibid.
30   Arthur Evans, "Snake in Primitive Cult Beneficent Genius," Essay, In *The Palace of Minos at Knossos*, 185–86. New York City, New York: Biblo and Tannen, 1964.

to make this assumption about the snake goddess as being a figure of a "divine house-mother" based on another version of the snake goddess made of limestone (Figure 2).

The limestone piece, which is larger than either of the two faience figures found in the palace, stands at 40 centimeters tall and is carved from one single block of limestone.[31] It is unclear where exactly this figure is from, as Evans introduces it without clarifying this. The supposed "goddess" carefully holds one snake in two hands, with her left hand holding the head of the snake steady while her right hand grasps the tail. She wears the same costume as the faience figures and a tiara separated in three bands. Overall, she lacks the symmetry found in the other two figures discovered at Knossos, as the tail of the snake nearly coils her ear and her head is slightly tilted towards the head of the snake.[32] Arthur Evans declares this piece a "Snake Mother" due to the fact that the snake gazes up at her and appears to be well-fed, claiming it to be a "tame snake."[33] Her divinity, he asserts, is signaled by her tiara-like headdress, which he states is reminiscent of a "cap of liberty."[34] Interestingly, a similar headdress is found on the second faience figure found at Knossos which Arthur Evans himself asserts as a votary figure (Figure 3).[35] In addition to the headdress, the votary also shares the same skirt and apron seen on the snake goddess figures. This inconsistency in naming figures when they are wearing identical costumes and holding the same animal is where Evans' claims of the faience figure at Knossos being that of a goddess feels unconvincing. Not only that, but fourteen unprovenanced "Minoan" goddesses infiltrated private collections and museums during the years following the discovery of the Minoan Snake Goddess.[36] Early publications even accuse those close to Evans for being responsible for the forgeries.[37] Genuine snake goddess figures were made of pieces carefully fitted together, and the majority of the fakes were made of single pieces.[38] This raises suspicion on the authenticity of the piece that Evans uses to base his "Mother Goddess" theory off of. Given the fact that Evans does not specify where exactly this limestone figure was found, we do not know where it originated from, making its provenance unclear, which certainly could point to the figure being one of the fakes.

Restoration Without Confirmation

Perhaps among the most controversial decisions on Evans' part was the restoration of the palace using modern materials, as seen in the Throne Room before restoration (Figure 4) and after (Figure 5).[39] Overall, Arthur Evans and his team were responsible for infamously reconstructing staircases, frescoes, and figures with little to no information about how the artifacts originally looked. In fact, the Snake Goddess statuette was restored, adding her head and her right arm (Figure 6).[40] Interestingly, Evans did not seem to model the reconstruction of the Snake Goddess off of the Snake Votary nor the limestone snake goddess figure, even though they are wearing similar costumes and likely depict a woman of the same role. Restoring sites and figures with no written documentation of how they were originally constructed allows for

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31   Arthur Evans, *The Palace of Minos at Knossos, Volume IV: Part I* (New York City: Biblo and Tannen, 1964), 195-196.

32   Ibid.

33   Ibid.

34   Ibid.

35   Diane Boze, "Creating History by Re-Creating the Minoan Snake Goddess," *Journal of Art Historiography* no. 15 (12, 2016): 1-31.

36   Kenneth D.S Lapatin, "Snake Goddesses, Fake Goddesses," *Archaeology* 54, no. 1 (2001): 34.

37   Ibid.

38   Ibid.

39   "Rebuilding the Palace of Minos at Knossos," Ashmolean Museum, Accessed April 3, 2024. https://www.ashmolean.org/article/rebuilding-the-palace-of-minos-at-knossos#:~:text=Sir%20 Arthur%20Evans%20began%20excavating,BCE%2C%20using%20modern%20building%20 materials.

40   Angelo Mosso, *Palaces of Crete and Their Builders*, Nabu Press, 1907.

misrepresentation of these artifacts. Critics of Evans called his reconstruction of the palace of Knossos a "movie city" and is noted to be a "very imaginative vision of the past."[41]

Through his discovery at Knossos, Arthur Evans laid down the foundations of what we know and considered to be true about Minoan society and religion. He characterized the Snake Goddess as one who represents the domestic spirit, which was a very common assumption about female figures in art during this time.[42] In the article "Prehistoric Goddesses: The Cretan Challenge" by Marymay Downing, she points out that it was quite common for male art historians during this time to mischaracterize female icons as those representing nature, domestic, and fertility icons.[43] Though not entirely incorrect, as the Snake Goddess is widely considered to reference the cycle of birth and death, this theory of the figure being a goddess rather than a priestess falls short in the fact that it fails to recognize the attributes of Minoan society that clearly point to the establishment of a society in which women are not limited to only holding domestic responsibilities.[44]

Arthur Evans' hypothesis about the Snake Goddess relies heavily on an androcentric point of view and fails to acknowledge the evidence that it was far more likely for Minoan society to have operated under a societal structure in which women hold greater responsibility, such as the role of priestess. The claims simply rely on the biased assumption that all civilizations were ruled and operated by men, with men primarily holding positions of power. Evans likely drew this conclusion based on the state of the contemporary world, with many nations operating under a patriarchy. This can be supported by the fact that Evans can be noted describing ancient Greece as the cradle for European modern society; this correlation between ancient Greece and the modern patriarchal state of Europe is a result of Evans' androcentric bias.[45] Establishing a connection between the civilization of the ancient Minoans and modern Europeans, Evans solidified his idea of the Minoan patriarch, and this assumption carried on as the leading theory of the way Minoan society operated for over a century.

The Role of Minoan Women in Society

The role of women in Minoan society can be determined primarily by the written records of Linear B tablets. These tablets were clay slabs inscribed with an ancient language known as Linear B and they were initially intended for temporary use, however when the buildings housing these tablets were burned, the clay slabs were fired, thus preserving them for future knowledge.[46] These tablets illustrate clear gender divisions in Minoan society; of the twenty two positions held by women, only two overlapped with men, those being religious affiliates and slaves.[47] This is not to say women did not hold equally important roles as men in Minoan society, however there was a clear division of the sexes. Despite the gender divisions in Minoan society, women were still socially prominent and maintained a degree of freedom. In art, Minoan women were often depicted solely in religious works and very rarely in leisure scenes, though there is one example of women participating in sports and that is in *Bull Leaping* (Figure 7). In this fresco, two women stand on either end of the bull in the fresco, as a man attempts an acrobatic performance on the back of the bull. This performance would have likely been performed in public as a form of sport. This shows women were not only accepted in

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41   Ibid.

42   Marymay Downing, "Prehistoric Goddesses: The Cretan Challenge," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 1, no. 1 (1985): 7–22.

43   Ibid.

44   Ibid.

45   Ilse Schoep, "Building the Labyrinth: Arthur Evans and the Construction of Minoan Civilization," *American Journal of Archaeology* 122, no. 1 (2018): 5–32.

46   Barbara A. Olsen, "Women, Children and the Family in the Late Aegean Bronze Age: Differences in Minoan and Mycenaean Constructions of Gender," *World Archaeology* 29, no. 3 (1998): 383.

47   Ibid.

society, but encouraged to participate within the social sphere. Furthermore, across all known Minoan artforms, the depiction of a woman in a domestic scene or as a parental figure is virtually absent.[48]

The inclusion of women in leisure and sports scenes, rather than in domestic scenes, allows us to understand the role of women in Minoan society. Not only were women respected beyond their domestic roles, they were also accepted into and encouraged to participate in social spheres in which men and women were placed on an equal footing.

Minoan Priestesses in Art, Symbology, and Recorded History

The discourse surrounding the way Minoan society operated began with Arthur Evans and his androcentrism; however, the evidence from Linear B tablets supports the idea that women held elevated roles within the Minoan social hierarchy. Linear B tablets also provide documentation that women held roles as religious functionaries, or priestesses.[49] In art, there are instances where women acting as religious functionaries are displayed in group compositions. In one of these group scenes on a gold signet ring (Figure 8), the engraving portrays four supposed "Snake Goddesses" in a ritualistic formation. The gold signet ring depicts two women to the left of the ring, one in the middle, and one to the right.

Though the snakes are absent from the composition, the figures are dressed similarly to the faience figure found at Knossos by Sir Arthur Evans. They all wear a flounced skirt and a bare-breasted bodice, and hold their arms up to the heavens. The presence of more than one of the Snake Goddess on the signet ring begs the question: Why would one singular goddess be represented multiple times in the same scene? It is suggested in an article by Jo Day entitled "Crocuses in Context" that the gold ring depicts a goddess and three worshippers.[50] However, given the evidence, it seems to be far more likely for this scene to be depicting a ritualistic practice between priestesses of the same cult rather than a depiction of one goddess and her worshippers. For instance, there is no hierarchy of scale, which is seen throughout ancient ancient art to represent the most important figure, whether that be a ruler or a divinity. Hierarchy of scale is seen throughout ancient art to represent the most important figure, and this being absent from this composition on the gold signet ring is abnormal. It is difficult to find examples of hierarchy of scale in Minoan art, this is because the majority of their art does not depict figures, with the majority being nature scenes. Additionally, when human figures are present, they are all of the same status, such as in the *Ladies in Blue* fresco. This fresco, also found at Knossos, depicts three women who look like copies of each other, as they all wear the same dress, the same hairstyle, and adornments. Therefore, all of these figures on the signet ring being a similar size and in similar dress allows them to hold the same status or importance, something that was not common when goddesses were depicted amongst their worshippers. Therefore, I posit that this is, in fact, a ritualistic practice being performed by three priestesses of the same ancient Minoan cult, devoted to an unknown deity.

Additionally, in the foreground of the gold signet ring, there are depictions of vegetation similar to a fresco found on Crete. In the wall painting entitled *Girl Gathering Saffron Crocus Flowers* (Figure 9), a figure is seen depicted with these floral motifs. Discovered in the 1960s in Xeste 3 at Akrotiri, this fresco depicts a girl who can be seen gathering crocus flowers, a key component to Minoan iconography that was often used in ritual and medicine.[51] Due to the fact that she is wearing the same clothing as the snake goddess and she is gathering ritualistic materials, it seems only likely that she is a priestess.

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48   Ibid.
49   Ibid., 383.
50   Jo Day, "CROCUSES IN CONTEXT: A Diachronic Survey of the Crocus Motif in the Aegean Bronze Age," *Hesperia: The Journal of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens* 80, no. 3 (2011): 337–79.
51   Ibid.

A popular image in Minoan art, crocuses and saffron played a pivotal role in everyday Minoan life. The crocus flower can be found on multiple artifacts found at Knossos, as well as on clay tablets, seals, and sealings.[52] Of the eighty-five species of crocuses found in the ancient world, eighteen of these species are found in Greece and colors vary from dark purple, lavender, yellow, and white.[53] Saffron is derived from dried crocus flowers, and at one point in time was a key export from Crete, though the flower is no longer part of the island's agriculture.[54] The process of saffron harvesting is painstakingly laborious, the flowers only bloom for a few days in the Autumn season and were harvested by hand before the flowers withered; next, the petals would have been separated from the inner flower, the styles would then be separated from the stamen, then the styles would be dried by sun-baking, thus producing the saffron.[55] While frescoes such as *Girl Gathering Saffron Crocus Flowers* provide some of the most striking evidence of the cultivation process in the Aegean Bronze Age, the floral motif is included in a multitude of different media such as on the gold signet ring.[56] Due to the fact that crocuses were used in ritual, it seems likely that these flowers were being cultivated and depicted amongst these figures as an allusion to this religious practice. Additionally, there are no instances where divinities are seen gathering materials for their own ritualistic practices.

In *Girl Gathering Saffron Crocus Flowers*, the figure can be seen climbing a ledge, wearing the same flounced skirt and bare-breasted bodice as the faience figure found at Knossos. Due to the fact that these figures share similar attributes, it is fair to assume they hold the same role in society. Other frescoes that were also found at Akrotiri depict supposed priestesses as well. This can be seen in detail of the young priestess fresco from the doorway between rooms 4 and 5 (Figure 10).

Though dressed slightly differently from the *Girl Gathering Saffron Crocus Flowers*, the priestess fresco shares many similarities. For example, the priestess has a serpent-like updo and is adorned with jewelry, as is the *Girl Gathering Saffron Crocus Flowers*. She also wears the same bare-breasted bodice, though it is covered by a shroud draped over her shoulder. I hypothesize that it is the same bare-breasted bodice as that found on the faience figures and in the fresco due to the fact that the sleeves of the bodice are the same half-sleeves. Additionally, her bare chest can be seen partially covered by the orange cloth draped over her, indicating that the bodice she is wearing is in fact the bare-chested one that has been found to be consistent in the other examples. Additionally, scholars point out that the priestess can be seen sprinkling what looks to be "orange threads" which many have noted to be saffron, thus further relating her to the fresco of the saffron gatherer. The orange threads can be seen in the hand elevated above the vessel the priestess is holding, though it blends in slightly with the top of the vessel, the threads are clearly visible in her hand.

The image of *Girl Gathering Saffron Crocus Flowers* and the fresco of the priestess from room 4 could easily depict two priestesses of different rankings in the cult, as they share many similar characteristics despite wearing a slightly different dress. When comparing the frescoes with the faience figures of the Snake Goddess, there is a clear absence of the crocus flowers in the three dimensional figures. The lack of crocus flowers in the faience figure could be due to the fact that the item was restored, so it is certainly possible that she could have been holding crocus flowers in her right hand, as there is surviving evidence from Knossos that faience sculptures of these saffron crocus flowers existed. In fact, they were found and identified as this specific flower by none other than Evans himself.[57]

It should also be noted that snakes were often used in ritual ceremonies as well, possibly

52 Ibid., 338.
53 Ibid., 339.
54 Ibid.
55 Ibid.
56 Ibid., 344.
57 Ibid., 358.

as a sacrifice.[58] Although the snakes are absent from the signet ring and fresco compositions, it can be seen in the Snake Goddess figures found at the Palace of Minos. Though not much information can be found about the symbology of snakes in the ancient Aegean, there is significant documentation of snakes in later Greek history. The snake is noted by scholars to be a polysemic symbol of art, to quote 19th century German classicist, Friedrich G. Welcker, "The serpent is the most ambiguous of animals."[59] The snake is seen prominently in visual culture both ancient and modern around the world; the Snake Goddess standing as one of the prime examples of this.[60] With the shedding of skin, slithering motion, and venom in poisonous snakes, the biological characteristics of these creatures allow for a multitude of metaphorical uses.[61] These uses can include, but are not limited to, the cycle of life and death, identity, ancestry, and otherness.[62] This is particularly interesting considering many religions have much to do with the cycle of life and death, the afterlife, and sometimes ancestor worship. Indeed, scholars have noted that snakes serve almost exclusively a solely religious purpose.[63] Priestesses may have used the snake as an offering to appease deities, as they act as a bridge between life and death. Furthermore, in ancient Greek literary and visual culture, the snake recurs a multitude of times with an emphasis on its protective role.[64] This idea could be conflated with the initial assumptions of Arthur Evans, posing the Snake Goddess as a "Mother Goddess," as mothers tend to be nurturing and protective of their children. However, in Greek mythology, snakes tend to symbolize enemies of gods and goddesses.[65] Considering this interpretation of the snake representing a foe, it makes sense that the snake would be used as a sacrifice in homage to the gods. This supports the idea that these figures represent priestesses, as they participate in this ritualistic practice in order to honor the deities they worship. Although snakes can hold a variety of metaphorical meanings, it is more likely that the snake in the Snake Goddess image, is meant to be interpreted more literally; this means that, in reality, this snake was either of a specific type or relating to a specific myth and used in the ritualistic practice they are being depicted in.[66] This is not to say that the snake is meaningless by any means, as they still hold great significance in the ritual practices of the Greeks and the Snake Goddess image makes this abundantly clear. Looking closely at the original snake on the faience figure of the Snake Goddess, that being the one held in the left hand, there is a clear longitudinal pattern on the first half of the body. Based on this pattern, I believe the snake is either a dice snake or a balkan whip snake, both native to Crete. Both of which are associated with water in some way; water, in other ancient religions, also has an association with the afterlife and transition, which could explain the possible significance of the specific snake to this ancient Minoan religion.

Although the attributes of the faience figures, frescoes, and gold signet ring are slightly different, some having snakes and others having crocus flowers, each composition nonetheless has a ritualistic item present. The faience sculpture at Knossos, the gold signet ring, and *Girl Gathering Saffron Crocus Flowers* all share the following characteristics: a flounced skirt, a bare-breasted bodice, an elaborate updo or headdress, the presence of ritualistic material, and jewelry. Given the fact that they are all dressed and adorned in a similar fashion, as well as seen with a ritualistic material –either saffron crocus flowers or a snake– it is fitting to identify them as representative of women who hold the same role, that being a priestess. The similarities

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58   Mara Lynn Keller, "The Eleusinian Mysteries of Demeter and Persephone: Fertility, Sexuality, and Rebirth," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 4, no. 1 (1988): 32.

59   Diana Rodríguez Pérez, "The Meaning of the Snake in the Ancient Greek World," *Arts* 10, no. 1 (2021): 2.

60   Ibid.

61   Ibid.

62   Ibid.

63   Ibid., 3.

64   Ibid., 2.

65   Ibid.

66   Ibid., 3.

between the priestess from room 4 and *Girl Gathering Saffron Crocus Flowers* draws parallels between the roles of the two women and the presence of the saffron crocus flowers indicates a preparation for a ritualistic practice. In another instance where saffron crocus flowers are present, the gold signet ring has an absence of hierarchy of scale, which indicates that no single figure in the engraving holds more importance than the others, and therefore supports the idea that these are women acting in a religious practice as a part of a cultic ritual. This evidence, along with the fact that Linear B tablets asserted the role of women as priestesses, backs the claim that these women are in fact representations of priestesses rather than a specific goddess.

Minoan Influence on the Mycenaeans and Later Greek Culture

The term Mycenaean describes the culture and art of Greece from 1600-1100 BCE.[67] During this time, contact with the Minoans of Crete contributed greatly to the formation of Mycenaean arts and culture.[68] This contact allowed for sculptures such as the snake goddess to inspire different Mycenaean artforms, specifically the Psi-type figures (Figure 11) and *The Dancing Figures from Keos* (Figure 12). A Psi-type figure is a female figure meant to look like the Greek letter Psi (Ψ). These female figures stand with an upright posture and arms raised, a similar pose to that of the snake goddess. The form is also significant, as many Psi-type figures look as though they are wearing skirts or dresses, headdresses, and have an emphasis on the breasts. Oftentimes these figures are patterned geometrically, much like the snake goddess' geometric patterns on her skirt. Additionally, *The Dancing Figures from Keos* exemplify the influence of the Minoans in Mycenaean sculpture. In this series of terracotta figures found on the island of Kea, the site of the ancient Keos, the statues all stand erect, with flared skirts, bare breasts and serpent-like belts and necklaces. When comparing these terracotta figures to the figures found at Knossos, the similarities in stance and dress are apparent. The Keos figures wear a short open jacket, much like the bodice found on the snake goddess figures. Not only that, but the statues from Keos were found at a temple site, implying a religious function much like the snake goddess. Though not entirely the same, as the snakes are not overtly depicted on the Keos figures, the forms are extremely similar and the figures seemed to have had similar functions as a representation of a religious figure or attendant, making a clear connection to Minoan influence in Mycenaean culture. Furthermore, in 1968, terracotta statues similar to those found at Keos were discovered in Wace's Citadel House at Mycenae.[69] Among these 16 terracotta figures, two snakes in a coiled position, as well as remnants of four more, were found in the citadel storeroom.[70] The presence of the snakes, in this instance, shows clear evidence that the snake goddess was influential to the later Mycenaeans. This influence was then carried from the Mycenaeans into the present day, where the snake goddess stands as a prominent feminist icon.

The Snake Goddess in a Contemporary Context

Today, the two Minoan snake faience figures found at Knossos by Sir Arthur Evans and restored by his team are housed in the Heraklion Museum and remain one of the Museums most popular pieces. The figures as well as the site of Knossos have also appeared on travel brochures for Crete and in the 2004 Summer Olympics in Greece, an actress dressed in the iconic costume of the Snake Goddess figure performed the opening procession.[71] These

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67   Hemingway, Seán, and Colette Hemingway, "Mycenaean Civilization: Essay: The Metropolitan Museum of Art: Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History," The Met's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History, October 2003. https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/myce/hd_myce.htm.

68   Ibid.

69   Robert Eisner, *The Temple at Ayia Irini: Mythology and Archaeology* 13, no. 2 (1972): 126.

70   Ibid.

71   Diane Boze, "Creating History by Re-Creating the Minoan Snake Goddess," *Journal of Art Historiography* no. 15 (12, 2016): 1-31.

examples place the statuettes as a symbol of Greek civilization even in the modern day. Not only that, but the figures have also become a symbol of feminism.[72] With the strong and confident stance of the figure showing off her feminine form, it is no wonder she has become a symbol that many women resonate with. Not only that, but her fashion has also piqued the interest of scholars such as Bernice Jones, who recreated the dresses of various Snake Goddess figures with the help of professional weaver, spinner, and dyer Valerie Bealle and photographer Massimo Gammacurta (Figure 13).[73] Through a series of photographs, Jones posed a model dressed in the Minoan fashion, specifically modeled after *Girl Gathering Saffron Crocus Flowers*. Through this series, the priestesses of the Minoan religion were brought to life in the modern day.

Additionally, the snake goddess also holds a place setting in the iconic work *The Dinner Party* by Judy Chicago (Figure 14). In this work, Chicago utilizes mixed media to create place settings for iconic female figures throughout history. In the snake goddess place setting, a plate, chalice, and silverware sit atop a linen runner embroidered with the name "Snake Goddess" on the bottom. Snake motifs are seen on the back of the runner as well as intertwined within the S in the word snake. The place setting utilizes the color scheme found on the snake goddess statuette, that being gold, brown, and a muted yellow. The plate itself is decorated with a vulvar central shape, echoing the female form and reinforcing this idea of the Snake Goddess as a feminist icon.[74] The pattern that adorns this shape and the forms radiating from the central figure not only evoke the flounce of the snake goddess' skirt, but also the scales of a snake.[75] The inclusion of the snake goddess place setting in *The Dinner Party* situates this statuette as a critically important figure in women's history. Through both the recreation of the costume from both the snake goddess and *Girl Gathering Crocus Flowers*, as well as the presence of the place setting in Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party*, the works situate the snake goddess as an icon of not only Greek civilization, but also of feminism. Overall, it is clear that since its discovery at Knossos, the Minoan Snake Goddess has become one of the most recognizable early Greek figures that continues to inspire artists and social movements, this shows the distinguished legacy of the snake goddess.

The argument that the snake goddess is, in fact, a priestess, elevates the feminist undertones of her contemporary representations. The snake goddess is not just a fertility figure, or a mother goddess, but a strong woman who is able to hold positions of power that scholars such as Arthur Evans assumed were only held by men. This shows a degree of equality in ancient Aegean civilizations that were not previously thought to be true.

Conclusion

During the Bronze Age from 2100-1600 BCE, the Minoans created astonishing architectural sites such as the maze-like Palace of Minos located at Knossos, which scholars relate to the myth of the Labyrinth due to its design. Excavated by Sir Arthur John Evans in the early 20th century, the Palace of Minos was home to artifacts such as the faience Snake Goddess and Votary figures, pottery, and frescoes. For the past century, the initial assumptions made by Evans about Minoan society based on his impressions of the Palace of Minos have been debated, though widely considered to be true. The assertion of the Minoan Snake Goddess actually being a priestess informs our understanding of Minoan society. Not only did women hold positions of power, but they were respected beyond their domestic

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72   Bernice R. Jones, "The Minoan 'Snake Goddess,' New Interpretations of Her Costume and Identity," Essay, In *Potnia, Deities and Religion in the Aegean Bronze Age, Proceedings of the 8th International Aegean Conference Göteborg, Göteborg University, 12-15 April 2000*, 259–69.

73   Bernice R. Jones, "Revealing Minoan Fashions," *Archaeology* 53, no. 3 (2000): 36–41.

74   "Snake Goddess," Brooklyn Museum. Accessed April 19, 2024. https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/dinner_party/place_settings/snake_goddess.

75   Ibid.

roles, and this is supported in the written record of the translated Linear B tablets. Sir Arthur Evans was misinformed in his assertions about the Snake Goddess as he decontextualized the images by restoring them with no information as to how they originally looked. Not only that, but he held an androcentric bias which situated Minoan society as one that was led by a patriarchal priest-king, when written documentation that has recently been translated, such as the Linear B tablets do not confirm that assumption. Evans' initial ideas about Minoan society are not only outdated due to newfound information, but also baseless. He recklessly restored sites, figures, and frescoes without any written documentation on how they originally looked, ultimately decontextualizing them. By rejecting these initial assumptions of Evans, we can broaden our understanding of the roles women held in Minoan society, and we can also determine that women held equally important roles to men during the Bronze Age, as can be seen in the fresco *Bull Leaping* and by holding the role as religious functionaries as evidenced by the Linear B tablets.

Attributes of the Minoan Snake Goddess such as the snake itself and the saffron crocus flowers depicted in the frescoes at Akrotiri and on the gold signet ring were often used in ritualistic ceremonies. Due to the fact that it is unlikely a goddess herself would be performing such ceremonies, it seems as though these images depict women who hold the role of priestess. This is further supported by the fact that all of the figures share similar costumes.

Through the analysis of images such as the frescoes from Akrotiri depicting a saffron gatherer and priestess, the gold signet ring depicting a ritualistic scene, and the faience figures found at Knossos, it can be determined that these images depict women who held the role of priestesses as they all share characteristics that indicate this fact, such as the flounced skirt, bare-breasted bodice, elaborate hair or headdress, and the common presence of an item that holds ritualistic significance such as a snake or saffron crocus flowers. These attributes, coupled with the fact that women were often depicted in non-domestic settings, allows us to conclude that the Snake Goddess is not a "Mother Goddess," but rather, a priestess.

Ultimately, the Snake Goddess allows art historians to draw conclusions about the roles women held in Minoan society, and this information disproves previous assumptions put forth by Sir Arthur Evans. Today, the legacy of the Minoan Snake Goddess continues to stand as an iconic representation of Greek civilization. Appearing on tour guides, in olympic processions, and inspiring artists such as Judy Chicago, the Minoan Snake Goddess is considered one of the most well known artifacts from this ancient civilization on the island of Crete. The snake goddess being a priestess elevates her as a feminist icon as she occupies a position of power previously thought to only be held by men.

Figure 1. *Snake Goddess*, Knossos, Middle Minoan, Faience, 1700-1550 BCE. Heraklion

Figure 2. *Snake Goddess*, Middle Minoan Limestone.

Figure 3. *Snake Votary,* Knossos, Middle Minoan, Faience, 1700-1550 BCE.
Heraklion Museum.

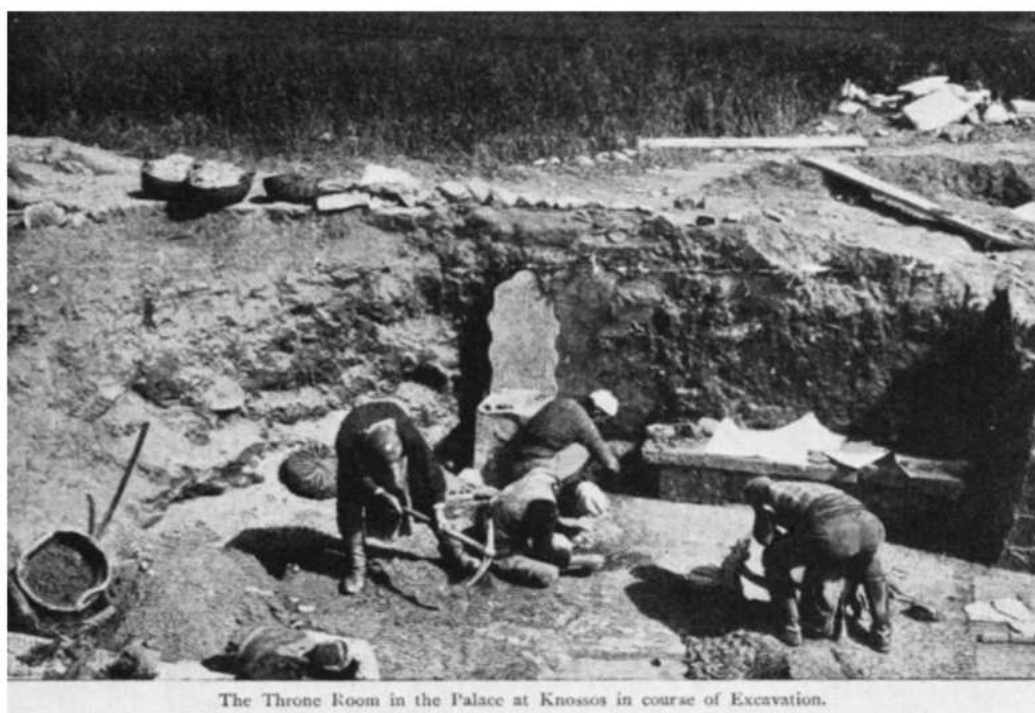The Throne Room in the Palace at Knossos in course of Excavation.

Figure 4. *Throne room*, Knossos, from the title page of a brochure appealing for support issued by the Cretan Exploration Fund, 1900.

Figure 5. *Throne room* (restored), Knossos, Photograph by Olaf Bausch.
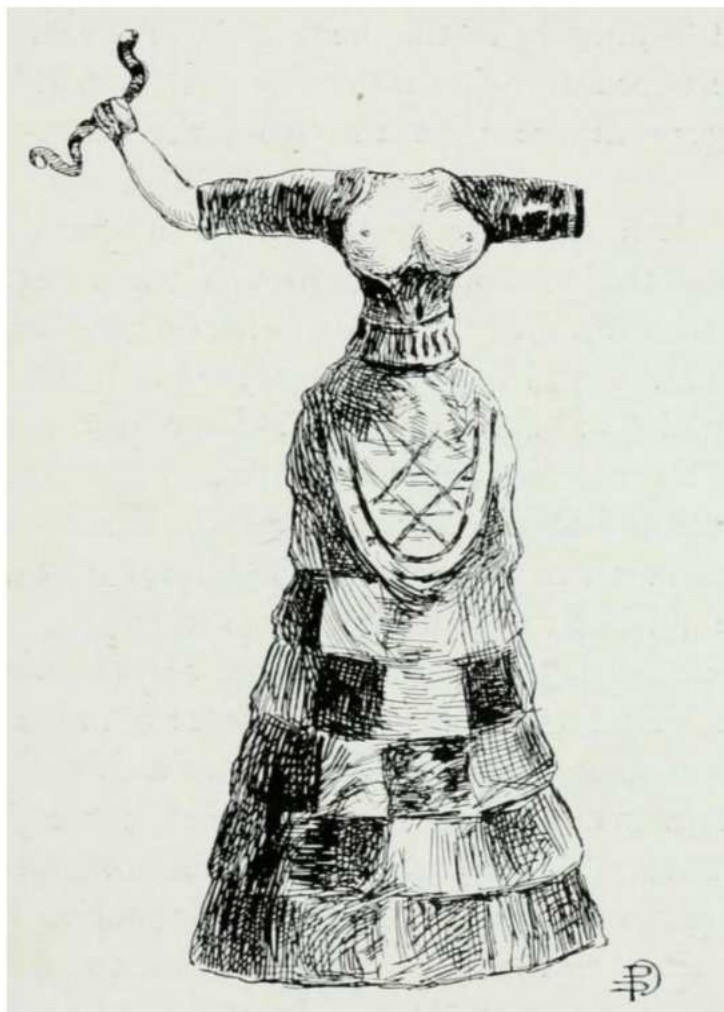
Figure 6. *Snake Goddess*, Knossos, Middle Minoan, Faience, 1700-1550 BCE.
(Before restoration by Evans)

Figure 7. *Bull Leaping*, From Palace of Minos, Frieze in Courtyard of East Wing, Fresco. c. 1500 BCE

Figure 8. *Gold signet ring with cult scene*. Late Bronze Age, 1500-1450 BCE. Heraklion Museum.

Figure 9. *Girl Gathering Saffron Crocus Flowers*, Detail of Wall Painting, Room 3 of House Xeste 3, Minoan, Before 1630 BCE.

Figure 10. *West House: Room 4: Young Priestess*, Fresco, 16th century BCE.

Figure 11. *Mycenaean female figurine* (Psi-Type), Clay, 1300-1150 BCE.
Museum of Cycladic Art.

Figure 12. *Dancing Figures from Keos*, Kea, Terracotta, 1450-1400 BCE.
Museum of Cycladic Art.

Figure 13. Diane Boze, Valerie Bealle, and Massimo Gammacurta. *Recreation of Minoan "Snake Goddess" Fashion*, Textiles, 2000.
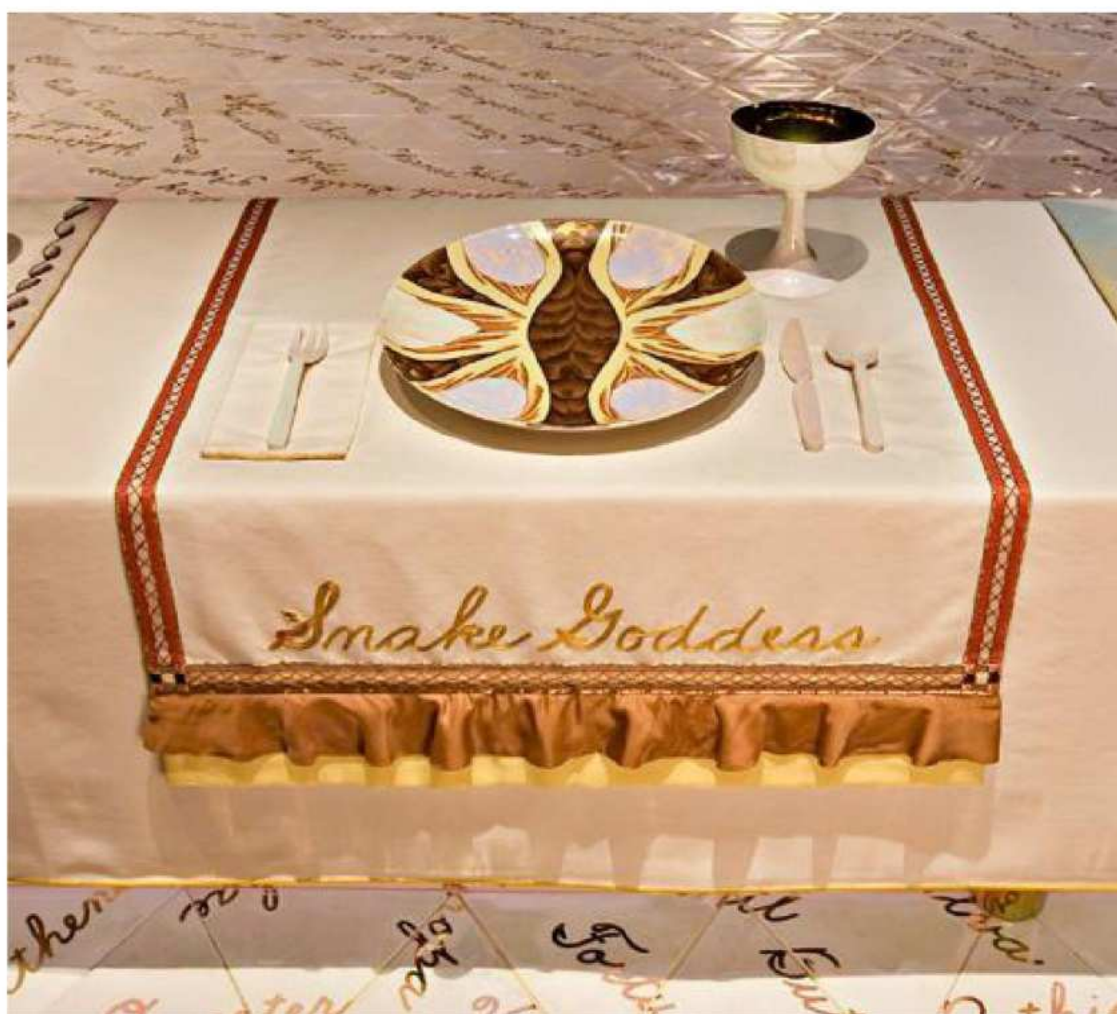
Figure 14. Judy Chicago, *The Dinner Party* (Snake Goddess place setting), ceramic, porcelain, textile, 1974-79. Brooklyn Museum.

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About the Author

Alexa Bergeron is a senior at Christopher Newport University who is majoring in Art History and double minoring in Museum Studies and Studio Art. Ancient art has always fascinated her since she was placed in her first survey class. In her sophomore year she took Special Topics in Ancient Art and learned about the Snake Goddess figurine, where she became fascinated with the mystery surrounding her identity. Alexa hopes to go on to complete her Ph.D. in Art History at Virginia Commonwealth University and is aiming to one day be a professor at a university where she will continue to spread her knowledge and love of art.

Sincere Stalking & Romantic Rage:
The Romanticization of Toxic and Abusive Behaviors in Movies

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Abstract

Movies can provide respite from reality, but some of the themes gleaned from movies can be problematic when applied to real world situations, such as people's romantic relationships. Indeed, in many romantic movies, toxic and abusive behaviors are portrayed as romantic or are justified in some way. This portrayal may cause severe issues for audiences who interpret those harmful behaviors as acts of love and affection and then choose to pursue or emulate such behaviors in their own romances. This paper examines four types of abusive behaviors (manipulation, stalking, control, and anger and aggression) across five different films (*Beauty and the Beast* (1991), *Twilight* (2008), *Fifty Shades of Grey* (2015), *Phantom of the Opera* (2005), and *The Notebook* (2004)). Using examples from these movies, we explore how these behaviors are romanticized. In addition, the implications of this romanticization are detailed, including connections to intimate partner violence, romantic beliefs, and eating disorders. Suggestions are provided on how to prevent these beliefs from being enacted.

Key Words: abuse, movies, romantic relationships, manipulation, anger, control

Manipulation

Manipulation is used when the manipulator wants to elicit or terminate a behavior in someone else (Buss et al., 1987). There are different tactics used depending on the manipulator's goal. For instance, charm is the most frequently used tactic for eliciting a behavior (Buss et al., 1987). Charm as manipulation can manifest as giving the victim a present before asking them to do something or complimenting the victim so they'll do what the manipulator wants (Buss et al., 1987). In movies, manipulative charm is often presented as a grand romantic gesture. Grand romantic gestures are used to mitigate damage rather than actually changing the behavior that caused harm. It veils the abuse which can make it difficult to identify, in film and in reality. Instead of apologizing for frightening Belle, the Beast gifts her the library to smooth over the relationship and prevent her from running away again (Trousdale & Wise, 1991). Throughout *Fifty Shades of Grey*, Christian sends expensive gifts to Ana's house and takes her on helicopter rides to convince her to be his submissive (Taylor-Johnson, 2015). Many of these gifts and experiences are timed to when Ana is thinking of leaving Christian, so he uses these to prevent her from leaving him. In *New Moon*, the second film in the *Twilight* saga, Edward uses Bella's desperate desire to become a vampire as a way to get something he wants by saying the only way he will turn her is if she agrees to marry him (Weitz, 2009). As exhibited by the examples listed above, manipulation is commonly used in fictional romantic couples. All three examples are portrayed as romantic, but they are less about displaying love to the victim and more about the manipulator getting what he wants. They are used to keep the victim in the relationship with melodramatic romantic gestures.

One reason these textbook manipulation tactics are misattributed is because of the "what is beautiful is good" heuristic. When shown attractive and unattractive faces, participants were more likely to assign moral traits to attractive faces than unattractive faces, and this effect was greater than the effect for non-moral traits (Klebl, 2021). Because attractive actors are cast to portray abusers, audiences assume that their intentions are good and are therefore less likely to recognize the harm they are doing to their victim. If someone you are attracted to sends you gifts to seduce you, then that act will be interpreted differently compared to if someone you are not attracted to sends you gifts. Audiences have a harder time picturing an attractive actor as someone with nefarious intentions, so their manipulation is instead seen as romantic.

However, there are some instances where the manipulator acknowledges their faults and ill intents, and they use this to attract their desired partner. Disclosing their flaws creates "a simultaneous sense of danger, humility, and sense of desire" which keep the victim interested and engaged because they have been "adequately warned" (Maas & Bonomi, 2020, p. 518). Edward constantly gives reasons for Bella to distance herself from him with statements including "I'm designed to kill…I've killed people before" and "if you were smart, you would stay away from me" to which Bella responds that she doesn't care and trusts him still (Hardwicke, 2008, 0:53:38; Hardwicke, 2008, 0:30:43). Christian Grey employs a similar tactic telling Ana that "[she] should steer clear of [him]" (Taylor-Johnson, 2015, 0:20:29). Later in the movie, Ana says that she has been waiting for Christian despite his warnings that she should stay away from him (Taylor-Johnson, 2015). *The Notebook* has a slightly different portrayal where Allie admits she should be with Lon, her fiancé, yet she chooses Noah instead of Lon anyways (Cassavetes, 2004). Why are these women choosing men that they either know they should not be with or the men are actively telling them they should not be together? One explanation could be that the women's implicit attitudes are driving their choices. Implicit attitudes are based on spontaneous affect whereas explicit attitudes are based on reasons (Eastwick et al., 2011). In romantic relationships, it is acceptable to base decisions off of gut level feelings of chemistry and attraction (Eastwick et al., 2011). Despite the women knowing they shouldn't be with the man, they still choose to be with them because of their implicit attitudes towards their partner which override their explicit reasoning.

Stalking

Stalking is defined as repeated, threatening or harassing behavior that includes behaviors such as following someone or showing up at their home or workplace (Maas & Bonomi, 2020). Although stalking is a crime, movies romanticize it and frame the stalking as an intense desire for the female character (Maas & Bonomi, 2020). Despite what these films want you to think, this is an unhealthy behavior, and it is certainly not romantic. Obsessive passion is when the pursuer places all of their efforts and energy into the relationship and often results in aggressive pursuit tactics including surveillance, invasion, harassment and coercion (Belanger et al., 2021). In *The Notebook*, Noah follows Allie onto the ferris wheel as she's on a date with another man, and he then threatens to kill himself by dropping off the ferris wheel if Allie did not agree to go on a date with him. Noah continues to show up where Allie is because he felt drawn to her, even though she repeatedly denied his advances (Cassavetes, 2004). Edward snuck into Bella's bedroom to watch her sleep for months before they became romantically involved, and he continued this behavior after they got together (Hardwicke, 2008). In the entire written saga of *Twilight*, there are 11 instances of Edward stalking Bella (Maas & Bonomi, 2020). Christian Grey is probably the most obvious stalker on this list; he constantly shows up where Ana is, whether it is at her job, a bar, her house, or to Georgia to visit her mom (Taylor-Johnson, 2015). All of these examples are depicted as the man's intense desire to be with the female character, but there is another way that stalking is romanticized in movies.

In some films, the man stalking the female leads to him being able to save her from some threat which overpowers the fact that he stalked her and associates stalking with protection rather than harassment. The Beast follows Belle after he scares her into running away, but he then saves her from a pack of wolves which overshadows the fact that he followed her (Trousdale & Wise, 1995). Another example is when Edward stalked Bella and saved her from a group of men who were about to attack her; he even goes as far as to say "I feel very protective of you" after this incident (Hardwicke, 2008, 0:42:40). When Ana drunkenly calls Christian, he finds her location to pick her up and then stops a man from assaulting her (Taylor-Johnson, 2015). Portraying stalking as desire or protection creates an association for audiences that stalking is a positive and romantic act instead of a controlling and aggressive one.

Control

A common theme throughout these movies is that they portray control as signs of commitment and love rather than as domineering (Papp et al., 2016). In *The Phantom of the Opera*, the Phantom is extremely controlling of Christine. After finding out that Christine is engaged to another man, the Phantom sings "You will curse the day you did not do/All that the Phantom asked of you" (Schumacher, 2004, 1:16:00). It is clear through the songs that the Phantom wants control over Christine rather than an equal partner. "Music of the Night" is the Phantom's seduction song to Christine where he constantly refers to her giving in and succumbing to his darkness, saying that she cannot fight it (Schumacher, 2004). This messaging is conveyed not only through the lyrics of the songs but also through the type of the song. "Music of the Night" is a solo which reflects the control that the Phantom has over Christine. Raoul, Christine's fiance, sings a duet with her called "All I ask of you" in which he asks if he can share his life with her and walk alongside her (Schumacher, 2004). The controlling nature of the Phantom's love song is expressed via a solo, in addition to it's one-sided lyricism, and it is heightened when compared to Raoul's duet with Christine in which he allows her a choice and a voice, literally. Another obvious example of control is in *Beauty and the Beast* as the Beast keeps Belle isolated in his castle, preventing her from seeing her father, and even limits her actions within the castle with statements like "If she doesn't eat with me, then she doesn't eat at all!" (Trousdale & Wise, 1991, 0:35:47).

Many of the relationships focused on in these films have a power imbalance that acts as a method of control. These imbalances are the result of differences in money, age, status, or strength which is then used to coerce the victim into doing what the abuser wants. In the titular song of *Phantom of the Opera*, the Phantom uses his talent as a musician to coax budding opera singer Christine and asserts that his "power over [her] grows stronger yet" (Schumacher, 2004, 0:32:15). The Beast is physically stronger than Belle which he frequently uses to intimidate her, either to get her to do things with him or prevent her from leaving (Trousdale & Wise, 1991). Edward also uses his strength and age to make decisions for Bella without consulting her, like preventing her from turning into a vampire despite the fact that she wants to become one (Hardwicke, 2008). Christian Grey has significantly more wealth and status over Ana, who is a senior in college, and he uses his resources to control her and get his way (Taylor-Johnson, 2015).

The reason that these actions are viewed as romantic is because controlling behaviors are seen as an expression of masculinity and an even desirable mate retention strategy (Papp et al., 2016). Many young women feel that a man taking ownership of his partner are indications of "intimacy and dedication" (Papp et al., 2016, p. 99). Furthermore, evolutionary theory suggests that women are attracted to men who have money and status which is typically associated with older men (Li & Meltzer, 2015). As a result, control is intertwined with expressions of masculinity. In the chosen movies, the gap in age, status, wealth, and or strength is used to assert control over the other partner, but since an older and wealthier partner is evolutionarily attractive for women, they might not view that difference as a problem. The ties between controlling behaviors and masculinity can make the behaviors seem appealing or desirable for women who want a masculine partner, and therefore, they don't recognize the power imbalances as forms of abuse and control.

Anger & Aggression

Anger and violence are typically dealt with in one of two ways: it is explained as uncontainable emotion or blame is deferred to the male's circumstances so he does not have to take accountability. Anger as uncontainable emotion is typically portrayed as an overflow of love and devotion. Noah and Allie in *The Notebook* are a highly combative couple. Older Noah states that "They didn't agree on much/ In fact, they rarely agreed on anything" (Cassavetes, 2004, 0:25:09). This behavior is displayed by both partners, but it is depicted as intense emotion rather than an unhealthy approach to conflict. The constant fighting was paralleled with intense passion, so the fighting was associated with an act representative of love which made the conflict itself feel romantic. The Phantom has violent outbursts that are written off as uncontainable emotion. He writes an opera, casts Christine as the female lead, and then kills the male lead and takes his place so that the Phantom can be close to Christine (Schumacher, 2004). The Phantom then later kidnaps Christine and threatens to kill her fiance if she does not choose to be with him (Schumacher, 2004). The singer the Phantom murdered and the attempted murder of Raoul were simply part of a grand scheme to be with Christine. Because the Phantom's violence was committed out of desire for Christine, it makes it romantic.

The other way that aggression is often depicted is not necessarily romanticized, but the aggressor is almost never at fault; his aggressive outbursts are blamed on some feature of his circumstance (Maas & Bonomi, 2020). Christian Grey, for example, likes to hurt sexual partners that resemble his mom because he holds a lot of resentment towards her since she was a crack addict (Taylor-Johnson, 2015). As a result, any abuse that Ana faces at the hands of Christian is not his fault because he himself was abused. The Beast gets extremely angry with Belle and breaks a table which causes her to run away, but the Beast was cursed to be a beast which absolves him of responsibility for his actions (Trousdale & Wise, 1991). The Beast was also acting out of a fear of abandonment which is used to both garner sympathy and fuel his

aggression (Belanger et al., 2021). After Edward reveals he is a vampire to Bella, he goes on a rampage ripping trees out of the ground, saying how he has killed people before, and how he has "never wanted a human's blood so much in his life", referring to Bella (Hardwicke, 2008, 0:53:57). Edward never wanted to be a vampire and has always resented his powers so that excuses him being one and his actions as a vampire (Hardwicke, 2008).

Another way that accountability is prevented is by attributing the anger to something that is assumed to be a fixed aspect of the character and that the woman just has to accept that that is the way it is. Throughout the entire movie, Christian asserts that he is "fifty shades of fucked up", and that he is incapable of changing (Taylor-Johnson, 2015, 1:50:46). Edward can't stop being a vampire, so there's no use in trying to adjust his vampiric actions. Another fixed trait that is often blamed is the male's appearance. The fear elicited from the aggression can be blamed on appearance rather than action to prevent the aggressor from having to take accountability. The Beast laments that Belle will "never see [him] as anything but a monster" (Trousdale, & Wise, 1991, 0:36:40). Instead of taking accountability for his actions, the true source of the fear, he defaults to his appearance as the frightening factor. The Phantom assumes everyone is scared of him because of his disfigurement instead of his murderous tendencies (Schumacher, 2004). In the final song, Christine even tells the Phantom "This haunted face holds no horror for me now/It's in your soul that the true distortion lies" (Schumacher, 2004, 2:01:26). Despite showing anger as a fixed character trait, all of the men improve over the course of the story without putting in effort to change. In all the movies, the abusive partner gets less abusive over the course of the film, or films if there are multiple. For some couples, it's after they get married (*The Notebook, Twilight, Fifty Shades of Grey*), but the others are simply the expression of love that changes the abuser (*Beauty and the Beast, Phantom of the Opera*).

Why it matters

Contrary to the endings of these movies, abusers typically do not stop being abusive. A study of 60 domestically violent couples found that only one man fully stopped his violent behavior over the course of a two year period. Although physical abuse did decrease in 54% of the couples who were still together after 2 years, emotional abuse did not decrease (Jacobson et al., 1996). The lessened physical violence might give the appearance that the abuse has stopped or gotten better, but the emotional abuse is still prevalent and dangerous. In fact, some research suggests that intimate terrorism, abuse that is intended "to control or dominate a victim", actually escalates in both frequency and intensity over time (Eckstein, 2017, p. 2). These films encourage women to stay in dangerous relationships because they tell stories where love will stop the abuse or the partner will magically get better if they are just patient. These films place an unjust burden on the women to "fix" the male. The male's violence or aggression is made the female's responsibility. This "I can fix him" mentality has become part of mainstream culture and has real impacts on people in domestically violent relationships. Women in abusive relationships believe that their love for their partner will stop the abuse (Papp et al., 2016). These films teach women to ignore red flags in the vain hope that their partner will change.

Another way these movies encourage victims to stay with their abusers is the promotion of "love conquers all" and romantic destiny. As mentioned before, movies have the power to shape our beliefs about romantic relationships, and we tend to adopt the beliefs that are endorsed in our favorite movies (Lippman et al., 2014). Research has found that exposure to romantic movies is positively associated with a stronger endorsement of the "love will find a way" mentality (Lippman et al., 2014). If victims believe they are in love with their partner, and their partner loves them in return, then they are more likely to stay in that relationship because they believe their love will overcome the abuse. Romantic destiny is the belief that people are either destined to be together or they're not. Believing in romantic destiny is associated with an avoidant approach to conflict resolution (Knee, 1998). This means that people are more likely to just wait for things to get better rather than put in the work to fix it. This is exhibited by

both the victim and the abusers in these films. The women hope for the best, that their partner will change, and the men suddenly change with minimal to no effort.

Furthermore, romantic beliefs are related to the experience of intimate partner violence (IPV; Papp et al., 2016). The highly idealized versions of relationships depicted in popular media shape how audiences view their relationships. Victims of domestic violence view their relationship through a fairytale lens; they rationalize their experience by saying things like "the abuse is not that bad", "it could be worse", or "the abuser is not being themselves" (Papp et al., 2016). Romantic beliefs can help disguise or rationalize abuse, but the abuse itself can be romanticized. Research has found that controlling behaviors and emotional manipulation are strong predictors of IPV, and the romanticization of controlling behaviors is related to women's reports of both physical and psychological abuse (Papp et al., 2016). In addition, obsessive passion is positively related to the experience of abuse (Belanger et al., 2021). Psychological abuse, although it is not illegal, is a widespread issue that has devastating effects. One meta-analysis found that 40.5% of women in the community had experienced psychological violence at some point in their lifetime (White et al., 2023). The same meta-analysis noted the worsened mental health outcomes resulting from IPV including depression, anxiety, PTSD, suicidal ideation, and psychological distress (White et al., 2023).

These movies do not just relate to the experience of IPV, but they can also impact eating behaviors and attitudes towards sexual violence via the gender stereotypes they endorse. Research has found that women who believe that men are meant to be aggressive and women are meant to be passive in romantic relationships have higher levels of disordered eating than women who do not believe this norm (Sharp & Keyton, 2016). The trope of the aggressive man and the passive woman is witnessed in many films, not just the ones included on this list. This gendered dynamic is translated into common rape myths such as blaming the victim instead of the perpetrator since the man is expected to be violent, and the woman is expected to take it. Research has found that exposure to sexually explicit and sexually violent content is positively related to more accepting attitudes on dating and sexual violence, and exposure is positively related to anticipated and actual dating and sexual violence victimization and perpetration (Rodenhizer & Edward, 2017). Male aggression towards women has become so normalized that women have come to expect violence in sexual encounters (Maas et al., 2015). The heavily gendered stereotypes depicted in movies put women at risk for eating disorders and sexual violence.

Perhaps the most important reason why this matters is that audiences do not recognize all of the abusive behaviors, even when they are looking for them. One study specifically asked participants what behaviors they found appealing or unappealing in *Fifty Shades of Grey*, and there are some glaring contradictions in the responses. Despite participants saying they would not tolerate being stalked, one participant thought it was "actually cute how Christian popped up" at Ana's workplace, which was an instance of stalking (Bonomi et al., 2016, p. 142). Participants stated that they would accept the gifts and adventure in their own life, but those are manipulation tactics (Bonomi et al., 2016). An analysis of incarcerated abuser's phone calls to their victims found that the abuser would compel the victim into forgiving them or retracting their statement in court "through grand gestures of marriage, writing poems, and sending gifts" (Mass & Bonomi, 2020, p. 513). Despite saying that they would not tolerate abuse, these films do an impeccable job of masking abuse as romance to the point where the two almost become indistinguishable.

What should we do about it?

It is unlikely that movies will stop depicting these sorts of relationships, so the solution then lies with the viewers. We need to become more critical movie watchers and understand the difference between fiction and reality. Sometimes, it can be hard to differentiate between

what is ok in movies but unacceptable in real life, but it is not impossible. Many people watch these movies as guilty pleasures or they recognize the problematic behaviors and actively choose to not implement them in their actual relationships. The problem occurs when the line between romance and abuse, fiction and reality, is blurred. Watching problematic relationships in films can be entertaining because of the fiery emotions and conflict, but audiences should discern the difference between romance and abuse so that they don't tolerate harmful behaviors in their own relationships.

Conclusion

Movies are a massive part of mainstream culture and provide a way to escape reality. However, many films are rooted in reality which can make them feel more real than fiction which can be problematic if the message of the film is harmful. Viewers who believe that the behaviors described above are romantic may argue that the context in which they occur and the individuals involved can influence how abusive the behavior is. Yet, just as there is a difference between fiction and reality, there is a difference between having empathy for another's hardships and being a victim. Abuse is abuse no matter what attractive actor you cast to portray it or how you justify it or explain it away. Modeling real world relationships off of these movies is detrimental to women's psychological and physical well-being. Despite what these movies might suggest, no, you cannot fix him.

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About the Author

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The Relationship between ADHD symptoms, attachment, conflict resolution, and relationship satisfaction in college students

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Abstract

Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder often characterized by inattention, hyperactivity, social difficulties, and executive function deficits. Previous research indicates that individuals with ADHD tend to exhibit lower rates of relationship satisfaction, increased rates of anxious attachment, and conflict engagement. The current study sought to examine the association between variables of ADHD symptoms, attachment, conflict resolution, and relationship satisfaction in a population of college students. It was hypothesized that respondents who exhibited greater symptoms of ADHD would have negative associations in attachment style, conflict resolution, and relationship satisfaction variables. Results were found using the Adult ADHD Self-Report Scale, Experiences in close relationships questionnaire, and Conflict Resolution Styles Inventory. Results of this study proved the research hypotheses to be correct.

Keywords: ADHD, attachment, conflict resolution, relationship satisfaction

Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is a widely known psychological disorder that is often diagnosed in childhood, and is defined as a "neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by a distinctive pattern of inattentive, hyperactive and impulsive behavior, which causes daily disruption in academic, social, and occupational functioning" (Asadi et al., 2021, p.958). Although frequently diagnosed during one's childhood years, ADHD is not strictly a childhood disorder in which individuals will grow out of their symptoms as they continue to develop and mature. Statistics show that 5.6% of US college students have a diagnosis of ADHD, indicating this disorder often carries into adulthood (Hotez et al., 2022).

Generally, college students experience many changes including increased academic workload, newfound independence, navigating romantic relationships, and substance intake while in college. Students with ADHD often struggle more in this transition, due to the deficits in social interactions, sleep and sleep quality (Pacheco & Dimitriu, 2023), emotional regulation (CHADD, 2024), and romantic relationships (Wozniak, 2022) associated with ADHD.

Of these areas of functioning, the present study will focus on romantic relationships in college students. Romantic relationships are a universal desire and need for most individuals across cultures and are notoriously difficult to maintain, even for neurotypicals. During this age, college-aged individuals especially aim to find romantic relationships due to social expectations, emphasis on partnerships, and increased interest in marriage. Relationships involve non-verbal communication, conflict resolution, attending to one's partner, and patience. Individuals with ADHD, however, may have more negative associations in beginning and maintaining relationships due to deficiencies in these important skills. In addition to the concern this poses for college students who have ADHD symptomatology, neurotypical college students may be in a relationship with someone with ADHD, and/or may have friends or family that have ADHD, and therefore this research will help with an understanding of how ADHD may impact their relationship experiences. For those with ADHD, one can use this research to understand themselves more and also understand potential difficulties they may face in romantic relationships. If one is aware of these potential struggles, one can use proactive strategies to possibly mitigate these negative behaviors, as well as ask for help. For partners of individuals with ADHD, they benefit from this research to understand the struggles they may face in a relationship with their partner. This can help facilitate empathy and understanding towards close others and what to expect in a relationship with someone with ADHD. Findings from this will also be of use to therapists and doctors. Awareness of difficulties commonly experienced by these individuals may aid in supporting clients or patients with this disorder, in the hopes of facilitating communication to help romantic relationship struggles.

Literature Review

Attachment

Previous research has indicated that interpersonal attachment has multiple important implications for romantic relationships, including childhood attachments influencing one's attachment in future relationships. Attachment is defined as "a global, relatively stable orientation to close others based on our beliefs and experiences with others" (Miller, 2018). Attachment theory, developed by John Bowlby, is the leading theory on attachment to close others. According to attachment theory, attachment styles in adult relationships stem from the interaction with caregivers at a young age. Kordahji et al. (2021) noted that "children develop a close relationship with one major caretaker figure, which persists into adulthood and defines the ways in which individuals create emotional bonds with significant others (attachment figures) for protection, comfort and emotional support" (p.1712). This information is important in understanding the basis of attachment for all individuals in adulthood. This shows that if