



# Inside English 1010

A Journal of First-Year Writing

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KAYLA ERICKSON

ZIA MACDERMID

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*Inside English 1010*

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As I write this in late July, the University of Wyoming—as well as other universities around the nation and the world—are reckoning with the ongoing challenges of covid-19 and what this unprecedented disruption of contemporary life means for education. How do we keep going amidst so much uncertainty? What risks can we ask our students, our colleagues, and our peers to take in the name of teaching and learning? And how do we make sense of our chaotic times?

I have no answers to offer regarding the pandemic, but I do feel profound gratitude for the students and colleagues who are adapting, who are refusing to retreat into utter isolation but instead are leveraging innovative thinking and the tools around them as they persist at simply being in the world. When I think of what it means to be a University of Wyoming Cowboy or Cowgirl (can we get some traction for “Cowfolx”?), these qualities—adaptation, innovation, awareness, care—are what come to mind. My Dad was a South Texas rancher, and these are the values he taught me were required for a vocation tied to the land, to the beautiful and terrible cycles of nature and the elements.

So to say I’m thankful for this volume’s authors, editors, and advisory board feels inadequate. Gratitude is certainly a primary aspect of what they deserve, but I think even more, I offer them my admiration. For their smart thinking, for their excellent and brave writing, for their contributions to this volume, and most of all, for their tenacity in keeping our readerly attention on a wide range of pressing issues: the ongoing oppression of People

of Color, gender violence, environmental degradation, and the damaging ineffectiveness of standardized tests.

Our student authors invite us to continue thinking broadly, to be accountable for the worlds we inherit and build. As Zia Macdermid writes in her op-ed, we need to “be empathetic, not dismissive” of a wide range of voices, situations, and issues.

In closing, I also thank you, our *Inside English 1010* readers, for sharing your attention and for opening your minds to consider the compelling work of these authors. Even amidst the demands of covid adaptation and innovation, they inspire us to poke our heads out of our bubbles and to stubbornly endure in listening and learning.

Nancy Small,  
*Inside English 1010* Faculty Advisor  
Director of First Year Writing  
Assistant Professor of English  
University of Wyoming  
May 2020

# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

This fourth volume of *Inside English 1010* is undoubtedly different than those published before it. Just like the three previous editions, this one features exemplary student essays worthy of attention from the broader UW writing community. These writers impressed and humbled our editorial board with unique and heartfelt arguments. Each communicates an issue with passion, purpose, and skill. I hope you will be as moved by these essays as I was.

But this year, the authors took on a new challenge: They had to revise remotely, working on their essays hundreds or thousands of miles away from the school where their ideas were conceived.

Their essays had been written in a different world. A global pandemic had not yet rocked our sense of security and disrupted the daily pace of life. Social distancing had not yet shuttered people inside their homes. Protests had not yet erupted in communities across the nation and world.

These students didn't just revise these essays. They reconsidered them. How did the argument fit into a world that had changed so much between drafts? How would they approach this topic now? Reading this year's compilation is like attending a rally where students are addressing our society's most pressing issues.



They demand changes in our flawed criminal justice system; an end to racism in our collegiate athletic programs; a new kind of support for people struggling with mental health issues. The essays here request an end to one-size-fits-all testing; action to prevent sexual violence; inclusion for transgender athletes; and sustainability in our national parks. This edition is a snapshot of the challenges we face and the ideas we might employ to overcome them.

We received outstanding submissions this year. While so many of this year's essays deserved a platform, we hope this selection informs and inspires you to make a difference. Change happens when you care enough to write about it. So to all the writers who submitted to this edition, thank you for doing just that.

May these examples inspire you to raise your voice in class and in your community. But don't just raise your voice—write in it.

Sally Leaf,

*Inside English 1010* Lead Editor

MFA in Nonfiction Writing

Graduate Assistant

University of Wyoming

May 2020

# HOW TO USE INSIDE ENGLISH 1010:

## AN INTRODUCTION FOR STUDENTS AND INSTRUCTORS

*Inside English 1010* showcases work in the three main genres taught in English 1010: the Expos Essay, the Researched Argument, and the Opposite Editorial. The essays included in this journal were written by University of Wyoming students in the academic year preceding publication, and were recommended by instructors who feel that this work represents some of the best their students produced.

Reading this introduction, you are probably enrolled in English 1010, and likely haven't written in some—or even all—of these genres before. *Inside English 1010* is a resource designed for you; these essays will clarify evaluation criteria for the three major assignments and will model rhetorical strategies that you will learn and practice in your own writing this semester.

As you read the Expos Essays, pay particular attention to the writers' use of summary, paraphrase, and direct quotation. Can you follow the arguments of the articles being summarized? How do the writers indicate which points are most important? How do visuals and layouts contribute productively to the essays?

What topics have writers chosen for their Researched Arguments, and how have these topics been narrowed into specific arguments? What kind of evidence do the writers use to support their claims, and how do these claims build towards their theses? How are paragraphs organized? What make the introductions and conclusions effective?

How do the writers incorporate personal experience and pathos into their Opposite Editorials, and what other types of evidence do they use? How is the writing style of the Op-Eds different from the Researched Arguments'? How do the writers target a particular

audience in each essay?

Examining strong work in each of these genres will help you recognize what is and isn't effective in your own writing, and why. Use these essays as model and inspiration for your own writing, and know that there is not simply one way to write an extraordinary essay; *Inside English 1010* offers excellent examples of the different ways English 1010 students have been successful in communicating their interests and ideas.

Once you've revised your essays for the final portfolio, send your best work as Word documents to [uwo.english1010@gmail.com](mailto:uwo.english1010@gmail.com) to be considered for publication in the next issue of *Inside English 1010*.

The editorial board of *Inside English 1010* wishes you a semester filled with interesting reading, engaged discussion, and good writing. Work hard, have fun, and write on!



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Expos

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# INSIDE ENGLISH 1010

Expos | Summarizing the Experts on Issues that Matter

## Surprising Statistics

- 40% of students expelled from U.S. schools each year are Black.
- 70% of students involved in “in school” arrests or referred to law enforcement are Black or Latino.
- African Americans and Latinos make up 30% of the U.S. population.
- African Americans and Latinos make up 61% of the incarcerated population.
- One out of three African American males will be incarcerated in his lifetime (Keer).

## About Expos

Expos essays summarize a scholarly or professional article for a public audience, identifying main arguments and key information important to the academic community. We call these pieces “Expos” because they are written in the tradition of *expository* writing, which provides readers with research findings in order to inform and educate. Expository writing is found in many academic contexts, including our student journal *Inside English 1010* and popular news publications such as *Inside Higher Ed*, which run feature stories on cutting edge scholarship for a general academic audience.



The United States justice system incarcerates more African Americans than any other race.

Photo Credit: Suzy Hazelwood

## Incarceration Discrimination: An Invisible New Form of Jim Crow

By Jalyne Brough

In her introduction to *The New Jim Crow*, Michelle Alexander examines the mass incarceration of African Americans in the United States and concludes that racial discrimination in the justice system acts as a new form of Jim Crow. Alexander begins by describing the history of legalized discrimination against racial minorities. She explains that African Americans have historically been denied the right to vote through slavery, racial violence, intimidation, poll taxes and literacy tests. Today, prisons have become the new vehicle for voter suppression (Alexander 2). The article explains that we currently use our criminal justice system to exercise legalized

discrimination against Black men in the United States. This form of institutionalized racism plays out in voting, employment, housing, education, public benefits, and jury service. At the end of the day, the racial caste system in America has not ended; it has simply been redesigned.

### **The Making and Keeping of Criminals**

Alexander explains that the 2008 election of President Barack Obama initially appeared to be the end of discrimination and a “triumph over race” (11). People of color waited expectantly for racial equality to trickle down from the highest office in America to every street therein. They kept waiting, and waiting, and waiting. In reality, this election scarcely changed the treatment of blacks in America. The problems plaguing poor communities of color, including those associated with crime and rising incarceration rates, became increasingly clear to the author. After the end of slavery and the Jim Crow laws, a new racial caste system evolved swiftly in our country, although it was intricate and indistinct enough to be largely overlooked.

According to Alexander, this racial caste system involves two parts. It begins with legal discrimination against criminals and then adds a justice system that incarcerates more African Americans than any other race. Whether or not discrimination exists in the justice system, the act of legalizing discrimination against criminals has damaging effects on the African American race. By denying ex-convicts a second chance and a fresh start, this system makes a criminal into a criminal for life. People who have been incarcerated face legal discrimination and are forced into an undercaste, similar to the segregated, second-class citizenship that African Americans were forced into during the Jim Crow era. Michelle Alexander concluded that perhaps poverty and prejudice *make* criminals, but the justice system *keeps* them as such.

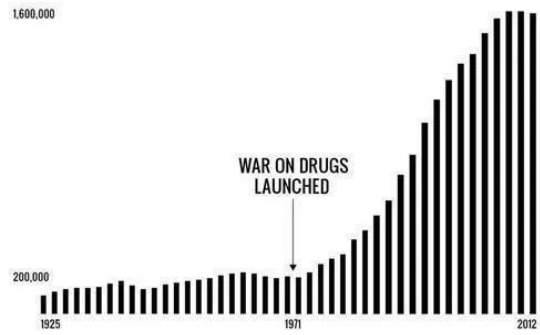


### **Writer’s Bio: Jalyne Brough**

Jalyne Brough is currently a Freshman student from Lander, Wyoming. She plans to major in English, with a minor in Creative Writing. She is an enthusiastic writer and has participated in the annual Young Authors writing competition on five different occasions, placing at the state level in nonfiction, fiction, and poetry. When she is not doing school work, she enjoys being active in her church, playing the piano and organ, hiking, rock climbing, reading books, and writing (of course). After graduating, she plans to become a freelance writer and a young adults author.

## The War on Drugs

When President Reagan announced the War on Drugs in 1982, the media was flooded with images that portrayed blacks in poor neighborhood as the instigators and distributors of drugs. This resulted in a racist mindset that criminalized African Americans. It was not until *after* the War on Drugs was announced that an illegal drug crisis suddenly appeared in the black community. The imprisonment rates of African Americans skyrocketed. Presently, there is no other country in the world that imprisons so many of its racial minorities as does the United States.



THE U.S. STATE AND FEDERAL PRISON POPULATION HAS INCREASED OVER 800% IN JUST 40 YEARS

Graph on Incarcerated Population  
Photo Credit: Stephen Crooms

### Questions to Consider:

- What motives were behind the decision to declare a War on Drugs?
- Do you think there may be discrimination in the Justice System?
- Why do you think the prison system is still in use, despite criminologists considering it to be ineffective in preventing crime?
- Do consider the prison system to be effective in discouraging and preventing crime?
- How can the prison system be improved? Should other punishments be considered?
- How do you think preventative education can be implemented for young, at-risk children?

But in the mid-1970s, there was a wide-spread prediction that the prison system would cease to exist as society modernized and developed better methods of discouraging and punishing crime. When a drug war was declared in 1982, drug crime was surprisingly declining, not rising. Equally surprising, prison populations were on the decline, too. Criminologists have found overwhelming evidence to suggest that prisons actually increase crime rather than prevent it. While many hoped that the War on Drugs would further decrease the rates of drug use and the number of prison sentences, Alexander explains that it accomplished quite the opposite. Both increased dramatically. Through careful research and personal experience, she came to the reluctant conclusion that “the drug war is the new Jim Crow” (3). This led to questions that could only be answered by looking behind the walls of a prison.

### Inside a Prison

Governments wield a certain power over society because of their ability to decide the punishment of crimes. Alexander explains, “sociologists have frequently observed that governments use punishment primarily as a tool of social control, and thus the extent or severity of punishment is often unrelated to actual crime patterns” (7). This would be a clear explanation as to why both drug use and the population of



Statistics on Incarceration by Race  
 Photo Credit: Michael Owens

### Additional Reading

Reva Siegel, "Why Equal Protection No Longer Protects: The Evolving Forms of Status-Enforcing Action," *Stanford Law Review* 49 (1997): 1111.

Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 84–91.

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Lerone Bennett Jr., *The Shaping of Black America* (Chicago: Johnson, 1975), 62.

Howard Winant, *The World Is a Ghetto: Race and Democracy Since World War II* (New York: Basic Books, 2001).

### Watch & Listen

Alexander, Michelle. *The Future of Race in America*: Michelle Alexander at TEDx Columbus.

prisons in America started to increase again after the War on Drugs was declared. Behind the walls of a modern prison is a larger incarcerated population than previously seen in America. Since 1972, this population has increased from 350,000 to more than 2 million, with higher rates of African Americans inmates than ever before in history (8).

Studies frequently suggest that "white youth are more likely to engage in drug crime than people of color" (7). However, our nation's prisons and jails are overflowing with black and brown drug offenders. This article highlights that black men in some states receive prison sentences from drug charges at rates up to fifty times those of white men. In cities most affected by the War on Drugs, almost 80 percent of young African American men now have criminal records. They are now subjected to legalized discrimination for the rest of their lives. These young men become members of America's growing undercaste. Their criminal records keep them permanently locked up and locked out of mainstream society. The imprisonment of and resulting legalized discrimination against African Americans traps them in a cycle of oppression and poverty that has no end in sight.

### An Invisible Form of Discrimination

Mass incarceration is often considered a criminal justice issue, despite mounting evidence to suggest it is a racial justice or civil rights issue. Alexander noticed that when civil rights advocates *do* give attention to the matter they focus on affirmative action, such as promoting diversity in higher education. Advocates often overlook the benefits that preventative education could have on lowering minority rates in prison. The need for criminal justice reform is also overlooked. This kind of reform is necessary in order to make the prison population actually reflect the criminal population. Moreover, prisons could become institutions that reinvent the lives of "criminals" instead of reinforcing their status as such. They could provide inmates with a fresh

## INCARCERATION DISCRIMINATION

start upon release from prison, rather than subjecting them to legalized discrimination.

However, this degree of reform is far from the current reality.

The reality is that slavery, Jim Crow, and the present-day mass incarceration are all control systems that are more similar than different. The mass incarceration of African Americans and the resulting legalized discrimination bars them from rising to a higher caste. This racial caste system thrives because of racial indifference: a lack of care and compassion for other racial groups.

There have been many advances towards achieving racial equality. Slavery ended with the Civil War in 1865. Jim Crow laws ended with the civil rights movement in 1968. But the current mass incarceration of African Americans will not end until more people admit to it and work to end it. Michelle Alexander finalized her argument in saying “no task is more urgent for racial justice advocates today than ensuring that America’s current racial caste system is its last” (19). Mass incarceration is a racial justice issue and a civil rights issue. It must be corrected for Americans to achieve racial equality. Righting this wrong requires three ingredients: an educated understanding of the issue, empathy for the people it affects, and a will to take action.

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# INSIDE ENGLISH 1010

Expos | Summarizing the Experts on Issues that Matter

## AT A GLANCE:

“59% of the universities graduated Black male student-athletes at rates lower than that of Black undergraduate men who were **not members** of intercollegiate sports teams”

(Harper 3).



Photo Credit: Pixabay

## Racism & Inequality in College Athletics

By: Kayla Erickson

Dr. Shaun Harper is a university professor and expert on race, higher education, and college sports. In his article “Black Male Student-Athletes and Racial Inequities,” he examines and exposes the subtle racism in collegiate athletics. Dr. Harper goes into extensive detail about the racism in college athletics for men across the country, bringing to light the “winners and losers” of the NCAA, highlighting the raw statistics of the racial inequalities within the largest divisions in the country, and concluding with his recommendations for readers (Harper 6). The statistical analysis of the racial inequalities presented in Harper’s article reveal the subtle racism still prevalent in today’s collegiate athletic systems.



## ***What's in the Research?***

In this article, Harper first introduces the purpose of his study and how he conducted his research. He uses socioeconomic research collected from universities included in the Atlantic Coast Conference, the Big Ten Conference, the Big 12 Conference, the Pac-12 Conference, and the Southeastern Conference. Harper uses this data to evaluate the social pressure that Black men are under to value sports over academia from a young age (4). Young student-athletes are often coaxed into athletics instead of academic programs, which facilitates the continuation of racial inequality in modern-day society. Harper also evaluates the “ways in which colleges and universities reap enormous financial benefits” from these Black athletes, usually at the expense of the academic success of those involved (4). This prioritization of sports over academic success suggests that the leaders of predominantly white universities might only be searching for minority students who will provide entertainment as well as financial gain.

Harry Edwards, an American sociologist and civil rights activist, describes yet another obstacle that these athletes take on while trying to achieve academic success: They must deal “with the connotations and social reverberations of the traditional ‘dumb jock’ caricature” and the implications of their athletic superiority compared to the academic success they are not encouraged to pursue (Harper 4). With all this introductory evidence, Harper further proves that racism is still seen today in college athletics.



Photo Credit: Robin George

### **Writer's Bio:**

#### **Kayla Erickson**

Originally from Littleton, Colorado, Kayla is enjoying her Freshmen year at the University of Wyoming. She is currently planning on majoring in History and minoring in Native American Indian Studies. Kayla is hoping to use this degree to become a college professor one day. In her free time, Kayla enjoys hanging out with friends, going to UW sporting events, hiking, and swimming.

## *Show Me the Stats!*

### **WINNERS VS. LOSERS** *WHAT DOES IT MEAN?*

“**Winners** are institutions that graduate Black male student-athletes at the highest rates, as well as those that have improved since the publication of the 2016 edition of this report”

“**Losers** are institutions that graduate Black male student-athletes at the absolute lowest rates, those at which graduation rates for this population have declined over the past two years, and those at which these men are most overrepresented on revenue-generating sports teams” (Harper 6).

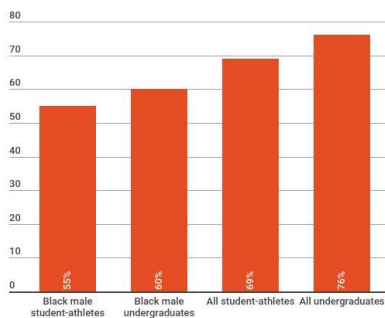


Photo Credit: Markus Spiske

The statistics used by Harper to outline the racial inequalities throughout collegiate athletics display the disparity between Black athletes and their peers. In one of the most important sections of this article, Harper reexamines evidence from his previous studies to find what he terms the “Winners and Losers” of collegiate athletics. One of the losers in the NCAA is the University of Florida. Black men comprise 77% of their football and basketball teams, while there is only 2% of Black representation in the entire student body (6). By relaying this information, the reader is able to grasp the disparity between the universities’ athletic teams and the rest of the student body. The article then examines the “Winners and Losers” further through the universities’ graduation rates of Black male student-athletes. In this regard, Northwestern University is a winner because of its 88% graduation rate (7). Harper highlights this “Winner” so the reader can understand that, although there is racial inequity happening everywhere, there has been progress in some universities. When evaluating the most important statistics, Harper assesses four major areas in which racism is most prevalent on college campuses: The Black male representation on campus compared to the athletic teams they are a part of; the graduation rates of all Black men compared to their athletic counterparts; the graduation rates between Black athletes vs. all athletes; and the rate of graduation of all students compared to Black athletes (10). By doing a thorough examination of the racial divergence on campus, Harper is publicizing the tenuous racial inequalities across college campuses.

### WHAT THE STUDIES SHOW:

Below, this study conducted by Shaun Harper of the USC Race and Equity Center shows that from 2013-2016, Black male scholarship athletes on all sports teams had **lower** graduation rates than students who didn't participate in collegiate sports.



SOURCE: *Black Male Student-Athletes and Racial Inequities in NCAA Division I College Sports*, Shaun R. Harper, USC Race and Equity Center, 2018



**Image Source:** Black Male Student-Athletes and Racial Inequities in NCAA Division I College Sports, Shaun R. Harper, USC Race and Equity Center, 2018

## How Do We Change?

After demonstrating racial inequities throughout collegiate athletics, Harper advises universities on how to stop these subtle instances of racism. The article presents former U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan's opinion that if universities are “failing to graduate at least 40% of its players [those universities] should be ineligible for participation in post-season play and championship contests” (15). This point of view shows there should be less focus on the success of athletic teams and more on the academic success of their players, specifically the young Black men. It is also Harper's opinion that if “admissions officers expended as much effort as coaches [did to recruit players], they would successfully recruit more Black male students who are not athletes” (16). To bridge the racial divide between the athletic teams and the student population, Harper suggests that University leaders expend more effort to encourage these athletes to participate more within their campus community.

The article also introduces recommendations to university leaders on how to engage their Black athletes in the classroom. One example of how universities are investing in these Black athletes is shown through the “University of Wisconsin's Beyond the Game Initiative,” which prepares the athletes for life after college (18). This program, and others like it, provide young athletes professional career services besides only offering information about professional sports. By providing programs that help these Black athletes excel off the field, the universities

are investing in the players as students instead of just entertainers, thus taking away some of the social stigma, which often surrounds these athletes.

The last recommendation Harper gives his readers is directed toward the Black male student-athletes and their families. Harper urges families to make sure their children are being equally represented on college campuses. He wants athletes and their families to be wary of the promises these colleges make when it comes to professional athletics. The question Harper says parents should be asking prospective colleges and coaches is: “What is the graduation rate for black men on your team?”

## RACISM & INEQUALITY IN COLLEGE ATHLETICS

(19) Questions like these can provide Black student-athletes with answers about racial discrepancies on prospective campuses and serve as a model for the academic success of young men like them. The article goes on to encourage Black athletes to get involved in other clubs, experience a study abroad, or obtain internships (19). These ways to get involved around campus help foster interest in academic success rather than reinforce the focus on athletics which is still being pushed by the mainstream media today. Through statistical analysis, research, and recommendations, Harper tackles the issue of racial inequity in college sports today. By addressing the Black athletes and their families, Harper helps ensure that all people, universities, and athletes alike, are equipped with the knowledge they need to notice and prevent the racism happening throughout college campuses.



Photo Credit: Pixabay

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# Researched Argument

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### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Isaiah Spiegelberg was born in Laramie Wyoming and studies wildlife and fisheries management at the University of Wyoming. Outside of class, Isaiah spends his time camping, skateboarding, and training martial arts. After college, he plans on traveling to South Africa and volunteering at a wildlife sanctuary.

## COED SPORTS: CHANGING THE GAME

Isaiah Spiegelberg

High schools offer a wide range of sports to participate in and, for many students, athletics play a major part in their educational experience. Whether it is football, basketball, golf, or cheerleading, sports provide many teenagers with a space to discover their passion. However, while most schools have mixed-sex physical education classes, sports teams have remained largely divided into single-gender teams. These single gender teams perpetuate the stereotype that women aren't strong enough to compete against men. But offering coed sports can combat that perception and open up a variety of benefits for both genders. For instance, coed teams provide young women with the opportunity to try out sports with traditionally limited female participation. They can also help both genders learn to overcome new challenges, leading to higher confidence levels, especially in girls. Coed sports pave the way for collaboration and positivity across the entire student body and offer a solution to accommodate the growing presence of transgender athletes. With all the benefits coed sports have to offer, high schools across the country should incorporate coed teams into their athletic programs.

While sports such as basketball, soccer and swimming are popular among high school girl athletes, full contact sports like wrestling have very little participation among girls. For that reason, coed teams are necessary to provide girls adequate competition. I experienced the importance of coed sports during my first wrestling match: "Monster Match Nationals" in Denver, Colorado. This is one of the largest coed wrestling tournaments in the country,

## COED SPORTS: CHANGING THE GAME

but as a new wrestler, I was surprised to find out I'd be competing against a girl. Though I was bigger, stronger, and slightly taller than my female opponent, none of that stopped her from outperforming me and coming out victorious. With so few competitors, single-gender female wrestling teams wouldn't have enough opponents to face during competitions. However, by allowing girls to participate on boys' teams, high schools avoid this problem entirely. According to Shawna Young, author of "Girls on Your Wrestling Team: Coaches Get Ready," while there was a total of 243,614 high school wrestlers in 2003, only 3,769 of them were female (Young 330). Young explains that in most states across the US, wrestling is not even an official high school sport for girls. Further, she cites that, "only two states—Hawaii and Texas—have added girl's wrestling as an official sport with a sanctioned state champion tournament" (331). By integrating both genders, female wrestlers don't have to worry about not having an opponent to face during tournaments. Other sports with limited female participation should follow the coed model high school wrestling provides.

While wrestling serves as a good model for sports with limited female participation, there are differences between the genders that cannot be ignored. Psychology Today author Neel Burton argues that anatomically, men have higher muscle masses and stronger bones than women. He also cites that, on average, men are taller than women (Burton). This means that the average female competitor faces a physical disadvantage when participating on a coed team. Lois Macgregor demonstrates how these disadvantages affect girls in his article "Coed Volleyball: A New Format for All School Levels." According to Macgregor, male volleyball players are more adept at spiking and blocking the ball, which can lead to the perception that females are less important on a coed team (Macgregor 26). Macgregor also mentions that coed volleyball nets are set in accordance with the average male's height, which causes a physical disadvantage for women (26). While author Shawna Young supports coed wrestling, she agrees that women face disadvantages when wrestling on coed

teams. According to Young, boys have higher muscle mass ratios than girls after puberty and have an easier time cutting weight than girls due to higher levels of perspiration (Young 34). She also states that many girls feel like they lack social support, receive less attention from coaches, and get unevenly matched up during practice (34). While females may face some disadvantages in competing with men, coed teams are a far more inclusive solution than traditional single-gender teams.

Even though physical and social problems can arise for girls competing on coed teams, coaches can take steps to ensure all their athletes have a positive experience. Young encourage coaches to have both their male and female athletes focus on healthy diets and exercise to make weight, as well as prioritizing strength and technique training for both genders (Young 35). Young also highlights the importance of coaches holding equal expectations for young men and women. She explains, “If a female wrestler feels that the coach has a high expectations for her, then she is more likely to have high expectations for herself. Feeling valued by the coach can lead to an increased sense of social support” (35). Proper coaching can help mitigate many of the problems with competing on a coed team, providing a positive experience for boys and girls alike.

On top of providing more opportunities for female athletes, coed sports can also help increase confidence in young women. In the article, “Investigating a Coed Sport’s Ability to Encourage Inclusion and Equality,” Adam Cohen analyzes how the sport quidditch affects its participants. He and his co-authors argue that competing against boys leads to increased feeling of confidence in girls because “the opportunity to run around, tackle males and prove themselves on the field provided females with a heightened sense of self confidence and pride” (Cohen 230). While many girls are under the impression that boys are physically more capable, coed opportunities like quidditch can help dispel that misconception. Likewise, Kathryn Barr also argues that coed sports can lead to higher confidence levels in girls.

## COED SPORTS: CHANGING THE GAME

In her article “Positive Reasons for Coed Sports,” Barr argues that coed sports encourage female athletes to “take pride in her accomplishments and demonstrate confidence in her ability to successfully compete with players who have similar skill levels” (Barr). Separating teams strictly on the basis of skill instead of sex lets girls know their ability as an athlete isn’t defined by their gender.

It should be noted that although coed sports can increase girls’ confidence, modifying rules in the sport based on gender can have the opposite effect. According to Zach Wood in the *Sociology of Sport Journal*, gender modified rules in intramural flag football create the impression that women can’t be as successful as men in the sport (Wood 1042). In addition to reinforcing negative perceptions of women’s abilities, gender modified rules can also be taken advantage of. The article notes that male players would often kneel before the goal line so a female player could make a touchdown in the next play and score nine points instead of six (1044). Bending the rules based on gender sends a negative message to female athletes, creating the perception that they aren’t capable of competing with men unless regulations give them an advantage. In order for coed sports to be beneficial and enjoyable, men and women need to be held to the same set of rules and regulations.

Another advantage coed sports offer is their ability to reduce negative stereotypes among boys and girls. Adam Cohen demonstrates how female quidditch participants viewed men more positively after playing the sport with them. One female participant stated, “I realized that male athletes were smarter and less self-centered than I thought they were” (Cohen 229). The article also argues that integrated activities provide young men with the opportunity “to experience girls in ways that build respect for their abilities and foster[s] the development of new beliefs about girls’ interest in sports” (Cohen 221). Cohen says this could lead men to be better advocates for women’s right to equal opportunities. By reducing negative stereotypes among each other, coed sports can foster positive friendships and

relationships among high school boys and girls. This effect goes beyond high school sports and can help men and women work together better and respect each other in the workforce.

Integrating coed sports into high school athletics is especially important now, as more students are coming to terms with their gender identity. Coed sports don't force athletes to play on a team that makes them feel misgendered. According to Bethany Jones, a gender studies scholar, transgender males develop a similar muscle mass to cis-gender males one year after hormone treatment. Transgender females show reduced muscle after hormone treatments, but their overall mass remains significantly higher when compared to cis-gender females (Jones 704). With transgender males having a higher muscle mass than cis-gender females, but lower muscle mass than cis-gender males, it's difficult for administrators to determine if a transgender male should play on a boys' or girls' team. Administrators face a similar challenge with transgender females. This can lead to transgender athletes being forced to compete against the gender they don't identify with. However, high schools can avoid this entirely by simply incorporating coed teams in their sport programs.

Coed sports also may reduce the level of discrimination transgender athletes face during competition. Bethany Jones explains, "some transgender people who engage in sports— both competitively and for leisure—report discrimination and victimization" (Jones 701). But Adam Cohen explains that coed sports can reduce negative stereotypes among male and female athletes and lead to less discrimination. In his article, he supports this opinion by citing the intergroup contact theory, the idea "that the ability to collaborate and share ideas leads to increased understanding and appreciation of different points of view, which can diminish the prejudice and stereotyping that commonly occurs between dissenting demographics" (Cohen 223). Coed sports provide cis male and female athletes the opportunity to learn about and appreciate their transgender teammates together. This can lead to transgender athletes feeling accepted by both their self-identified and biological

## COED SPORTS: CHANGING THE GAME

gender, as well as give them a more positive experience in high school.

High schools can make their athletic programs substantially more beneficial for student athletes by incorporating coed teams. Through coed teams, girls have the opportunity to excel in male dominated sports and prove that their gender doesn't hold them back from success. Coed teams also help boys and girls gain respect for one another and can help all athletes feel accepted, regardless of their sexual identity. Every athlete has the right to challenge themselves through athletics, but single gender teams prevent athletes from reaching their full potential. High schools across the country need to incorporate more coed sports into their athletic programs. Now, more than ever, it's time to prioritize inclusivity in our schools and sports.



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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Originally from Darien, CT, Patrick Wolf is a Junior transfer student at the University of Wyoming. He spent much of his childhood living overseas in England and Switzerland. He spent a year studying business at the University of South Carolina, after which he took a break for two years to work and travel. During that time, he worked as, an outdoor educator in Austria, a rock climbing guide in North Carolina, an EMT in Wyoming and a crew worker in Oregon. Patrick is passionate about the outdoors and majors in Environmental System Sciences. He is interested and believes strongly in social justice, especially as it pertains to environmental issues.

# THE IMPACT OF AUTOMOBILES ON YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK

Patrick Wolf

Our national parks are some of the last refuges of wilderness in the United States. They are home to numerous threatened species and hold some of the world's greatest natural wonders. From the geysers of Yellowstone to the cliffs of the Yosemite Valley, they have inspired millions and have become places of solace and refuge from modern life. However, to say they are pristine wildernesses, devoid of any human impact would be a mistake. Of the 318 million people who visited a national park last year, over four million of them were in Yellowstone (US Dept of Int). With them came all the problems that humans tend to bring: heavy foot traffic, pollution, invasive species, and automobiles. Cars have become one of the chief ways people travel to and experience national parks. The National Parks Service has sought to meet this demand by building and paving roads, gas stations and parking lots. Now, however, the influx of cars has reached a tipping point as more and more people seek to get outside and experience what national parks have to offer. In some of the busier national parks, traffic jams have become commonplace, air pollution has increased and more invasive species are being spread by travelers. This essay will focus specifically on how automobile use has damaged one of the oldest national parks in the world: Yellowstone. In order to preserve Yellowstone and ensure people can still experience it in the future, the use of personal vehicles needs to be restricted. In turn, public transportation needs to be expanded so the park's delicate environment can continue to thrive and visitors can continue to enjoy it.

## THE IMPACT OF AUTOMOBILES ON YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK

In order to understand the current problems facing Yellowstone, you need to understand the history of the national parks and the principles by which they are administered. The National Park Service (NPS), which administers all national parks and national monuments, was created in 1916. This was 44 years after the first national park was founded. Since then, the mission of the National Park Service has been to “preserve unimpaired the natural and cultural resources and values of the National Park System for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations” (US Dept of Int). This mission, though noble, is contradictory and has created problems as tourism traffic inside the parks has steadily increased. It is near impossible to preserve an unimpaired natural environment while creating and facilitating the enjoyment of that place for human beings. How do people get there and move around once they are there? Where do they sleep, eat, and use the restroom? How far do we go to ensure the enjoyment of visitors? These are difficult questions that the NPS has wrestled with for years. Access and enjoyment is important. The only way National Parks can exist and be protected is if they provide some benefit to us that is greater than if it were to be commercialized. Finding the balance is necessary, one cannot exist without the other. If there are no visitors to a park, it would no longer be protected and the environment would be put at risk. If the environment is degraded or destroyed, then the visitors would stop coming.

The introduction of invasive species is one of the largest threats that cars pose to Yellowstone’s ecosystem. According to the National Wildlife Federation, “an invasive species can be any kind of living organism... that is not native to an ecosystem and causes harm” (“Invasive Species”). Most organisms that enter a new environment are unsuccessful and die out quickly. However, when a few are successful, they can spread, and become invasive. There are many reasons why a species can become invasive: lack of natural predators, local organisms lacking defenses, faster reproduction rates, and generally being more versatile.

Invasives can outcompete local organisms, prey on natives, and much more. The threat of invasive species is not unique to Yellowstone. They are a major problem across world, especially in areas of high human impact (Alback et al. 416). This means that as visitation and impact increases, the problem can potentially get worse. Yellowstone is currently undergoing an invasion by the weed *Linaria vulgaris*, also known by its common name: yellow toadflax. A paper in the *Western North American Naturalist* described how *Linaria vulgaris* has been able to spread from areas of high impact to pristine areas in the park. While it has stifled competition amongst other plants, it has also had an adverse effect on pocket gophers and large herbivores (426). The report also stated that, “the increase in visitation and development around protected areas is facilitating the spread of alien invasive species into natural communities” (426). This is but one example of how humans are having unintentional consequences on Yellowstone’s environment.

Invasive plants can travel long distances by hitching a ride on cars, which are an excellent vector to facilitate their spread. Seeds get lodged into dirt or mud on the body of the car or their tires. Invasive species tend to thrive along roadways, as these are areas high disturbance and they are the places where the seeds first enter the new ecosystem. Researchers at Kakadu National Park in Australia conducted a study showing how seeds can be transported by cars was. Over the course of a year, 1,917 seeds were found 304 cars, more than half of all cars studied were carrying seeds (Lane and Lonsdale 278). The principles of the study could easily be applied to most national parks where people are driving from far away from different ecosystems to come visit. While exact numbers and types of seeds would vary for Yellowstone, the potential for seeds being brought in by cars would still likely be high. In Yellowstone, *Linaria vulgaris* thrives on “roadsides, riverbanks, and isolated areas in burned sites (Alback et al. 421). Cars disturb soil, which levels the playing field, wiping out established species and forcing them to compete with any newly introduced species. This gives

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opportunities for plants like *Linaria vulgaris* to rise up and dominate an ecosystem because it no longer has to compete with many established and fully-grown organisms. By limiting car usage, we can decrease the level of soil disturbance and lower the amount of new invasive species being brought into the park.

While invasive species might only affect an area at a very local level, emissions from cars can impact the broader park as a whole. Emissions from cars produce pollutants such as carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides, and particulate matter (Gately et al. 496). These pollutants lower air quality and have adverse health effects. The discussion around car emissions is often too focused on their effects on the atmosphere or is framed in the broader discussion of global climate change. However, emissions also have adverse effects on local environments. In general, pollution is found in higher concentrations along major roads. Also, car emissions such as black carbon and nitrogen dioxide are found mostly within tens to hundreds of meters to roads where they were produced (496). While a pollutants are much more ubiquitous in urban areas, even in small numbers, they have the potential to have adverse effects on local organisms and visitors alike. Clearly more cars within Yellowstone means more pollutants. However, this problem does not exist within a vacuum. As the number of cars increase, so does congestion and traffic jams. One study showed that a “vehicle’s fuel economy falls and emission rates rise as their average speed declines, due to increased engine load required for re-acceleration” (499). This creates a situation where pollutants from car emissions increase exponentially. Reducing the number of vehicles on the road will reduce the amount of pollutants in park. This would not only be beneficial to the health of the park, but would also be a small step in the broader fight against climate change.

Congestion in national parks not only poses health risks and damage to the ecosystem, it also takes away from the visitor’s experience. A study into car usage in Yosemite National Park found that some of the main problems visitors had with driving in the park

were traffic congestion, feelings of stress, crowding, and conflict (White et al.). The same could easily apply to Yellowstone as congestion is becoming a major issue in the park. A recent report from the National Park Service stated that vehicles are forced to follow closely behind other vehicles 60-80 percent of the time and that with increases in traffic volume all roads in the park are expected to perform poorly by 2021-2023 (US Dept of Int). Visitors already think the park is too crowded and visitation is only growing. The infrastructure of the park simply cannot handle the number of cars on the roads. Traffic jams and congestion take away from the perceived sense of freedom and the awe from the natural surroundings one gets while in national park. If we want to keep that sense of awe that draws people to national parks, then the number of cars on the roads needs to be reduced.

The number of cars in Yellowstone could be limited in two ways. On one hand, we could reduce the total number of people visiting the park by putting a cap on how many visitors are allowed to enter in a given day. This would have the added effect of decreasing the impact of foot traffic. However, restricting the total access to the park would be a bad idea. As people become more disconnected from nature, open access to our national parks is more important now than ever. And if people don't experience these wild spaces, how will they learn to care for and protect them? But one thing is clear: we must change the way in which we visit the park. A more inclusive solution would be to restrict the number of cars entering the park by creating a more extensive public transport system. Some may argue that the sheer size of Yellowstone would make it too difficult to set up a transportation system. But it doesn't need to be that complicated. The park has five entrances which lead to two big loop roads that connect together. All of the main attractions in the park are either on the loops or on the road to the entrances. These are the only places visitors would need to have public transportation. If they plan to stay in that area, they should be required to take the bus. If they plan to leave any of these routes, then they should be issued a permit to bring



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their car. Providing a public transportation system for the park is the best way we can limit impact without limiting access.

Some will be upset by the idea of banning cars in Yellowstone. This is an understandable reaction. Experiencing the park in a bus full of people is very different from viewing it on your own or with family. People choose to drive in national parks for “perceived freedom, access, personal control, and opportunities to experience nature” (White et al.) Freedom is one of the main reasons people come to national parks. The experience of traveling around Yellowstone in a bus would undoubtedly be a different experience, perhaps even a less enjoyable one at times. But the question is, what’s the alternative? Even under conservative growth rates, 3.7-5.3%, the parks infrastructure will soon not be able to handle all the visitors and the ecosystem will go with it (US Dept. Int). Additionally, the experience of being in Yellowstone is already changing. The feelings of perceived freedom, access, and personal control are already slipping away due to the sheer numbers of people and cars in the park. Making this change would be radical and difficult, but it is what is necessary if we want to preserve Yellowstone.

Our environment and climate are changing; Yellowstone is no exception. With this change, it is more important now more than ever that we protect what wild spaces we have left. It is not enough to sit back, relax and expect that the protections we have will be enough. There is too much at stake. Edward Abbey said it best: “Wilderness is not a luxury but a necessity of the human spirit, and as vital to our lives as water and good bread (Abbey 169). We need the wilderness. More people wanting to be in the outdoors is a good thing. However, it is a double-edged sword that has led to stress on local environments. The cars that travel in and out of Yellowstone transport not just humans, but also invasive species. They also contribute to air pollution and heavy traffic takes away from many visitors’ experiences. Yellowstone is the world’s oldest national park. It is one of America’s best ideas. If

we are serious about protecting Yellowstone, we will need to sacrifice and restrict car usage in the park.

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Op Ed

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photo credit: Shamira Casiano

## IS MY SISTER SAFE?

Bibek Baral

Over the past five years in Nepal, the number of reported sexual assaults has [increased by 60%](#). That's an average of [946 rape cases](#) in a single year—or a staggering 78 cases every month.

So, what has Nepal's Government done to combat this problem? [Ban pornography.](#)

Public outcry over the increase in violent sexual assaults had been growing steadily in Nepal. The tipping point

was when a thirteen-year-old girl was raped and murdered in Western Nepal.

Unable to provide proper justice, the Nepali government decided to ban all forms of pornography as a reactionary measure. The government issued a statement citing [Article 121 of the Criminal Code](#) as a ground to ban pornography.

### *An Empty Move*

The decision to ban pornography was reac-

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tionary and hollow. A study focused in India previously concluded that [accessibility of pornography has no significant impact on the rate of sexual assaults](#). The policy was clearly nothing more than a [diversionary tactic](#) to hide the government's ineptitude in capturing and [prosecuting rapists](#).

Furthermore, the majority of sexual assault cases in Nepal take place in rural areas with [little or no internet connection](#). This calls into question the government's assumption that viewership of pornographic content increases the number of sexual crimes.

Moreover, research done by Anthony D'Amato at Northwestern University found [reported rape cases were 53% higher](#) in states with minimal pornography access. In contrast, states with the easiest accessibility to porn showed 27% less reported rape cases.

This data suggests that pornographic content could actually be a safe outlet to vent one's sexual frustration,

rather than being the cause of an assault.

The government's reactionary policy against pornography was also simply overambitious. According to [Binay Bohara](#), the managing director of a large ISP in Nepal, the government ordered around 20,000 porn sites to be banned initially. But there are still millions left.

And despite the government's attempted restrictions, people have started to figure another way to access pornography: By using a VPN to mask their location. [One adult site reported](#) that traffic to the site decreased temporarily after the ban was enforced, but it was soon back to similar levels as before.

These shortsighted policy measures failed to deal with the actual issue at hand: The ineffectiveness of the country's law enforcement.

In the recent rape case of a thirteen-year-old girl, police reportedly [took more than an hour](#) to respond, did not



seal the crime scene, and were accused of destroying evidence by washing the clothes of the deceased rape-victim.

[Further claims state](#) the police also pressured the victim's family to cremate the dead body. The investigation moved at snail's pace, with three different teams unable to find and prosecute the perpetrator.

The lack of reporting is another big obstacle in tackling sexual violence. [The statute of limitations](#) of reporting a sexual assault has increased to one year. Previously, it was just 35 days. While this extension is a step in the right direction, this might still not be enough time for a victim to get over the physical and mental trauma caused by a violent assault, especially in girls below the age of eighteen.

[The political and financial power](#) wielded by the perpetrator also plays an important role. If the perpetrator is of high enough social and economic standing, this often leads to a weaker investigation, tampering of evidence,

or illegal out-of-court financial settlements.

### *[The Way Forward](#)*

If we want to truly reduce the number of sexual assaults, the government must take a multifaceted approach that focuses more resources on capturing and prosecuting those accused of sexual violence.

Law enforcement should be made more efficient, effective, and responsible, with very harsh punishments for evidence tampering. Out-of-court settlements should be discouraged, with strict fines issued to perpetrators who attempt to silence victims through financial payoffs. Finally, sentences should extend well beyond [16-20 years of prison time](#) for those found guilty of sexual violence.

Girls should be encouraged to take defense lessons for their protection. And we should help all citizens better understand the meaning of consent: No means no.

As individuals, we can influence the

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government's course of action. Speak to your local representative. Make sure your voice is heard. Treat the victims with respect and care they deserve.

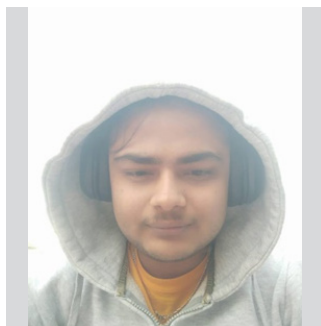
An assault can happen to anyone. Our sisters, cousins, friends and wives should not have to look over their shoulders every time they are out on the street. We should not have to keep asking ourselves, 'is my sister safe?'

But until the government does their job, we must do ours. As citizens, the responsibility falls on us to keep our sisters and friends safe.

So stand up and speak out.

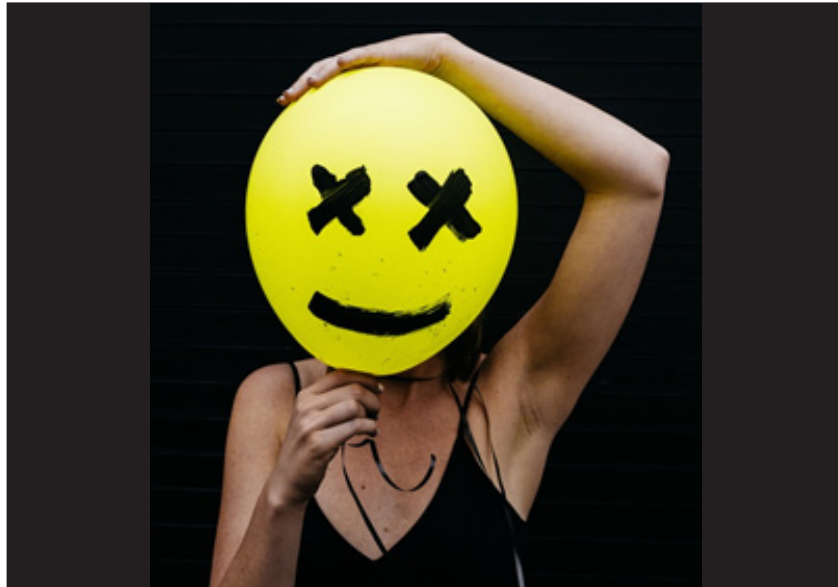
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### ***About the Author***

*Hello! My name is Bibek Baral and I am an International Student from Nepal, currently majoring in computer science. Growing up, I frequently came across news about violent sexual assaults and crimes against women. Many Nepali youths, including me, would like the government to do something progressive towards discouraging sexual assaults. It is my dream that one day my female friends and sisters would not have to fear for their well-being when outside the safety of their home.*



*photo credit*

## THE DAMAGING SIDE EFFECT OF POSITIVITY

Zia Macdermid

When I was 16, I was diagnosed with depression. That year, there was a permanent dent in the center of my bed.

I would lie empty-eyed on my back. A buzzing mind kept me awake, heavy limbs kept me down. I would hear footsteps thud down the hall as my family went about their lives. Always that slight pause outside my room as they'd throw me a confused or concerned glance.

Sometimes we talked.

My brother gave me hugs and told me “It could be so much worse.” My dad smiled and declared “You’ll be fine.” My mum held tight to my limp frame advising “be grateful for everything you have.”

I started to shut the door after a while.

Then I sold my phone.

I knew if my closest friends and family

## THE DAMAGING SIDE EFFECT OF POSITIVITY

couldn't accept that I wasn't going to be upbeat and happy—no one could.

My experience is a common one. [One in five American adults experience depression.](#) Many receive some form of support. But too often, that support shares the same positive, yet invalidating outlook my parents offered me. To build a healthy, inclusive culture, we need to start making space for negative emotions.

We all know people whose genuine optimism brightens our days. However, sometimes an excess of positivity is damaging. This is known as toxic positivity.

[Psychologists Samara Quintero and Jamie Long](#) describe toxic positivity as an overdose of generalized optimism leaving no space for reality. From their experience as therapists Quintero and Long connect such positivity to feelings of shame.

According to [Psychology Today](#), people suf-

fering from depression experience a sense of shame because their illness causes them to feel lethargic or unmotivated. Amplifying this feeling with toxic positivity doesn't help. Shame is a hard emotion to recognize in ourselves, but it is often present when we experience judgment, denial, and secrecy. Forcing a positive outlook upon others with nonchalant phrases like “it could be so much worse” encourages the latter two and implies the first.

When I was 19, I developed PTSD. I'd be slouched back against the arm of a couch, enjoying the banter of close friends when someone would mention a name, or use a certain word. My fists would clench, my heart would slow its beating, my brain would shut down. Sometimes my friends followed me after I left, imploring me to “look on the brightside” and explaining “those little things don't matter.”

If I made it to my room, I always shut the door behind me.

This is common. Toxic positivity can damage relationships and isolate people. [Clinical Psychologist Dr. Allison Niebes-Davis](#) claims toxic positivity can harm the relationships of people struggling with mental illnesses. Comments may be made with no ill intentions, yet Niebes-Davis says they send a subtle but clear message: There is no space for negativity here. People are left feeling invalidated and unable to reach out. Isolated. Like I was.

Besides shame and isolation, suppression of emotions is closely linked to increased stress levels. [A study by James Gross and Robert Levenson in the Journal of Abnormal Psychology](#) looked at the physical effects on the brain of suppressing strong emotions.

They showed three videos to participants, each made to evoke a different emotion: One negative, one positive, and one neutral. Half the participants were encouraged to express their emotions while viewing the films and the other half were told to sup-

press them. They found that both preparing to and suppressing emotions induced higher rates of brain activity (more effort) and created greater stress in participants.

The effects of long-term suppression include anxiety and depression. When toxic positivity leads to suppression of emotions, the same thing occurs.

Being around people becomes more draining and planning to meet with friends induces greater amounts of stress. By allowing ourselves to make authentic connections with people, the bad and good included, we make the lives of those around us easier.

So I ask, be empathetic, not dismissive.

I understand comforting a friend isn't easy. And seemingly the more you know about mental health the harder it gets. Anything you say could have unforeseeable long-lasting effects.

## THE DAMAGING SIDE EFFECT OF POSITIVITY

I've been on both sides of this issue, so I get it.

But the best thing we can do is educate ourselves. Creating an environment that invalidates and judges' negative feelings causes additional shame, isolation, and stress. Instead, we need to make space for these emotions.

Here are some [tips from Dr. Niebes-Davis](#) to help recognize when positivity becomes toxic:

First, is your positivity simplistic?

Making generalized one-line responses to deep and complicated emotions can imply you haven't listened or you don't care about what someone is going through.

Second, does the comment leave a place to address pain or struggle?

By not acknowledging their pain, Nie-

bes-Davis explains, you are "drawing an imaginary forcefield around yourself." You are isolating and invalidating others.

Third—perhaps the least obvious aspect of toxic positivity—is the use of all or nothing language.

An example is 'everything happens for a reason.' By using the word 'everything' you include traumatic experiences such as losing a child, being diagnosed with cancer, or being abused. Placing these experiences in the same category as missing the bus implies you aren't giving credit to the depth of emotions felt.

Toxic positivity doesn't leave room for people to be genuine humans. Most of us have experienced physical heart ache after a breakup. Or the way disappointment renders us hopeless after we're let down again by the people we trust. Or a sense of overwhelming grief after a loved one has passed away.

We can't stop those feelings.

No one can.

No one should.

So, why force each other to hide them?

Let's accept each other and embrace the full human experience. It'll make it a better one.

I promise.

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#### *About the Author*

*Zia Macdermid is a Junior student at the University of Wyoming. Originally from Palmerston North, New Zealand, she is majoring in Physics and Astrophysics.*

*Zia has struggled with the stigma surrounding mental health since she was a teenager. She found the more she knew about mental illnesses the better she was at supporting herself and others. Zia hopes that bringing light toxic positivity is a way she can help those playing a supporting role in mental health issues.*



*photo credit: Pixabay*

## THE POINTLESSNESS OF STANDARDIZED TESTING

Travis Wicks

Picture this: You're a high school student sitting in a room with 50-100 other students on a Saturday morning. In front of you is the test you've been preparing for throughout your entire high school career. If you do well, you'll get into the college you want. If you don't, you're going to have to either pay to take the test again, or go find a job and forget about it.

This is the problem almost every high school student, myself included, has or will face

before going on to the next phase of their lives. I imagine most people reading this might be feeling sick just thinking about it.

Why is this system in place and why does it have to be so pressurized? And the bigger question? Whether it's really worth it.

These standardized tests may be a way for education systems gather and compare data across the United States.

But this data shouldn't be used as such a



defining factor in students' lives. There are many other ways in which these statistics could be achieved without as much pressure.

Schools across the country measure a student's performance—as well as their teacher's instructional methods—by [administering standardized tests](#). These test scores are intended as a way to normalize and compare every school to one another using measurable statistics.

These tests are useful in evaluating some aspects of student achievement and in broadly gauging the efficacy of a teacher's lesson plans. The hope here is that this data might help pave the way to improvements in an educational system. However, this data shouldn't be so heavily depended on to judge a student's intelligence.

Here's the first problem with these tests: The same material isn't taught everywhere. There are differences in teaching methods,

environments, and goals in different schools. Sure, school districts many have standardized curriculums in place, but that doesn't mean they teach everything exactly the same. The reality of the situation is that without intense monitoring and completely online learning systems, we will never get to a point where complete standardization is possible.

[Fairtest, The National Center for Fair and Open Testing](#), explains there are large gaps between student performance on a pressurized test compared to their actual level of intelligence. The scores on the ACT can be off by up to 2.2 points. According to the organization, this discrepancy “can actually have significant consequences for applicants when admissions offices or financial aid programs require minimum scores.”

Standardized tests are simply not accurate enough to dictate someone's future, much less produce accurate data for education systems and school districts across the country.

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Another thing to consider: Everybody learns at a different pace.

While some students are slower to learn, others may already be enrolled in college courses by the time they have to take a standardized test like the ACT or SAT.

This means that the material they are learning in their classes doesn't match up with that of the test even if they are in higher level classes.

But that's not always the case. A friend of mine was in all advanced and honors courses, had above a 4.0 GPA, and was involved in multiple sports and activities outside of school. Even so, he had to take the ACT five times in order to get into the school he wanted. Making this test so pivotal to a student's future puts an unacceptable amount of weight on students' shoulders everywhere.

Someone's intelligence is not just a reflec-

tion of their academic work. For many students, [high school means work outside the classroom, too](#). Many become involved in extracurricular activities, sports, school organizations, or take on a part time job. Now stay with me here. It turns out that in order to get a good job, these things are taken into account. So why do we not put more weight on these issues when we're talking about going to college or advancing to the next step in life?

How can we fix it? My recommendation would be to keep the test, but to make it part of a class that covers all the material. For example, this could be a required class that teaches high school kids to learn how to take a test. They would focus on the aspects of the standardized test and then at the end of the semester, their final would be the actual standardized test.

This would help demonstrate what students have learned and give feedback to teachers on their instructional methods. But this test

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should not follow a student throughout their life and learning career. We need to make a good faith effort to control for variables that make statistics from these tests unreliable, such as pressurized testing environments, differing teaching methods, and fluctuations in test scores.

Standardized testing may seem important, but that importance can only go so far. Each year, it seems there is more and more pressure on students to do well on these tests.

We need to take a step back and realize the

impact this is having on students.

We must do something about the way this information is gathered, while creating a fair atmosphere for students.

These tests have failed. But our students shouldn't have to.

Let's come up with a new system to protect their future aspirations, both in education and life.

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### ***About the Author***

*Travis Wicks is a student at the University of Wyoming. He's currently pursuing a major in architectural engineering. Travis feels strongly about the effects of standardized testing because, like many students, he was forced to take the ACT in high school. Travis is hoping to bring light to this issue and make improvements on the current system.*



A vibrant field of purple lupine flowers in full bloom, set against a clear blue sky and distant mountains. The flowers are in sharp focus in the foreground, with a soft bokeh effect in the background.

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