Acta Cogitata
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Presenting the 9th Annual Undergraduate Conference in Philosophy

Saturday & Sunday March 9th & 10th
McKenny Hall, 3rd Floor
Check-in Saturday & Sunday at 8:30am
Presentations begin at 9am

KEYNOTE SPEAKER: DR. KIRSTEN JACOBSON from The University of Maine

Breakfast and lunch provided

Welcome Event
Hosted by the Philosophy Club
7pm - Friday, March 8th
McKenny Union Ballroom

Contact: emuucip@gmail.com Website: www.emuucip.com

Sponsored by Student Government, the History & Philosophy Department, and the Philosophy Club.
Acta Cogitata is a publication of the History and Philosophy Department at Eastern Michigan University.

Acta Cogitata is dedicated to providing a venue for undergraduate authors of original philosophical papers to have their work reviewed and, possibly, published. Publication acknowledges the work of outstanding undergraduate authors, rewards their efforts, and provides a home for some thought-provoking projects. In line with this purpose, Acta Cogitata’s authors retain their copyright so that they may continue to develop these projects. The journal, however, does not publish work that has previously been published elsewhere.

The journal accepts philosophical papers from all areas of philosophy and seeks to promote philosophical discourse in any area where such discourse may be illuminating.

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Cover Art

Unbalanced, by Morgan Burgard
Acrylic and paper on canvas, 36” x 24”

Visual description

The cover art for this journal depicts a two dimensional abstract painting in vibrant shades of blue, green, yellow, peach, orange, red, and purple. Beginning on the left, the artist depicts stripes, triangles, and parallelograms of varying colors which intersect and come together, unified into larger, brightly colored squares, rectangles, and arrows. The shapes begin to transition from distinct shapes to indistinct smudges as the colors blur together gently near the bottom-right side of the painting. The overall effect is one of layers, crisp and distinct at the top and to the left, with deeper layers more indistinct.

Artist’s Statement

Art allows me to explore emotion and connection. Art serves as a passion, therapy, means of expression, and a message I want to communicate to people: It is about being inspired and exploring a physical and mental perception that is unique to each individual.

I paint in the same way the brain thinks: creating new pathways and making new connections in order to understand. When my mind wonders my hands go along for the ride. Each turn and stroke, each color and mixture, and each figure and outline create something different for everyone. There is more than one way to understand and think about what has been made onto the canvas. There is an infinite number of pathways and connections within each piece. This is what is inside my mind, and I believe it’s what my thinking looks like.
Letter from the Editor

I am proud to have joined the staff of Acta Cogitata this year as student editor. Our previous editor, Ryan Lemasters, has left me some large shoes to fill, and all of us, both at Acta and in the department, thank him for his work shaping the journal into what it is today. Taking on this role is particularly meaningful to me, as this journal was my first taste of public philosophy, presenting my undergraduate work in previous issues. The opportunity and experience offered to me then by the journal helped refine my vision and goals for my life as a professional philosopher, and I am both privileged and humbled to be offered the chance to work with emerging scholars in a similar way. I hope that I am able to offer them as rewarding an experience as I had when I was in their shoes. As the Philosophy program grows at Eastern Michigan University, Acta is also growing by presenting our first fully-compiled issue, featuring work by an undergraduate student in Eastern’s Art program on the cover. I hope you are as excited as I am by this new direction.

A fundamental part of philosophy is asking hard questions and exploring the possible answers, whether those questions are about the nature of reality or knowledge, the right way to live in relation to and with other humans, non-human animals, and the environment, what it means to live, or what it means to die. In our sixth issue of Acta Cogitata, we share with our readers papers from emerging scholars on topics as timely as LGBTQ+ rights related to military service and as timeless as our approach to mortality.

Thank you to our authors for sharing their work, their professors and mentors for their efforts in support of their development as scholars, and their institutions for encouraging these students and so many others in their philosophical work. You enrich not only philosophy, but our world, through your contributions.

C. Áine Keefer

Editor in Chief
Dr. W. John Koolage

Student Editor
C. Áine Keefer
Abstract

As an institution, the U.S. Military allows a certain strain of heteronormative masculinity to flourish, subsequently pushing to the margins individuals who do not fit such a standard. In this paper, I use this phenomenon as the basis for an exploration of the different forms of insecurity experienced by LGBTQ+ persons within the military, a project that necessarily includes viewing security as a holistic issue, rather than just as one which affects a person’s immediate physical safety. I engage in a project of seeking out a linguistic framework through which to deconstruct LGBTQ+ insecurity within the military that is both all-encompassing of the community’s needs, and is politically expedient, thereby providing channels for future activism and policy change. First, I explain and critique two common frameworks – rights and national security – pointing out both the benefits and the potential inadequacies of each. I then explore a third linguistic framework, one which focuses on citizenship, as I believe that it has the most potential both for recognizing the full scope of LGBTQ+ insecurities within the military and facilitating political progress. I explain the necessity of a fluid definition of citizenship, and use this to make brief suggestions for theorists engaging in deconstructive projects in the future.

Introduction

Despite the passage of laws prohibiting discrimination based on an individual’s gender or sexuality, the LGBTQ+ community remains greatly disadvantaged on both a legal and social level. Understanding these disadvantages as insecurities, rather than just personal biases, places them within political discourse, as it makes clear the relationship between insecurities and policies that fail to prevent – or even explicitly facilitate – them. The phenomenon of LGBTQ+ insecurity is especially apparent within the military, where implicit and explicit ideas of heteronormative masculinity are evident. An individual’s military experience is shaped by both interactions with other servicemembers, and by the relationship between individual soldiers and policies. It is then possible to study policy through political-philosophical frameworks, which makes clear the social ideas behind them.

In this paper, I begin by exploring security as a multifaceted issue, one which is best captured by a paradigm known as human security. I then analyze two ways of understanding LGBTQ+ insecurities within the military, both of which have merit but are incomplete on their own. I describe the potential downsputs of these two frameworks before describing what I find a more convincing one: citizenship. My paper concludes with a brief discussion of potential approaches to reframing discourse surrounding LGBTQ+ individuals within the military in terms of citizenship, as I believe that doing so will both recognize a wide range of issues and provide a feasible and politically expedient method through which to address these issues.
LGBTQ+ Insecurity

In order to understand the full scope of LGBTQ+ insecurity both in and outside of the military, it is important to grant that security is a fluid concept that is not captured fully by theories that define it in terms of physical vulnerability alone. Traditional security models center on the importance of preventing physical attacks against a specific population, but recent scholars have begun to view this approach as inadequate. Instead, insecurity is best thought of through a human security paradigm, which has grown in popularity since the 1990s because it focuses on “problems created by humankind” without limiting itself to a study of physical violence, often showing the effects of actions that target individuals.\(^1\) Human security allows for analyses of “both direct and indirect violence,” which thus renders it well-equipped to rectify a number of non-traditional security threats.\(^2\) Throughout this paper, I will use such a definition of security, as I will assume that security threats include a variety that are predictably harmful to an individual’s well-being. Viewing security in this way elucidates many of the insecurities that LGBTQ+ individuals within the military face because of their identities and making these issues visible helps facilitate discourse and political change.

Policy-based indirect violence against LGBTQ+ persons in the military contributes to their insecurity. One example of this is the G.I. Bill of Rights, a piece of legislation passed in 1944 at the conclusion of World War II with the intention of helping re-assimilate returning veterans into civilian life. The G.I. Bill gave these veterans access to education, vocational training, and financial resources to ease their transition from service. Margot Canaday writes extensively on this bill, focusing on the ways that it was unjust for gay service members, especially in the years immediately following its passage. The full extent of the G.I. Bill’s benefits were “most accessible to white middle-class men” leaving the military, especially those who were not discharged for known or suspected “homosexual acts or tendencies.”\(^3\) Soldiers removed for homosexuality were issued a blue discharge, which is neither honorable nor dishonorable. Though the initial provisions of the bill were supposed to allow anyone with a non-dishonorable discharge to reap its benefits, the undesirable blue discharge was still excluded, a strategic move intended to harm men who were discharged based on sexual orientation.\(^4\) The bill’s language, then, allowed men who were discharged for homosexuality to be denied the economic and education benefits given to straight men who were not discharged dishonorably. The human security model that I am assuming allows this to be conceptualized as an instance of LGBTQ+ insecurity, as economic stability is a fundamental component of well-being.

Another policy-based threat to LGBTQ+ security affects both members of the military and civilians: healthcare access. Veterans who were discharged for homosexuality were also denied access to healthcare services provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs, though many of them later gained the ability to appeal their discharge statuses in order to regain access to service members' benefits.\(^5\) Similarly to the economic stability granted under the G.I. Bill, having access

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2. Ibid, 39.
4. Ibid, 943.
to reliable and affordable healthcare is encompassed in the human security paradigm, as scholars recognize how imperative it is for a strong quality of life. This issue is not exclusive to LGBTQ+ veterans. A 2016 report explains that LGBTQ+ people in the rural United States face “decreased access to care and lower rates of screening for multiple preventable or treatable diseases” compared to cisgender and heterosexual persons, due to a number of psychological and social factors making this care more difficult to access. 6 Like the distribution of G.I. Bill benefits, a human security model allows for complications in obtaining adequate healthcare to be thought of as insecurities.

The two frameworks that I will explain and critique – along with the one that I will propose – serve as potential methods to redress a broad range of issues facing LGBTQ+ individuals in the military. They create a conceptual space within which these insecurities may be deconstructed, thereby enabling scholars to understand the conditions that create insecurity.

**Traditional Frameworks for Deconstructing LGBTQ+ Insecurity**

There are two dominant linguistic frameworks that are traditionally used to deconstruct and understand instances of LGBTQ+ insecurity within the military. The first is a rights discourse, which portrays insecurities as violations of individuals’ rights, and the second frames them as risks to national security more broadly. As both rights and security are often linked with military service, the two frameworks offer interesting methods for deconstructing insecurity specifically within the military. Both frameworks make valuable contributions to addressing LGBTQ+ insecurity, as LGBTQ+ rights cannot and should not be fully separated from the discourse on basic human rights, and national security and conceptions of the common good ideally attempt to provide a more secure environment for a greater number of individuals. Taken alone, though, neither one is able both to (1) address a wide range of insecurities fully and (2) provide a politically expedient means of rectifying them.

Much discussion framing LGBTQ+ injustices and legal battles, especially in recent years, uses human- or civil-rights-based language. The largest LGBTQ+ advocacy organization in the United States is the Human Rights Campaign, a name which suggest that human rights is the default framework for studying issues affecting the LGBTQ+ community. Similarly, a United Nations report regarding homophobic violence and discrimination was produced by the UN’s Human Rights Council, again assuming that LGBTQ+ insecurity ought to be delegated to a human rights focus. Such an approach to security is legitimized and enabled by understanding security as a multifaceted issue. Patrick Hayden writes of a “human right to peace” as a “justifiable and necessary cornerstone” to an ideal security model. 7 Thus, though his work does not focus only on LGBTQ+ persons within the military, the language he uses allows his work to be applied to a variety of instances of LGBTQ+ insecurity.

Though the concept of human rights has facilitated much social progress for the LGBTQ+ community, it may not be the best option for influencing policy decisions. Angelia R. Wilson considers human rights framings’ flaws by concentrating on what is at stake when we rely on this approach alone as an approach to LGBTQ+ issues. 8 She proposes a shift toward an approach that

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7 Ibid, 40.
8 Angelia R. Wilson, “The ‘Neat Concept’ of Sexual Citizenship: A Cautionary Tale for Hu-
I will explore in greater detail later, one that focuses on citizenship. Wilson believes that there is “a power relationship between the state and the individual,” one which must be understood before we can examine LGBTQ+ insecurity. If we study queer theory without understanding the power dynamics informed by and influencing it, we will not gain the fullest possible understanding of how LGBTQ+ insecurity operates and can be eradicated. Wilson’s argument is that “a claim to human rights is not enough,” as such claims tend to miss the middle ground between theoretical rights language and practical steps taken toward securing rights.

Catherine Connell provides a striking example of an instance in which human rights as a framework was inadequate for addressing an LGBTQ+ insecurity: advocating for the repeal of Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell (DADT), a policy that for nearly two decades barred openly gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals from military service. Connell traces DADT’s evolution from the demedicalization of homosexuality in the 1960s to the more tolerant – but still not ideal – social climate in the 1990s that saw the bill’s enactment. She then analyzes the political climate surrounding DADT, especially while repeal was being sought, aiming to highlight activists’ strategies for gaining political recognition and ultimately success. Activists initially based their position on a civil or human rights claim, arguing that all Americans have the same right to enlist in the military. Though rights were a strong rallying point for activists, this approach was unsuccessful for both the DADT repeal and a number of other issues affecting the LGBTQ+ community. Connell points out one major flaw in the adoption of a rights-based framework for the DADT repeal: “it first requires buy-in to the idea that people deserve sexuality based protections.” Thus, without a major social shift that changes individuals’ opinions about the LGBTQ+ community, a human rights approach to LGBTQ+ insecurity will not be successful.

Connell’s work shows that relying on human rights to address LGBTQ+ insecurity within the military is not an effective approach, as it does not acknowledge the convictions of those who are fundamentally opposed to rights for marginalized sexuality groups. Though human rights may be conceptually strong, such an approach fails to facilitate the discussions that would ultimately lead to policy victories. Connell suggests a shift toward a national security framework that acknowledges traditionally conservative concerns despite working toward liberal goals. Activists working toward the DADT repeal needed to use a frame that would appeal to an audience beyond those who were LGBTQ+ rights advocates, convincing skeptics that “DADT actually threatens [military] readiness and security” by preventing individuals with valuable skills from enlisting. Connell’s work therefore shows the value of addressing LGBTQ+ insecurity through a bipartisan approach, as doing so allows activists to build upon a wider range of people’s desires, eliminating the need to accept a liberal set of social beliefs before understanding the implications of insecurities.

In her study of political discourse through the lens of queer theory, Jasbir Puar’s work offers a response to Connell’s assertion that LGBTQ issues are best addressed by reference to man Rights Discourse,” Contemporary Politics 15, no. 1 (2009): 74.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid, 82.
12 Ibid, 1020.
13 Ibid, 1025.
14 Ibid, 1021.
national security. She argues that “proper homosexual subjects” are those easily assimilated into the larger culture, as they are not readily viewed as threats to national cohesion in a society shaped by heterosexual norms.¹⁵ When homosexuality is not welcomed for assimilation, though, LGBTQ+ persons’ identities become politicized, as homosexual language and imagery is applied to terrorists to emasculate them and portray them as ‘others.’ For example, she describes visual media after the September 11 attacks, like “a website where weapons are provided to sodomize Osama bin Laden to death,” showing the weaponization of homosexuality.¹⁶ Ultimately, such images say that homosexuality is a punishment, and ought not to be accepted as a natural part of individuals’ lives. Coupled with the declaration of the War on Terror, then, Puar’s work describes another backward step for LGBTQ+ military members, as soldiers are taught to identify potential terrorists as fundamentally unlike themselves. Therefore, images that assign homosexual characteristics to terrorists give the impression that homosexuality is essentially an antithesis to military values, opening the door for it to be marked as dangerous elsewhere.

Puar writes that “even as patriotism immediately after September 11 was inextricably tied to a reinvigoration of heterosexual norms for Americans, progressive sexuality was championed as a hallmark of U.S. modernity,” drawing attention to the dual usage of queer linguistic references in terrorism discourse.¹⁷ The U.S. will use language and images that are derogatory toward LGBTQ+ persons, but simultaneously attempts to present itself as progressive relative to the countries it fights against, in an attempt to uphold the ideal American freedom. As the link between terrorism and national security is fairly explicit, Puar’s work reveals the drawbacks of the approach that Connell suggests in her work on DADT. Creating a link between LGBTQ+ identities and national security makes it possible to begin weaponizing homosexuality, which is ultimately harmful to servicemembers.

What else may prevent national security from being the best framework for deconstructing LGBTQ+ military insecurity? When policymakers focus on national security issues as opposed to human rights, they necessarily focus on the collective state rather than rectifying individuals’ insecurities, or even those of communities within the state. Even though national security may be a more attractive option than human rights to a greater number of people, it does not capture the full breadth of issues faced by LGBTQ+ persons within the military because it focuses on state security. This causes issues that affect individuals, or even groups of individuals, to go unnoticed. For example, “coercive forms of military masculinity” enable rapes by and against male soldiers to be viewed as emasculating and representative of a hegemonic gendered power dynamic.¹⁸ This effect is compounded by the shame felt by the victims of these attacks, as they often feel that their masculinity has been challenged while simultaneously knowing that their attackers will likely evade punishment.¹⁹ Because of what sexual violence represents to its victims and its perpetrators, it is important to recognize that the military as an institution represents traditional

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¹⁶ Ibid, 38.

¹⁷ Ibid, 41.


masculine values, which compounds the effect of emasculation. Even if these attacks represent a larger pattern of military social relations, they are still commonly thought of as attacks against individuals, and are therefore given a relatively small amount of conceptual space in discussions of individuals’ military experiences and national security more broadly. Further, concern about disrupting the military’s ‘normal’ processes may hinder prosecution of the perpetrators of these attacks. Therefore, deconstructing insecurity through national security may marginalize issues that affect individuals.

Citizenship in Analyses of LGBTQ+ Military Insecurity

Though there are merits to deconstructing LGBTQ+ insecurity in the military via rights or national security, neither of these frameworks is able to lead to a solution that is both politically expedient and captures the full extent of insecurity. Recognizing citizenship as a fluid status claim rather than purely as a legal designation means that the origins of it cannot be easily understood, as it arises through discourse rather than through policies. Foucault writes on the role of discourse in shaping political thought, writing that each state “has its regime of truth, its general politics of truth,” meaning that the discourse spread by government institutions is relative to the social conditions under which it is conceived. By making certain statements “function as true,” states are able to give legitimate meaning to concepts that may otherwise only exist abstractly. This underscores the importance of understanding the power dynamics at work within discourse, as the ideas that become dominant are often those most favored by whomever is in power. If political discourse is controlled by a hegemonically heterosexual state institution, the ideas it produces become reflective of this. Puar discusses the dis-identification of terrorists as citizens, describing it as a “process of sexualization” in which terrorists are simultaneously portrayed as anti-American and depicted as homosexuals. This rhetoric is harmful as it suggests that terrorists’ non-citizenship is intimately connected with these sexually charged images, therefore promoting a view that allows all LGBTQ+ persons, including those in the military, to be viewed as threats to national security. In this way, citizenship is formulated discursively in a way that designates certain individuals as non-citizens, suggesting that their non-citizenship is part of their deviance.

Linda Kerber, a historian specializing in the development over time of feminist theory, analyzes an instance of discourse being inadvertently influenced by political thought. She describes a toast given by Sarah Jay shortly after the Revolutionary War ended, in which she declares, “May all our Citizens be Soldiers, and all our Soldiers Citizens.” Kerber believes that Jay was doing more than just reciting a patriotic platitude; she posits that it was influenced by a political discourse that defined citizenship through military enlistment. Though her work focuses on how women were excluded from discourse because they were barred from combat positions, under DADT

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22 Ibid.
23 Puar, Terrorist Assemblages, 38.
25 Ibid, 92.
the same would apply to gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals who wished to be open about their identities. Kerber describes the historical applicability of this discourse, tracing it back to Ancient Greek ideas, as many early political philosophers saw military service as on par with civic engagement.26

Present-day discussions about citizenship also liken it to a certain baseline level of civic engagement, described by Dennis F. Thompson as “the present and future capacity for influencing politics.”27 Many scholars take this literally, as they equate voting with citizenship. This misses the non-voting ways – including military service – that individuals can influence politics, and it assumes that everyone with the ability to vote is granted the same citizenship status. Instead, Thompson theorizes “degrees of citizenship” as determined by two conditions: autonomy and improvability.28 An issue arises, then, when access to the resources allowing individuals to act upon their autonomy and improvability are not equitably distributed.

Following Thompson’s model, the G.I. Bill of Rights would be a violation of individuals’ citizenship because it did not fairly distribute the resources that enabled a greater level of economic autonomy and improvability to soldiers discharged for homosexuality. The aspects of the G.I. Bill denied to soldiers discharged for homosexuality were components of “social citizenship” as they would ensure recipients a greater level of social and economic stability.29 Because these advantages were only granted to a certain group of people, they placed individuals at different levels of citizenship. Similarly, DADT challenged the notion of autonomy as “treating each citizen as the best judge of his own interest” by enabling the government to ban an entire group of persons who were otherwise qualified to serve from enlisting.30 Deconstructing both of these issues affecting LGBTQ+ individuals in the military via citizenship, then, draws attention to their roots as insecurities.

Reframing LGBTQ+ Military Insecurity through Citizenship

T.H. Marshall describes the separate elements of citizenship as culminating in “a status bestowed upon those who are full members of a community,” in that they, though different, are afforded the same “rights and duties” associated with citizenship.31 Citizenship, therefore, is deeply rooted in equality. Marshall notes that civil rights discourse allows for economic and social inequalities to persist by treating each man as fundamentally independent and responsible for himself, rather than acknowledging the legally-sanctioned institutions like the military that enable inequality to persist.32 Citizenship “provided the foundation of equality on which the structure of inequality could be built” in present-day capitalism, which enabled people to recognize that a society built upon identical legal status for different groups was not enough, and new forms of rights began to emerge, causing citizenship discussions to be focused on social, rather than purely

26  Ibid.
30  Ibid.
32  Ibid, 150.
In order to determine whether an insecurity is an instance of diminished citizenship status, theorists might combine Thompson and Marshall’s theories. Thompson provides two strong yet fluid criteria that can be used to assess a given scenario: autonomy and improvability, as conditions that allow for both of these can be thought to respect individuals’ citizenship. Marshall’s critique of citizenship as equality may also be applied, because he acknowledges that this definition limits discourse by asking us to consider all citizens as citizens to the same extent. Instead, if we frame citizenship as Thompson suggests and then use the disparities in these qualities to show that individuals — regardless of their legal citizenship — are not granted equivalent citizenship, then we may gain a more comprehensive view of how insecurities for LGBTQ+ persons in the military are brought about by the unequal distribution of citizenship.

33 Ibid, 151.
Bibliography


A League of Their Own: A Feminist Interpretation of Women’s Sport in the U.S.

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Abstract

The goal of this essay is to examine American sports through the lens of feminist philosophy. I am particularly interested in the questions of what the American attitude is toward women’s sports and the involvement of women in men’s sports, does that attitude reflect a cultural limit that Americans have reached regarding women’s sports (I intend to argue that it does), and does that limit reveal essentializing notions about sex which still haunt American society. In answering these questions, I will be using Wendy Williams’ article, “The Equality Crisis,” specifically her sections on the culture of men and women as aggressors and nurturers respectively, for her definition and recognition of the concept of the cultural limit, and the Joan W. Scott piece, “Deconstructing Equality-versus-Difference” in conducting a post-structuralist examination of women’s sports in the U.S. as well as the work of various scientists and philosophers in examining the genealogy of women in sports. My primary focus will be the sports of basketball, baseball, and American football, along with what appears to be its female equivalent in cheerleading. Each of these sports, perhaps, apart from basketball, are traditionally associated with essential masculinity and each have a female equivalent, which seems to be less popular in mainstream entertainment.

It can be easy to view sports purely as entertainment, while not realizing their depth, in terms of cultural significance. But athletic competition has a long and rich history, and much can be learned about the culture of a nation by examining which sports are popular and the general attitude of a people concerning sports. Sports often serve as a reflection of key societal issues and social justice victories, ranging from Jesse Owens raising a fist after winning the gold medal in Nazi Germany, the desegregation of baseball, to activist causes like the recent Colin Kaepernick protests. The major role of sports in popular culture combined with the history of sport being traditionally viewed as the arena of masculine competition and the domain of essential masculinity leads me to the conclusion that a feminist examination of topic will shed light on some essentializing notions still held about women in mainstream popular culture which may seem contradictory to the values we now hold in our modern “post-feminist” society.

My intention in this essay is to examine the American attitude towards women’s participation in sport through the lens of feminist philosophy, and what it reveals about the American attitude towards women in general. In doing so, I intend to argue that in spite of various successes of the feminist movement, which have resulted in some ground being gained for women’s equal treatment in American society, the American attitude towards women’s sports and the athletes who participate in them reveals essentializing notions about sex and gender that still exist in some form within the subconscious mind of American society; as well as a “cultural limit” which has been reached in our society of the kind described by Wendy Williams in her essay “The Equality Crisis”. Further, I also intend to investigate how this limit came to be reached through a post-structural analysis, using the model described by Joan W. Scott in her piece “Deconstructing Equality-versus-Difference”, of the sports of baseball, football, and basketball, as well as the participation of women in each of these sports; all of which are traditionally associated with essential masculinity and each have
some female equivalent which is less popular in mainstream entertainment.

In her article titled “The Equality Crisis: Some Reflections on Culture, Courts, and Feminism”, Wendy Williams introduces the idea of a “cultural limit” which can be reached by a society concerning the amount of progress they are willing to make on social issues which are contradictory to “our most profoundly embedded cultural values” (Williams, 697). Williams argues that a refusal to ignore certain culturally constructed gender norms can be reflected by certain cultural phenomenon. She uses the examples of particular court cases which show that a separate spheres gender labor policy, in which men occupy a public sphere and fulfill a “breadwinner” role and women occupy a private sphere and fulfill the role of “homemaker”, still exists embedded in the subconscious minds of lawmakers by tradition, while any actual legislation prohibiting women from entering the workforce had been stuck off the books by activist movements. In the same spirit of Williams’ work, I believe that a similar cultural limit has been reached regarding women’s sports in the U.S.

Several legal and societal victories have been won regarding women’s sports in the last 50 years, including the establishment of the WNBA in 1996 and the passing of title IX of the educational amendments in 1972, which prohibited discrimination based on sex in any federally funded institution and opened the door for female athletes to begin participating at the collegiate level. But title IX only demonstrates legal progress and you cannot legislate people’s attitudes and opinions. According to an article by Forbes, the average attendance of WNBA games is about 10,000 fans less per game than their male counterparts; the players in the WNBA are also paid 28% less than their male counterparts, only receiving 22% of league revenue, while NBA player receive 50% of league revenue. These statistics demonstrate that female basketball players are less popular and less appreciated by their league than male players, and I would argue are a result of essentializing notions held by the typical American sports consumer, who believes that the game is less entertaining if played by women. The female basketball player, and female athlete in general, is assumed to be less talented and less athletic than her male counterparts by the typical fan, which is a result of essentializing ideals which have been reinforced in American culture by tradition. But these assumptions appear to run counter to what is typically accepted to be the appropriate attitude towards women in modern American culture. For example, when Cam Newton, the quarterback of the Carolina Panthers, made a sexist comment to a female reporter interviewing him after a game, saying it was “weird to hear a female talking about (intricate game details),” he received overwhelmingly negative feedback on social media and from his colleagues. The feedback received by Mr. Newton regarding his comment demonstrates that the popular attitude is perhaps more progressive than the one held by Newton himself, but I would argue that there are cultural limits lingering in the American subconscious which prohibit most of those same people who came to the reporter’s immediate defense from asking larger questions about the role of women in football in general. Questions like why are women who want to be involved in football confined for the most part to the role of sideline reporter instead of analyst; to the role of cheerleader instead of player? It is not a lack of ability, athleticism, or physical toughness that prevents women from playing Football, as evidenced by the recent emergence of female players at the pop warner, high school, and collegiate levels, but rather the idea still held in the American subconscious that women are delicate and fragile and have no place in the violent world of professional football; which speaks to the larger problem of war and violence in general having been traditionally thought of as the domain of men, a phenomenon which Wendy Williams describes in detail.
In her article, Williams defines the notions of gender traditionally held by our culture, namely the role of man as aggressor in both war and sex, and the role of woman as mother or nurturer. She writes that war is identified as “essentially masculine” and has traditionally been defined as “the locus of traditional masculine pride and self-identity” and goes on to say that “contact sport is...just a subset of physical combat” (Williams, 699). I would take the comparison a step further in saying that male athletes in all mainstream sports, meaning football, basketball, and baseball, are routinely compared to “warriors” who are “doing battle” on the field of play, and this parallel between sport and war contributes to the reification of essentializing notions of gender. Regular use of this sort of language works to preserve the world of sports as the domain of men and makes sport synonymous with masculinity because of the deeper traditional association between war and masculinity, contributing further to notion that women who play sports are somehow less feminine or “not real women”. This association of sport and masculinity creates a sort of negative feedback loop, in which women in American culture are subtly dissuaded from participating in certain sports because of standards of beauty which discourage large amounts of muscle mass for women and essentializing notions about gender which paint women as weak, fragile and delicate, the apparent avoidance of these certain sports by women then works to reify the notions which discouraged them from participating in the sports to begin with.

Further evidence of a cultural limit reflected in sport is the traditional association with men and baseball, while women are encouraged to play softball instead. Softball has recently been gaining in mainstream popularity, in fact the 2017 college softball world series was recently broadcast on several major networks, including ESPN and CBS. The growing acceptance of softball as a mainstream sport, with big games at the collegiate level now being broadcast on major networks, may at first glance appear to be a victory for women in sports, but the segregation of the two sports by gender in the mind of society is not only problematic for women who would rather play baseball, as the two are largely different games, but also implies and reifies negative stereotypes about female athletes in general.

Softball is assumed to be much less difficult and less physically strenuous than baseball, because the field which is played on is smaller, and the ball is larger and easier to hit. The implication of the fact that women are encouraged to play softball as an alternative to baseball further reflects the aforementioned ideas which are still subconsciously held about gender. Although women are no longer dissuaded outright from participating in sports because of changes in the popular attitude, women’s encouragement to participate in sports which are thought to require less strength, coordination and athletic skill, like softball, demonstrates a reluctance by our society to accept the possibility that men and women are not as different in potential for athletic ability as we assume that they are. What I mean by this is that the assumption that women are so physically inferior to men that they belong in a different sport is an uncritical one and the reluctance to abandon the “women are weak, men are strong” trope, which is implied by the separation of sport by gender reflects what I believe to be a cultural limit in our society that prohibits us from moving beyond traditionally held values which associates strength and athletic ability with men and weakness and frailty with women. I want to be clear in saying that I am conscious of the biological differences between men and women in terms of average muscle mass and naturally occurring hormones which promote muscle growth and am not arguing that these facts should be ignored altogether. However, what I am arguing is that the apparent disparity between males and females in terms of athletic ability, or the popular notion of such a disparity, which amounts to the same thing,
is at largely culturally constructed, and if certain cultural factors were changed, then this gap in athleticism, if it still existed at all, would narrow significantly.

The question of where these notions of gender and sports come from is one that I find particularly interesting because the genealogical examination which is required in attempting to answer the question not only reveals the impermanent nature of certain ideas which we take as essential or having always existed, but also provides the possibility for the righting of certain societal wrongs. The realization that problematic values which we have held in the past and may still continue to hold are not fixed and permanent but transitory gives us as a society the option to make corrections. The technique I will be using to attempt to answer such a question is a poststructural analysis as described by Joan W. Scott in her article “Deconstructing Equality Vs. Difference”, in which she provides a detailed description of what such an analysis entails and how poststructural analysis can be beneficial from the standpoint of feminist philosophy.

Scott defines post-structuralism as a “way of analyzing constructions of meaning and relationships of power that called unitary, universal categories into question and historicized concepts otherwise treated as natural (such as man/woman) or absolute (such as equality or justice).” (Scott, 758). This theory, when applied to the question of the cultural attitude towards women in sports, accomplishes much in the way of providing answers which call into question traditional conceptions of gender, e.g. man as strong, brave warrior, and woman as gentle, meek nurturer. Scott highlights four key elements or structures which must be the central focus of any post-structural analysis, namely, language, discourse, difference, and deconstruction. Language refers to not only verbal communication, but to “any system...through which meaning is constructed and cultural practices are organized,” meaning that a post-structural analysis of the language used within sports would not only focus on the words but also on the socially constructed ways in which men and women reveal themselves to themselves and to each other in meaningful ways. Discourse refers to the complex web of “historically, socially, and institutionally specific” structures which shape how we operate within a given society (Scott. 760). Scott writes that the movement of such structures over time come to constitute what we take to be given as true, e.g. that popular opinions about our understanding of the science of human biology come to shape the so called “truth” that men are vastly superior to women in terms of athletic ability. Difference is the notion that “meaning is made through explicit or implicit contrast…” (Scott, 760) and that such a contrast contributes to how certain things or people reveal themselves to us. The example Scott uses is how the term feminine comes to be defined in terms of a direct opposition to masculine, therefore causing men to be associated with the positive traits which are implied by masculinity, while women come to be associated in terms of the antithesis of masculinity, e.g. men are strong, women are weak, or men are tough, women are fragile. The final element is deconstruction, which refers to the exercise of examining in a critical way the “ways in which meanings are made to work” (Scott, 761). Another way to think about deconstruction would be to examine something that originally shows up as an either/or scenario and realize that it in fact is a false dichotomy and the two terms in question are not actually mutually exclusive.

The general attitude towards women in sports is reflective of the historical attitude towards women in general, and in an effort to examine this attitude I will be referring to the work of various philosophers and scientists, namely Bonnie Morris and her article on the history of women’s sports, Leslie Heaphy and her article sport, philosophy and women, as well as research done by
the Japanese Center for Women in Sports. The commonly held attitude that women are not good at sports or are at least not as good at sports as men are, is the result of attitudes regarding women and their health, which date at least as far back as Aristotle, who posited that human beings had a “limited amount of energy” and that a woman’s menstrual cycle on its own used up a good deal of this finite amount of energy which flowed through the body. Women were therefore discouraged from participating in strenuous mental or physical activity because it was believed that the stress of such activities, combined with the stress of the menstrual cycle, could use up this energy and render the woman infertile (Morris). This belief that women are physically inferior to men became calcified in the subconscious of western culture, evolving alongside our understanding of medical science into the belief, which was popularly held among experts in the 19th century, that women have delicate constitutions and need to be confined to the home and to light house work because strenuous physical activity was bad for their health, especially in terms of fertility and childbearing (Heaphy).

These beliefs, which were commonly accepted as truth, bled into our current understanding of the differences between men and women, and even though modern sensibility has changed in such a way as to be more accepting of women’s participation in the workplace as well as in sports these attitudes still linger in our society, as demonstrated by the still popularly held idea that women are physically inferior to men. Beliefs such as these also contribute to which sports are traditionally played by women or are thought of as feminine. The 19th century belief that women were more delicate and should avoid strenuous physical activity limited which sports women could participate in at that time. Ladies were confined to the sports of swimming, tennis, golf, croquet, and archery because of the relatively low level of exertion required for each of those sports (Morris). When the Olympic games were re-founded at the turn of the century, an all-male Olympic committee was charged with determining which sports women should be eligible to participate in. By the fourth Olympic games, four sports were deemed to be “feminine” and therefore eligible for the participation of women, and these four sports were tennis, archery, swimming, and golf, the same four sports which had previously been deemed socially acceptable for women to participate in because of the historical conception of women as weak (JCRWS). This kind of discourse is also responsible for why women play softball instead of baseball, as softball was originally developed as a less strenuous form of baseball which could be played indoors or in the off-season, as was thus deemed a natural fit for women because of these same antiquated conceptions of health.

The beliefs about the difference between the bodies of men and women are also made manifest in the way in which women, proximally and for the most part, occupy space and move their bodies. Iris Marion Young, as quoted by Leslie Heaphy, argues that the different ways in which men and women perform similar tasks, like throwing a baseball for example, are affected by the ways in which men and women understand themselves physically. She writes that Women traditionally “throw like girls”, or in a restricted manner, not using their entire body, but rather throwing with just the arm, because of constraints placed upon them by the societal understanding of the female body, not because of “breast size, shoulder width, or muscle size” (Heaphy) which is often offered as a scientific justification for these beliefs which actually have their roots in cultural habituation rather than scientific fact. It is helpful to understand this distinction in terms of the post structural aspect of difference, and the definition of the feminine in opposition to what is masculine. Women are expected to act in a manner which society deems to be feminine, and what is feminine is defined as the opposite of what is masculine, i.e. strength, courage, a propensity
to act; while the feminine, and by extension the way in which women are expected to act to be properly called women, is exemplified by weakness, compassion, and passivity.

Despite several victories for feminist equality movements and a more progressive attitude towards women in general now held by our society, the attitude towards women in sports and women as athletes is still one that assumes men to be physically superior to women to a degree that is far beyond the limits imposed by human biology. This attitude that women are physically inferior to men to the degree that they are currently understood to be in popular culture is what I think to be a cultural limit reached by our society regarding how much we are willing to change our understanding of the differences between men and women. Sport is still thought of as the domain of men, and while women’s participation in sport is no longer explicitly discouraged, certain social and cultural factors limit women to participating in either a less strenuous version of the sports played by men or in different sports all together. This discouraging of women from participating in certain sports, or even exercising and moving their bodies in such a way as to support physical activity, is a far greater factor in what appears to be the difference in athletic ability between males and females, and as such is entirely contingent on our historical moment. I would argue that if these specific social factors were to change, the gap between male and female athletes, if it continued to exist at all, would narrow significantly.
Abstract

Since the culture surrounding death in the West is shrouded in fear and anxiety, it is necessary to illuminate the realities of living and what we presume to be its antithesis, death, with notions outside of our normative thinking. This paper works to reframe the subject of death when one is considering: 1) the death of a loved one, 2) one’s own death, and 3) the option of self-immolation. I believe an understanding of Dao supplies one with the peace necessary to celebrate death as one might celebrate living. I argue that seeing and living in accord with the virtues of Daoism engenders acceptance of realities beyond our control, which could result in the prevention of severe existential dread and overwhelming suicidal ideation.

Introduction

The work of this paper is merely to discuss the Daoist conception of death in a way that allows new conclusions to be drawn on the subject. When observing Western traditions and normative ideas surrounding death, a great deal of anxiety and separation is often found. The fear of loss and death is a stress that manifests not only in the individual, but in the structural components of our culture and society. Similarly, rooted fears and insecurities about living can compel others to obsess over or long for death, often to fatal ends. The Zhuangzi addresses the source of such dread about living and dying and offers, by example, a means to free one’s mind from such thinking. This project is as much personal as it is academic.

This paper will focus on three points related to our feelings about death: 1) how do we manage the death of a loved one, 2) how do we cope with our own mortality and, 3) how do we grapple with the reality of suicide and suicidal ideation. I will address these respectively, using relevant examples from the Inner Chapters of the Zhuangzi translated by Brook Ziporyn, “The Concept of Zhen in the Zhuangzi” by Kim-chong Chong, “Emotions That Do Not Move: Zhuangzi and Stoics on Self-Emerging Feelings” by David Machek, and passages from the Dao De Jing to contrast common Western perspectives of death and life. When discussing Daoism and attempting to make any sort of philosophical claim, there seems an unavoidable element of intentionality that defies the underlying message of spontaneity (wu wei) addressed in the Zhuangzi and in this paper. For this reason, goal-oriented and coercive language has been removed from this project.

The Death of Loved Ones

In chapter three, Zhuangzi tells us a story of his own death. His friend, Qin Yi, cried out a total of three times before immediately leaving the funeral. Yi is then questioned by a disciple, who doubts Yi’s commitment to Zhuangzi after his brief display of grief. Qin Yi offers that a greater show would be unnatural given the relationship between death and Dao, “When it came time to arrive, the master did just what the time required. When it came time to go, he followed along with

* For Kellie and Josh, who live.
the flow” (Zhuangzi, 22-23). This simply means that death is a necessary part of life, coming to each of us in time. Grief, as a part of this, requires no particular effort or show.

This is framed more clearly in the description of how things often regarded as opposed to each other are happening simultaneously due to their place in the Dao. Ziporyn translates this phenomenon in chapter six as “the Singularity” (Zhuangzi, 44), suggesting earlier in the text that this approach allows for an understanding of all things as one within the Dao. It is explained that while the terms we use to relay an understanding of events and ideas seem to be in opposition to each other (heaven and earth, affirmation and negation, fragmentation and destruction, existence and non-existence), they “open into each other, connecting to form a oneness” (Zhuangzi, 13), meaning that without one there would not be the other. For this reason, we can understand them as mutually constitutive.

This idea of oneness is crucial to understand Qin Yi’s point that Lao Dan did what was required of him at the time that it was expected. As stated in chapter two, “When ‘this’ and ‘that’ — right and wrong — are no longer coupled as opposites — that is called the Course as Axis, the axis of all courses” (Zhuangzi, 12), and again in chapter five, “Seeing what is one and the same to all things, nothing is ever felt to be lost” (Zhuangzi, 33). Dao is everything and our understanding of this fact will determine the peace we make with all aspects of life and what we once considered its antithesis.

In the story of Ziji, Ziyu, Zili, and Zilai, four people become fast friends over their understanding of Dao and the harmony they have with it. When they are faced with each other’s mortality, they graciously accept this fate and discuss the transformative properties of such a process. While both Ziyu and Zilai fall terminally ill and handle it with grace and reverence for the changes occurring within their body, the relevant feature for this section is the response of Zili when he visits Zilai. Zilai’s family has surrounded him, weeping hysterically and worrying about the fate of their loved one, but Zili interrupts them and demands they give him room. Zili says, “Ach! Away with you! Do not disturb his transformation!”, then turns his attention to Zilai and states, “How great is the Process of Creation-Transformation! What will it make you become; where will it send you? Will it make you into a mouse’s liver? Or perhaps an insect’s arm?” (Zhuangzi, 45) The response to the death of a loved one should be that of acceptance and celebration, both for the life they lived and for the continuation of them within Dao. They are not gone, but simply transformed.

**The Inevitability of Our Own Death**

The conversation about the death of loved ones deepens when we take into consideration what the Zhuangzi says about our own deaths. This is where a clear understanding of what the Genuine Human Being is (and other examples of this concept, such as the Consummate Person, or when considering the Chinese, zhen) allows us to hear and understand how we should be striving for a character free of turmoil and fear regarding our lives and the certainty of death.

Zhuangzi writes at the end of the Inner Chapters about the Genuine Human Being specifically, although other examples of the same concept appear earlier. In chapter six, he writes:

The Genuine Human Beings of old did not revolt against their inadequacies, did not aspire to completeness, did not plan their affairs in advance. In this way, they could be wrong or they could be right, but without regret and without self-satisfaction. And thus they could ascend the heights without fear, submerge into the depths without getting drenched, enter the flames without feeling hot. (Zhuangzi, 40)
Simply put, those that were considered Genuine Human Beings did nothing to alter the Course. There was no emphasis on the self that needed developing, improvement, or goal-setting. They put no positive value on being correct and felt no shame from being wrong. When they lived like this, they could navigate and maneuver through the ups and downs of life without being swept away with the banalities and sufferings of living.

According to the Zhuangzi, human beings are inclined towards value judgments, preferences, or emotions regarding one thing or another to make decisions, but the Genuine Human Being does not impose these. They are conditions reserved for the human but should not affect the heavenly. As Chong puts it, “Zhuangzi expresses the general principle that for the true person heaven and human [action] do not overcome one another. This connotes the maintenance of a harmonious balance between human beings and nature” (Chong, 325). In other words, the Genuine Human Being still feels and exists as human, but does not interrupt the natural flow of events or disrupt the notion of the “Singularity”. When considering life and death, Zhuangzi says this of the Genuine Human Being: they “understood nothing about delighting in being alive or hating death. They emerged without delight, submerged again without resistance” (Zhuangzi, 40). Chong points out that this connotes wuwei, or non-action, as this emerging and submerging will occur without any sort of interference (Chong, 325). Non-action describes the state of affairs for the Genuine Human Being; without this essential knowledge of nature the Genuine Human Being could not be.

Zhuangzi gives us the framework for such a person, telling us that “The Course gives him the appearance, Heaven gives him this form…,” and follows with a complete description of how exactly someone can be considered both human and heavenly in accord with the Dao. He says:

Affirming some things as right and negating others as wrong are what I call the characteristic inclinations. What I call being free of them means not allowing likes and dislikes to damage you internally, instead making it your constant practice to follow along with the way each thing is of itself, going by whatever it affirms as right, without trying to add anything to the process of life. (Zhuangzi, 38)

We must be sure not to let these characteristic inclinations, or subjective considerations of what is good and bad, dictate mental, emotional, or physical health. While we may consider death a bad thing, and expend a great deal of energy on self-preservation, Zhuangzi offers that the strife we feel regarding such realities would be removed entirely if we accepted these feelings as part of the whole and not representative of objective truth. They are a product of our cognitions and respected as such because the human is still essential, but not heeded. It is only Dao, or the oneness of everything, that determines the reality of how things are. Death is not bad because we determine it to be; death is naturally a part of the Course. In one of the dialogues presented in the Zhuangzi, Confucius states, “Death and life, surviving and perishing, failure and success, poverty and wealth, superiority and inferiority, disgrace and honor, hunger and thirst, cold and heat — these are the transformations of events, the proceedings of fate” (Zhuangzi, 36). We could act out against this, try to prevent the fated comings and goings of Dao, but we only hurt ourselves in the process of such efforts.

The Consummate Person, the Spirit-Man, and the Sage are all conceptual tools used for the discussion of wuqing, or passionlessness, as Machek describes it in “Emotions that Do Not Move: Zhuangzi and Stoics on Self-Emerging Feelings.” What is generally understood as emotionlessness, Machek argues, is an etymological inaccuracy that does not fit with the overall interpretation of these sage-like characters within Daoism. He bases this part of his argument on the origin of the
word “emotion,” offering that its very inception, which was based on the Latin verb movere, has intended its use to mean quite literally, to move. He goes on to say that “Whenever the mind feels emotion, it must be moved by it, because emotions are conditions of the entire mind. There is no independent faculty of thinking that could remain detached from the emotions, and untouched by their impact” (Machek, 522).

With this understanding of the word and its intended use, it becomes difficult, arguably impossible, to discuss a sage-like person who has emotions yet is unmoved by them. What Machek suggests instead, is one who has these inclinations, but is not damaged by them. He describes the term “passions” as boundless, and uses it to represent what he believes are absent from these sage-like beings (Machek, 529). When considered within the context of the Zhuangzi, this description fits quite well. As Zhuangzi states, you must “Let yourself be jostled and shaken by the boundlessness — for that is how to be lodged securely in the boundlessness!” (Zhuangzi, 20). It is also important to note that this lack of passion has much to do with our acceptance of the insignificance of our current state as humans. It is frequently brought up throughout the Zhuangzi that our humanity is not to be confused as something superior to other aspects of Dao. We can see this in Zili’s remarks to Zilai about what he might be after he has died, in discussions of the Great Clump (the Course) which grants credit to Dao for the arbitrary assignment of our being, and later when we are told making any sort of demand of Creation-Transformation to be human again is as foolish as a sword asking to only be made if it can be Excalibur. We are told, “The Great Clump burdens me with a physical form, labors me with life, eases me with old age, rests me with death. So it is precisely because I consider my life good that I consider my death good,” followed by, “This human form is merely a circumstance that has been met with, just something stumbled into…” (Zhuangzi, 43), and finally:

Now, suppose a great master smith were casting metal. If the metal jumped up and said, ‘I insist on being nothing but an Excalibur!’ the smith would surely consider it to be an inauspicious chunk of metal. Now, if I, having happened to stumble into a human form, should insist, ‘Only a human! Only a human! Creation-Transformation would certainly consider me an inauspicious chunk of person. So now I look upon all heaven and earth as a great furnace, and Creation-Transformation as a great blacksmith — where could I go that would not be all right? (Zhuangzi, 46)

These three passages work together to demonstrate what our attitudes should be about our own existence and the changes that occur within it. They show us that the ego which dictates our self-importance is misguided and, when looked at from a broader perspective, not conducive to a life in harmony with Dao.

When we place such emphasis on a human form, we get lost in the endless possibilities supplied by the Great Clump, we become stuck in the expectations which have already been shown to be false and harmful. There is a finality to our conception of life, just as there is a finality to our conception of death, and it limits our understanding of nature. As Zhuangzi states, “If you regard what you have received as fully formed once and for all, unable to forget it, all the time it survives is just a vigil spent waiting for its end. In the process, you grind and lacerate yourself against all the things around you” (Zhuangzi, 11). This pain and suffering is avoided if we can situate ourselves in our own mind within Dao. Physically, we are already there; it is merely a question of our own considerations and inclinations.
The Question of Suicide

The lessons which relate to our anxieties about death are relevant to a discussion concerning our anxieties about living. In instances where one may feel a very specific sense of despair or dread that may cause one to consider suicide, one must lean even further into Dao and the behaviors of the Genuine Human Being. Our inclination may be to search for greater meaning or purpose in our lives, but a Daoist would suggest that this goes against a genuine or natural self. It is not nature that is absurd, it is the concepts we create to understand nature and living that are off. A Daoist would suggest that such efforts only deepen our struggle and lead us further from harmony.

Regarding the tools we use to affix meaning: language, Zhuangzi says, “What it refers to is peculiarly unfixed. So is there really anything it refers to? Or has nothing ever been referred to?” (Zhuangzi, 11). From this, we can see that our ability to rationalize and make sense of things is a way to confuse ourselves about the reality of nature.

Understanding harmony is common sense, and using common sense is acuity. On the other hand, trying to increase one’s quantum of life is certainly a bad omen, while allowing the heart-mind to use up the qi one has, is to overdo things. For something to be old while in its prime is called a departure from the way of things (dao). And whatever departs from the way of things will come to an untimely end. (Laozi, 55, pp. 163).

This suggests that when we attempt to live naturally, we set ourselves up for more suffering. Seeking the position of rational human being is not conducive to natural life in accord with Dao. We have a tendency in our “deliberate posturing” (Zhuangzi, 10), to diminish ourselves, or “to be old while in [our] prime.” Zhuangzi suggests that we are “held fast as if bound by cords, we continue along the same ruts. The mind is left on the verge of death, and nothing can restore its vitality” (Zhuangzi, 10). The mental gymnastics we utilize to make sense of things is surely the death of our mental health and a detriment to our becoming sage-like. As Zhuangzi suggests, we cannot hope to gain peace if we have not learned to embrace the life given, even when its duration and events are not wholly apparent to us from the beginning.

When considering the cook from Liang in the Zhuangzi, we can see the role of loss of Self and consciousness, or wuwei understood as non-action, in our ability to move through the trials of living. He is praised for his ability to cut meat perfectly, but he replies:

What I love is the Course, something that advances beyond mere skill. When I first started cutting up oxen, all I looked at for three years was oxen, and yet I was still unable to see all there was to see in an ox. But now I encounter it with the spirit rather than scrutinizing it with the eyes. My understanding consciousness, beholden to its specific purposes, comes to a halt, and thus the promptings of the spirit begin to flow. … When what has no thickness enters into an empty space, it is vast and open, with more than enough room for the play of the blade. That is why my knife is still as sharp as if it had just come off the whetstone, even after nineteen years. Nevertheless, whenever I come to a clustered tangle, realizing that it is difficult to do anything about it, I instead restrain myself as if terrified, until my seeing comes to a complete halt. My activity slows, and the blade moves ever so slightly. Then all at once, I find the ox already dismembered at my feet like clumps of soil scattered on the ground. (Zhuangzi, 22-23)
The cook is not only losing Self to overcome the obstacles the gristly portions of the ox present, he is also moving the blade as the meat and bones of the ox permit. He is not forcing cuts, causing unnecessary harm to his knife by nicking it against these tougher spots. He does not advocate for his own skill, but merely gives credit to the Course for guiding his blade. In relation to suicide, the resistances and entanglements of living are not as debilitating or life-ending as they often feel in the moment. Sometimes it is merely a case of trusting a sense of spontaneity to maintain harmony with the Way, as opposed to our own thoughts fettered with fear and uncertainty. The cook still moves and acts, but without contrivance, which would mar the efforts put forth by branding them with intent. It is because he chooses to begin, persist, and end his task with a sort of dissociation from Self or consciousness and a reliance on the “promptings of the spirit” (Zhuangzi, 23), that he can perfectly cut meat and never dull his blade.

From a Daoist perspective, the ego, which helps define Self, must be removed for our mental states to be calmed and our physical bodies to be preserved against any harm we might inflict upon ourselves. When one accepts nature as it is, and moves away from the human delineations of good or bad and existence or non-existence, “He takes all that his consciousness knows and unifies it into a singularity, so his mind always gets through unslaughtered. His death will be just like choosing a day to climb off into the distance” (Zhuangzi, 34). One will not need to take one’s own life.

**Conclusion**

The primary implication of Daoism on all manner of death as it relates to us is that it simply matters no more and no less than any other part of our human experience. Since we arbitrarily assign value we create the oppositional understandings of things that eventually lead to suffering and unhappiness. The Genuine Human Being or any of the sage-like beings discussed throughout the Zhuangzi and the Dao De Jing are meant to be our guides or models for natural living and a measure of societal harmony (Laozi, 7, pp. 86). It is through their existence that we are meant to come to understand Dao, since it is not something which can be spoken and grasped.

Once we have achieved this state of being, we will know peace in relation to our existence and human feelings without being swept away by passions. We will not fear the death of loved ones or our own death, and we will not long for premature death because we understand that nature will bring it to us in due time. There will be no hardship that imbalances us or moves us from stability. Although we will still be free to experience such hardships, we will not be knocked from the Course and into suffering from them. We are to love the Course. In doing so, we will love every possible hardship, victory, death, birth, physical or mental ailment, prize, success, or loss the same, as they all make up the Singularity.
Works Cited


Abstract

This paper focuses on a specific type of knowledge, this being the type of knowledge that allows for the ability of an individual to know another person. I analyzed Shannon Sullivan’s book Revealing Whiteness: The Unconscious Habits of Racial Privilege to gain insight into an individual's ability to know another person. Within the text, I concentrated on the first chapter “Ignorance and Habit”, and the argument Sullivan articulates in this chapter. This argument is in regard to the consequence of what Sullivan describes as white solipsism and how it can cause unconscious habits. To better display Sullivan’s argument, I used the epistemic framework articulated in Bernard Lonergan’s cognitional theory and his three stages of knowing. These stages of Experience, Understanding, and Judging, were used to explain how white solipsism could affect a white person’s ability as a knower in the first stage of Experience. From this, I described how white solipsism causes the inability of a white person to have knowledge of people of different racial backgrounds from themselves. Ultimately, I conclude that white solipsism causes white people to have false knowledge because they are no longer looking for new experiences and that white solipsism causes ignorance and epistemic blindness regarding alternate viewpoints.

Introduction

How am I to know another person outside of myself? This paper focuses on a specific type of knowledge, this being the type of knowledge that allows for the ability of an individual to know another person. To do this I analyzed Shannon Sullivan’s book Revealing Whiteness: The Unconscious Habits of Racial Privilege. I concentrated on the first chapter, “Ignorance and Habit”, as well as the argument Sullivan articulates in this chapter. This argument is in regard to the consequence of what Sullivan describes as white solipsism and how it can cause unconscious habits. From this, I used Bernard Lonergan’s cognitional theory, his three stages of knowing, to explain how white solipsism can affect a white person’s ability as a knower. In light of this, I show that white solipsism causes white people to view their views as the only important viewpoint. A habitual form of white solipsism can then be seen to affect the actions of white people and their understanding of the world. In light of this, I demonstrate that white solipsism limits perception and from this can be considered an epistemic vice in the stage of Experience. Due to white solipsism being an epistemic vice, I show that white people are not good knowers of people of different racial backgrounds from themselves. Ultimately, I conclude that this vice causes white people to have false knowledge because they are no longer looking for new experiences and that white solipsism causes ignorance and epistemic blindness regarding alternate viewpoints.

Three Stages of Knowing

To begin my discussion of knowledge, I will lay out a framework for how we, as knowers, can come to knowledge. To do this, I will describe Bernard Lonergan’s three stages of knowing to serve as my framework. For Lonergan the three stages of knowing are Experience, Understanding
and Judging, with the stages occurring in that order. The first stage of Experience can be seen as the individual knower going out into the world and perceive things, gathering information. This gathering of information is done through, “seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, tasting, inquiring…” (Lonergan 1971, p. 6). Lonergan’s second stage is Understanding, when “our consciousness expands in a new dimension when from mere experiencing we turn to the effort to understand what we have experienced” (9). The knower must look at all the data and information they have collected and attempt to bring it together and try to make sense of what they have experienced. Finally, the knower must reflect on what they have brought together, the knower must decide if they hold the idea to be true; this is our third stage of knowing, the stage of Judging. This shows that knowing is not a static entity, that is given to someone, but for Lonergan is rather a dynamic process that a knower partakes in.

Due to knowing being a dynamic process, there is one major implication. This implication is that knowing like any process can either be done poorly or well. In light of the implication of individuals being better or poorer knowers, I ask one question. Simply, how can we be better or poorer knowers? To answer this question, I will introduce the concept of epistemic virtues and epistemic vices in reference to Lonergan’s stages of knowing. Before discussing the epistemic virtues for Lonergan, I will first define the notion of virtue.

**Epistemic Virtue**

To define virtue, we will turn to Linda Zagzebski and her book titled On Epistemology. In the text, Zagzebski defines virtue as “an acquired human excellence that includes a characteristic emotion disposition and reliable success at bringing about the end of the acts motivated by the emotion in question” (Zagzebski 2009, p. 81). This definition can be broken down into three distinct characteristics of virtue. In the first part of the definition, Zagzebski states that virtue is “an acquired human excellence”. From this notion of a virtue being acquired, we can conclude that virtue is something an individual must work at and practice. Now, if we are to acquire a virtue through practice, the virtue must become habitual since an individual must do it constantly. In light of this, it can be concluded that our actions define us as individuals because they form our habits. Next Zagzebski states that virtue “includes a characteristic emotion disposition” (81). What this means is that there is an emotional reaction by the person who is acting out the virtue. This is the emotional feeling or reaction that comes after the action of the virtue. An example would be that after you act out the virtue you think or reflect upon yourself, “I like doing this action, it comes easy to me.” Finally, the last characteristic of virtue is made clear when Zagzebski states that virtue has “reliable success at bringing about the end of the acts motivated by the emotion” (81). This notion of “reliable success” and “bringing about the end” can be seen as a cognitive element or a skill in judging how best to use the virtue. We must judge if the action in question will bring about the desired end of the emotion or habit and if we can reliably judge the action to bring about the success. An example of this would be: we must judge if jumping into a pool to save a drowning person would be the courageous thing to do. We must judge if we are good enough swimmers to pull the person out of the water, or if we are simply dooming ourselves and the other person to drowning in the pool. From all of these parts, we can state that the three components of virtue are: it must be habitual, there is an emotional component and there is some cognitive judgment that must be made.

For Lonergan, there are multiple virtues and vices that are specific for each stage of knowing. To better explain the idea of how the virtues and vices affect a knower, I will use an
example of two students working on a problem. Let’s say you are student A and you are working on an assignment with student B. This assignment requires you and your partner to work together to answer a multiple-choice question. Before starting this assignment, you overheard from other classmates that student B is incredibly intelligent and is never wrong. For this situation, you have collected all the relevant information regarding the topic for which you will answer the multiple-choice question and understand it perfectly, meaning you have completed the first two stages of knowing without any problems. Now it is time for you and your partner to put down your answer, and your partner feels that the answer is C. You decide to agree with your partner without judging for yourself because the individual you are working with is believed to be smart by your other classmates. This is an example of an epistemic vice for the stage of judging; you are looking to an authority and not thinking for yourself, regarding the answer’s validity. The opposite of this action would be the epistemic virtue, that of autonomy or the ability to think for oneself.

This example illustrates that when an individual partakes in either an epistemic vice or a virtue they affect the way their knowing is done. The individual can be a good knower by engaging in an epistemic virtue or a poor knower by engaging in an epistemic vice. Now that I have articulated the stages of knowing for Lonergan and how someone can come to knowledge, I look to a new text to discuss how Sullivan describes the epistemic blindness of white people and how this blindness may stop the knowing process.

**White Solipsism**

For Sullivan, the epistemic blindness of white people is rooted in the notion of white solipsism. Sullivan states:

> [...] white solipsism is a real problem. In many people’s day-to-day lives, it can seem as if only white people exist. While the literal existence of people of color may be acknowledged, such acknowledgement often occurs on an abstract level that produces ethical solipsism in which only white values, interests, and needs are considered important and worthy of attention. (Sullivan 2006, p. 17)

To better describe this passage, I will break it down into multiple sections. I will start with the first full sentence were Sullivan states, “in many people’s day-to-day lives, it can seem as if only white people exist” (17). What Sullivan is articulating is the segregation of people by race in cities and across nations. We can see this in one of the largest cities in the United States, Chicago. There are portions of the city, like South Chicago, that are predominantly if not entirely of the racial minority with 75% being Black and 20% being Hispanic (Statistical Atlas 1). Conversely, there are portions of Chicago, such as Lincoln Park, that are predominantly white, almost 82% (Statistical Atlas 2). What this means is that the likelihood that a white person in Lincoln Park will see another white person is very high, but the likelihood of a white person in Lincoln Park seeing a Black or Hispanic person is very low. In light of these statistics, it is easy to see how Sullivan can come to the notion that in many white people’s lives they are able to go about their day-to-day activities only encountering and engaging with other white people.

The final part of the passage that is of interest is when Sullivan states, “while the literal existence of people of color may be acknowledged, such acknowledgement often occurs on an abstract level that produces ethical solipsism in which only white values, interests, and needs are considered important and worthy of attention” (Sullivan 2006, p. 17). Sullivan is describing how even though white people know people of other racial backgrounds exist this knowledge of
mere existence is the extent of their knowledge regarding these individuals. Sullivan is stating that white people only know of racial minorities by description, this would be a kind of I-it knowledge, or a simple knowledge of existence that Martin Buber describes in his book I and Thou. For Buber this is the type of knowledge one would have of an object, knowing it only in its relation to oneself. An example being I only know of the lamp sitting in the corner of the room by its relation to me, I don’t know if it has thoughts or feelings or any concerns. I only know that it is about 5 feet from me, that it takes us physical space and it is not in any apparent motion.

Sullivan’s argument continues this I-it notion through the description of the relationship white people have with racial minorities. Since white people don’t think of racial minorities, because the white people do not see them, the minorities can simply be considered as an external object, like the lamp in the corner. From this, the external racial group is then not considered to have interests or concerns and in turn white people only view their own concerns as important and disregard the other. This reducing and eliminating of the concerns of others brings about the creation of white solipsism, the experience that there is only one possible viewpoint, the viewpoint of white people.

For white people this white solipsism can lead to the idea that their way of experiencing the world is the only way to experience the world. Sullivan continues this idea and shows the effects this can have in the creation of a racial habit. She does this by expanding on the concept of W.E.B Du Bois, the notion of unconscious habit. This notion is described by Du Bois as the idea that “much of human behavior is guided by irrational unconscious habits” (qtd. in Sullivan 2006, p. 21). What Du Bois is saying is that our habits guide us and guides our actions potentially without our awareness of them. This means that there is a basic framework we are operating under that affects our actions and we may not be aware of the framework’s existence.

Sullivan expands on this idea when she states, “as an instance of habit, race often functions subconsciously, as a predisposition for acting in the world that is not consciously chosen or planned” (25). This means that we not only have an unconscious habit, but also a racial habit that affects the way we behave in the world without our knowledge. In light of this, it can be seen that, due to our racial background, we have some habits that affect the way we move and experience the world.

Given this, we can expand the idea of white solipsism and see it as an unconscious racial habit. Sullivan does this by using an example of a college class. She describes how the racial habits for white people are praised in this college environment, where raising one’s hand and having the conversation dictated by the professor is encouraged. She goes on to show how this habit of raising one’s hand contrasts the racial habits for black people where “people tend to value individual regulation of when turns are taken”, which is seen as rude and interruptive in the college environment (28). To explain the meaning of this example Sullivan gives us a hint into what she was thinking by stating, “my descriptions of racial habit should be read as an illustration of some of the ways by which habits of communication in the classroom racialize (and class) both the space of education and the habits of those being educated” (29).

This, on the surface, shows that the two contrasting forms of communication are important and that the overall setting is important. If we dive deeper, we can see in what sense each of these two aspects are important. This example shows us that these unconscious racial habits affect the way the professor perceives the students. Additionally, the setting of the college classroom was created using white solipsism, meaning that it was created under the framework that there is only one way to ask question or conduct conversation. In the example the white students would
automatically be seen as performing the right action because the environment views the white students actions as good. This perceived good action originates from the fact that the action is in line with the unconscious racial habit. This is the opposite case with the black student, where their actions would be viewed as rude even though the student is operating in a perfectly good way based on their own racial habit. This illustrates an immediate difference in the way a teacher would perceive the white student versus the black student. From this, we can state that white solipsism, white people believing that their way is the only way, is a framework or an unconscious racial habit that white people are operating under.

Now I will look at how white solipsism limited the ability of the professor to accurately perceive the student of a different racial background and the implications of white solipsism. I will use Lonergan’s cognitional theory to help articulate what is exactly happening during white solipsism, in terms of epistemology. We showed that white solipsism does not allow white people to perceive the world accurately and gain all relevant information. For Lonergan the gaining of all relevant information is a characteristic that is required for good knowing in the stage of Experience. From this, I argue that white solipsism causes white people to be bad knowers of people of different racial backgrounds because the solipsism hinders an aspect of their knowing. In light of white solipsism causing white people to be bad knowers, it can be concluded that white solipsism is an epistemic vice in the stage of experience.

One could argue that for white people to engage in an epistemic vice they would have to actively know they were doing so. I argue, rather, that white people can engage in white solipsism without them knowing that they are partaking in the vice because it is an unconscious habit, as shown before. Due to the fact that white people are partaking in this epistemic vice we must now conclude that they have not completed this stage of knowing, Experience. Meaning that regardless of how well white people conduct the other two stages of knowing, Understanding and Judgment, they are still considered bad knowers because of their use of this epistemic vice in the first stage of knowing.

This raises the question, what are the ramifications of being a bad knower? Sullivan answers this question of the ramifications in her discussion of how bad knowing caused by habits can affect our ability to gain knowledge. Sullivan states, “thought as unconscious, the concept of habit demonstrates how habits often are deviously obstructionist, actively blocking the self’s attempts to transform itself for the better” (44). This means that bad habits can obstruct our ability to grow because they influence our future actions. If we recognize, however, a current action as something we don’t want to do in the future we should change the current habit to influence the future actions. This is easy enough to change when you know what the habit and actions are, you make the conscious effort to do the opposite. The problem is when you have a bad, unconscious habit, it can be almost impossible to change the actions because you have no idea that the actions are bad or that you even want to change the habit.

With an in-depth look into this passage, it can be seen as an explanation of how these habits create a positive feedback cycle in white people’s inability to attain knowledge. White people are blocked from originally perceiving all of the necessary information due to the epistemic vice of white solipsism, this is our bad habit. This, in turn, causes white people to feel they have knowledge even when there are errors in the process of their knowing. Further, they are unable to see the error because this white solipsism is an unconscious habit that white people are unaware of.

Now, because white people feel that they already have adequate knowledge on the subject
of other racial groups they have no drive to acquire any other new information in an attempt to
correct themselves. Thus, showing the difficulty of overcoming a bad unconscious habit. This, in
turn, creates a white ignorance to all ideas that are non-white. This ignorance does not allow an
individual to “transform itself for the better” because they are blocked by their incorrect belief that
they have true knowledge (44). From this, we can conclude that white solipsism causes epistemic
blindness for white people which, in turn, causes white ignorance and a cognitive block for white
people to have accurate knowledge of people of other racial backgrounds.

I have shown that white solipsism causes white people to view their views as the only
important viewpoint. From this, I illustrated how habitual white solipsism affects the actions of
white people and their understanding of the world. In light of this, I demonstrated that white
solipsism limits perception and from this can be considered an epistemic vice in the stage of
Experience. Due to white solipsism being an epistemic vice, I showed that white people are not
good knowers of people of different racial backgrounds from themselves. From this, I concluded
that this vice causes white people to have false knowledge because they are no longer looking for
the experiences and that white solipsism causes ignorance and epistemic blindness.
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An Unexpected Hobbesian Defense of the Black Lives Matter Movement

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Abstract

Civil disobedience has been a well-known tool for many of the political movements over the past century. Once such movement is called Black Lives Matter (BLM), and its aim is to bring attention to and challenge violence and anti-black racism at a structural and personal level. Like other political movements before them, BLM is often criticized as being immoral when they engage civil disobedience. This is a famously Hobbesian interpretation of morality—-that if you break a law, you are immoral. However, this interpretation of Hobbes is oversimplified; in fact, I will argue that, if properly informed, Hobbes would likely support BLM. J. D. C Carmichael, a Canadian philosopher, points out the limits of Hobbes’ authoritarian sovereign in his article “Hobbes on Natural Right in Society: The ‘Leviathan’ Account.” Because of our natural right to self-preservation, our obedience to the sovereign is contingent on the sovereign’s ability to protect us. If the sovereign punishes violators of a law that harms them, he has done so unjustly. Therefore, any violators of such a law, while still subject to punishment by the sovereign, are not behaving immorally. I argue that BLM fits this criterion: using statistics and testimonials, I will show that BLM members are not currently protected by the sovereign, and therefore they are just in their violation of laws during acts of civil disobedience. I conclude that a properly-informed Thomas Hobbes would not condemn the BLM movement as immoral or unjust.

In contemporary American society, we have found ourselves in a second wave of the Civil Rights Movement. Like the Civil Rights Era of the 1960s, the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement uses strategies such as protesting and civil disobedience to demonstrate their frustration with, and call attention to, police brutality in the black community, among other issues of systemic racism (“About”). This has been met with confusion by some Americans, who often make a Hobbesian claim that BLM protesters who break the law are themselves immoral (Green). However, while this claim that roots morality in the law is indeed Hobbesian, it oversimplifies Hobbes’ role of the sovereign and its limits. The article “Hobbes on Natural Right in Society: The ‘Leviathan’ Account,” by Canadian scholar D. J. C Carmichael carefully explores Hobbes’ understanding of authority and the limits placed on law and punishments. Therefore, because of Hobbes’ assertion that the subjects’ obligation to obey the sovereign is contingent on the sovereign’s protection of them (Carmichael 5), Hobbes, if correctly informed, would likely support the Black Lives Matter Movement and their subsequent civil disobedience.

Arguably, it was Thomas Hobbes’ Leviathan that sparked the conversation about conceptions of morality and society in the early modern era. Almost all other philosophers including John Locke, David Hume, Francis Hutcheson, Bernard Mandeville, and Adam Smith are responding to Hobbes’ somewhat radical approach to morality. In the Leviathan, Hobbes’ sets a particular image of human nature. He famously writes that there is “a general inclination for all of mankind, a perpetual and restless desire for power after power, ceaseth only in death” (Hobbes 33). It is natural for us, then, to be entirely selfish creatures, striving only for our own power and
possessions. According to Hobbes, humanity’s natural state is a state of war, “...and such a war, as is of every man, against every man” (36). This means that “every man is enemy to every man” (36), and all humans have the right to every other man’s possessions; there is no justice, no rights, and no morality (Hobbes 38). Through a selfish desire to protect ourselves and our lives, family, and belongings, Hobbes explains that man makes a decision to enter into a society, to relinquish our right to everyone and everything and to limit our own power (Hobbes 38). Hobbes’ then infamously writes that our own morality comes from the laws created by a sovereign in society: in our natural state of humanity “the notions of right and wrong, justice and injustice have no place. Where there is no common power, there is no law; where no law, no injustice” (38). Hobbes does not believe that we have any innate ability to be moral; our morality is socially constructed to protect us from one another, but would not exist otherwise. Clearly, this must mean that those who violate the law are unjust, wrong and immoral, for “he that endeavoureth [the law’s] performance, fulfillith them; and he that fulfilleth the law, is just” (Hobbes 50). When the laws are the source of justice and morality, to follow them would be to be just, and to violate them would be to be unjust.

Hobbes’ point of view is a prevalent one in our current social landscape as we face an onslaught of moral conundrums including: the ethics of presidential tweets, the healthcare crisis and importantly, the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. BLM began as a hashtag in 2013 as a response to the acquittal of George Zimmerman, a neighborhood watch volunteer who allegedly murdered unarmed black teenager, Trayvon Martin in 2012 (“About”). Since then, the hashtag has grown into a movement whose mission is to “build local power and to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes” (“About”). In 2017, notable protests have occurred across the country: in September protests lasted over a week in St. Louis, MO after the acquittal of a former white police officer charged with the fatal shooting of a black man in 2011 (Eligon); in August, protests against the removal of confederate statues in Charlottesville, VA by radical white nationalists sparked counter-protesting by BLM (Schmitt). While BLM raises awareness through many regional peaceful protests and the use of its hashtag, they have also been known to engage in acts of intentional civil disobedience to demonstrate their discontent.

One instance of civil disobedience perpetrated by BLM was done in December of 2015, in which protestors shut down heavily populated Chicago streets in response to the murder of 17-year-old Laquan Mcdonald and the subsequent cover-up of his death by mayor Rahm Emanuel (Harper). Nearly eight months later, in late July of 2016, another, more strategic act of civil disobedience took place again in Chicago, this time at Homan Square. Protesters chained themselves to a secret police facility where they claimed suspected criminals are taken, interrogated, tortured and sometimes never seen again (Bowean). Protesters stayed chained together at Homan Square for over a week, calling it “Freedom Square.” This resulted in the arrest of many of the demonstrators, who were mostly sawed out of their chains by police (Bowean). According to Charlene Carruthers, national director at Black Youth Project 100, an affiliate group of BLM, the protesters wanted “a full divestment from policing and a full investment in black communities” (Bowean). Other prominent BLM leaders reiterated this sentiment, expressing that the purpose of the Homan Square occupation was to spread awareness of the suffering of black Americans under standard policing practices.

Predictably, this form of protest was criticized by some Americans. Regan Pifer, a history educator wrote an op ed article that denigrated the peaceful civil disobedience protests promulgated by the BLM community. She writes that “their actions obstruct official police business and the opportunity for the police to do their job and protect all citizens,” asserting that Martin Luther
King Jr. would support #AllLivesMatter (Pifer). Derryck Green, a political commentator and member of Project 21—a national leadership group of black conservatives, also expressed a similar sentiment. He writes that BLM is not an offshoot of the Civil Rights Movement, as it lacks the moral authority and moral agenda. Specifically, Green says “the social disruptions of Black Lives Matter are simply hostile demonstrations of racial identity politics and the look-at-us melodrama that descends directly from the black power movement.” Green is critical of the social disruptions—also known as the civil disobedience—by the BLM movement because he sees it as counterproductive to disobey the laws of without having what he calls a ‘moral essence’. It is here that both Pifer and Green are relying on a typical Hobbesian conception of morality; those who break the laws constructed by the sovereign—the U.S government—are themselves immoral and therefore indisputably in the wrong.

However, this reading of Hobbes, while common, oversimplifies the limits Hobbes places on the sovereign. The dominant narrative on Hobbes makes him “‘the monster of Malmesbury’ [who] is thought to have squashed civil rights more than he respected them” (Carmichael 3), but that ignores the Leviathan’s emphasis on true liberties, liberties that we have regardless of any declarations of law. In part one of the Leviathan, in chapters 14 and 15, Hobbes outlines rights that he considers to be “non renounceable,” namely they surround our right to self-preservation (Hobbes 41). Canadian scholar, D. J. C. Carmichael, writes that “although authority is absolute the obligation of the subjects is not, because the right of nature--self preservation--itself cannot be laid aside” (4). So, in chapter 21 of the Leviathan, Hobbes lists seven rights that allow a subject to refuse to comply with certain laws without being unjust, and therefore immoral (Carmichael 5). Of particular importance to this paper is the seventh liberty that we may exercise without injustice: Hobbes writes, “The Obligation of Subjects to the Sovereign is understood to last as long, and no longer, than the power lasteth, by which he is able to protect them” (Hobbes). Essentially, because self-preservation is so important to Hobbes, when the sovereign society refuses to protect you, then you have the right to justly disobey laws that compromise your self-preservation.

Carmichael elaborates on that in his article, “Hobbes on Natural Right in Society: The ‘Leviathan’ Account.” In this article, Carmichael argues that according to Hobbes natural rights and natural laws are “logically independent but systematically complementary” (15). This may seem contradictory, but when understood thoroughly “the result is a distinctively two-tiered conception of natural right and political authority” (15). So, while we may have a natural right to justly defy laws which violate our own true liberties, the sovereign’s declaration that forbids the exercise of that liberty, and any subsequent punishment imposed on violators, is indeed still authoritative and absolute. Simultaneously though, the sovereign’s use of his power in this way is also improper (Carmichael 12). Hobbes would recognize any punitive action taken against these violators to be “an act of hostility: a recognizable misuse or abuse of the sovereign’s proper authority” (12). It is important to note here, however, that while subjects, like BLM protesters, are not obligated to obey a sovereign who creates laws that harm them, they are not permitted by Hobbes to rebel against the sovereign (Carmichael 16).

So, for Hobbes to defend BLM, two things must be clear. First, it needs to be the case that the group of marginalized people who BLM represents are not being protected by the sovereign. Second, BLM’s engagement with civil disobedience must prove to not an example of intentional rebellion. As to the first point, the sovereign defined for BLM is the American government, and even more expansively, American society. BLM’s official stance is in opposition to “state-sanctioned violence and anti-black Racism” (“What We Believe”). It’s clear that BLM and its
supporters believe that the violence perpetrated against them is done by society at large, meaning that our societal institutions are inherently racist. During the protests in Homan Square, Carruthers articulated her frustration with society, “what we have done is called out the amount of power (police) have in our lives. At this moment, black families are also grieving, and our actions continue because black people continue to be killed, live in poverty and live in communities that are hyper-surveilled and policed” (Bowean). The statistics back up this claim. White people make up around 64% of America's population, but only 49% of the people killed by police annually. On the flipside, black Americans, who make up only about 13% of the population, are 24% of those shot and killed by police (Lowery). Black Americans are statistically 2.5 times more likely to be shot by police than their white counterpart. BLM and most of its supporters believe that this is a pattern of anti-black racism that has permeated society and created an image of the young black man, both in a hoodie and without, as inherently dangerous. Clearly, the members of the BLM community do not see themselves as being protected by the sovereign, and the numbers are on their side. As a result, Hobbes would likely see them acting on their natural right to preserve themselves, and in this capacity, he would approve.

Secondly, BLM, while protesting for change, is not rebelling against the authority of the United States. While BLM does believe that police brutality is only a part of the state sponsored violence against their race, they still consider themselves Americans. Carruthers states, “We want a world where we don’t deal with conflict with police and prisons. It’s a process. It’s not just about tearing things down but building up alternatives, institutions and practices that deal with conflict and harm without punishment” (Bowean). This was in response to the volatile tension in 2016 that stemmed largely from five cops being shot down by an alleged radical member of BLM. Carruthers, among many other BLM members, wanted to make it clear that “[her] our movement has never called for the execution of police officers” (Bowean).

Kristiana Rae Colon, co-founder of the Let Us Breathe Collective, also spoke about her frustration with the system, but this frustration is for change, not for an overthrow. While police brutality in black communities is certainly a part of the problem, she sees violence being perpetuated at the state level as well. According to Colon, the state is both mismanaging and refusing to listen to the voices of mostly or all-black communities. She advocates for a reallocation of funds in Chicago that would better serve that community, “Chicago is investing in what it deems necessary, which is different from what the people deem as necessary” (Bowean). Colon’s organization does not want to overthrow American society as we know it, rather they want to change it so the sovereign does protect them.

So, BLM protesters are not rebelling against the United States police or government, rather they are looking for ways to improve those agencies. They draw attention to it by disobeying the laws set forth by the sovereign. Their civil disobedience is protected under Hobbes’ understanding of the natural rights of the subject and the limits of the sovereign. Therefore, when subjects are punished by the authority for exercising their natural right to self-preservation, like BLM refusing to comply with laws that aim to silence them, the authority still has absolute power to punish them for breaking that law, although to do so would be an abuse of the sovereign’s own power and would thus be unjust.

We can then see that black people in contemporary American society are largely not being protected by the sovereign. When BLM participates in civil disobedience, as they have done at Homan Square in Chicago, they are not being immoral, rather, according to Hobbes, they are
just in defying these laws. The conception of Hobbes as an “authoritarian monster,” is shown by D.J.C Carmichael to be largely a myth, and from this I can deduce that Hobbes would approve of the BLM movement if he truly understood who they were and why they protest at all. Ultimately, matters of morality are not necessarily defined by law, but sometimes even when they are, a closer reading can reveal that even the most stringent philosophers would concede to us the right to justly preserve our own lives.
Works Cited


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