TRACKS

Research in the Humanities

TEXAS PLAINS

TEXAS

VI

About the Cover Artist:
Jaydn Jeffries

My name is Jaydn Jeffries, and I am in my first year of graduate studies at West Texas A&M University, pursuing a M.A. in English. My scholarship focuses on Western Literature, where I often like to explore how stories on landscape, gender, and identity shape the narrative of the American West. I hope to pursue a doctorate in the future, with dreams of becoming a professor or working in some capacity in higher education. Beyond academics, I'm interested in all forms of creative expression including all mediums of art, specifically photography, painting, and folklore, which often influence how I approach all forms of research.

For the cover, I wanted to design something that captures the true grandeur of West Texas. The Panhandle can be very dry and windy, but it's also alive with color and quiet motion. Beneath the surface, invisible tracks form the ecosystem of what was and is the Palo Duro Canyon, a network of life and beauty of the place we all call home. I used an app called Procreate to make this digital painting; it is a grouping of about 40 layers where I used different textured brushes to create the canyon-scape. I also used Photoshop to copy the Canyon's cliffs, and layered it to create the distance effect. This piece is a love letter to the land that has inspired me in many ways over the years and, I hope, will continue to inspire me and many others to come.

TRACKS

Tracks is a student-edited research journal housed in the English, Philosophy, and Modern Langauage department at West Texas A&M University. Submission is open to all outstanding undergraduate research in the humanities at WTAMU, including literature, the arts, history, social studies, communication and cultural studies. If you are interested in submitting your work for the next edition, or want to discuss joining our editorial staff, please contact Dr. Rebecca Weir at rweir@wtamu.edu.

Acknowledgements

TRACKS | Table of Contents

The Future for *Tracks*

The editorial staff of *Tracks: Research in the Humanities* is excited to present the first-ever print edition. Thanks to the generous support of the Sybil B. Harrington College of Fine Arts and Humanities, we are now able to feature outstanding WTAMU undergraduate humanities research both online and in print editions.

Jason Robert Brown: How To Break the Mold in Modern Musical Theatre

By Ray Barber

Jason Robert Brown is a renowned composer, lyricist, and playwright. The winner of three Tony Awards and multiple Drama Desk awards, his success can be tied to his skill in music writing. One thing that Brown is most known for is his ability to create music in multiple genres. He writes jazz, blues, pop, and even gospel music. His vast knowledge and ability to implement these genres into shows has made him a respected name on Broadway. Another aspect of Brown's music that is widely respected is its complexity. Some of his works have elaborate orchestral scores accompanying a difficult yet beautiful singing line. While it may be hard to perform, those who listen to the music are enthralled by it and drawn deeper into the show. Brown's ongoing success as a songwriter is thanks to his ability to write music with variety in genre and complexity in technique. Because of his knowledge of both genres and technique, Jason Robert Brown has become one of the most recognized and influential composers in modern musical theatre.

Jason Robert Brown is renowned in the world of Broadway. To date, he has written scores for eight musicals, four music albums, and various other works. He has won three Tony Awards and multiple Drama Desk awards. All the while, he has also conducted, written lyrics, taught classes, and even performed with his band. Many regard him as an incredibly talented composer in the modern era of musical theatre. The level of credit that Brown gets for his compositions is due to his ability in music writing. Jason Robert Brown's skills in complexity and variety of music have made him a respected and beloved musical composer. This essay will share highlights from Brown's early life, education, and inspiration to become a composer followed by sections discussing four of Brown's musicals: *Songs for a New World, Parade, The Last Five Years,* and *The Bridges of Madison County,* as well as discussing why Brown's music is so well regarded.

EARLY LIFE

Jason Robert Brown was born on June 20, 1970, to Stuart and Deborah Brown. He grew up in the suburbs of New York City. Brown's parents put him in front of an old piano at the age of 7, which led him to start making noise on it and inspired him to make music in the future. In an interview posted on his website's blog, Brown credited a lot of different artists as inspiration growing up: "There's George Gershwin, Leonard Bernstein, Stephen Sondheim, Jule Styne… Stevie Wonder, Carole King, Elton John, Billy Joel… and I haven't even started, but that's the heart of my iPod" (Brown, "In Conversation"). There is a mix of styles within this list of artists: jazz, pop, and musicals, both old and new. Brown had varying tastes growing up, which is later evidenced in his works.

Brown attended the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, NY, studying under Joseph Schwantner, Christopher Rouse, and Samuel Adler (Voelker 79). He studied composition at the university for two years before dropping out and moving back to New York City. There, Brown would work as a piano player in nightclubs before meeting Daisy Prince, who directed Brown's first musical, *Songs for a New World* (IMDb). Later, Brown would meet Daisy's father, Hal Prince, who was a famous director and producer. This marked the beginning of Brown's legacy, composing musicals

that would become renowned in musical theater history.

SONGS FOR A NEW WORLD

Songs for a New World was Jason Robert Brown's musical debut. The show was written and composed by Brown, with Daisy Prince serving as director and co-producer. The show premiered off-Broadway in 1995 at the WPA Theatre. The show would later be revived in various productions both on and off the West End, as well as part of *Encores!* at New York City Center ("Songs").

Songs for a New World is credited as a song cycle: a musical made up of individually composed songs that are tied together through an overarching theme or narrative. In this show's case, each song is connected by one theme: decisions. The musical has four actors, each playing different characters throughout the show that have similar story arcs. All of the characters in the musical have very different stories, but each has a defining moment in their lives which led to them starting over and making a "new world." One woman stands on the edge of a building to get her husband's attention, one man left his fiancée, and one couple sings of the moment they reunited after being apart for years, all culminating in a finale where the actors express their hope that the audience heard the stories and can gain strength from them ("Songs").

Songs for a New World's unique structure as a song cycle allowed Brown to showcase his skills as a music writer. Scott Miller describes the show as "commercial show-tune pop with palatable sentiment and easy-to-take melody" (Miller). The music had a wide usage of pop, gospel, and jazz for each song, blending two or more of these styles in one piece ("Songs"). The small cast, unique style, and expertly crafted music allowed this show to enjoy many revivals and paved the way for countless college and community theaters to perform this show.

Brown's usage of various genres of music within the show can be heard in the song "Stars and the Moon." There is a clear mix between '90s pop and jazz. The use of jazz is accentuated through the accompaniment with repeated rhythmic phrases on the piano. The rhythms are syncopated and rather difficult to play, but the chords and the building of said chords into phrases allow for a jazzy sense of excitement, which is supported by soft drums playing a syncopated pattern underneath. The drums give the piece a sense of drive while also adding comfort. Her story is about marrying a wealthy man, thinking that it would bring her happiness, but she realizes that wealth won't bring her the true joy that she seeks in life. The singer's phrasing and tonal choices reflect a pop style, enhancing the piece's contemporary feel. Additionally, there are decision-making moments in the piece when she realizes that her marriage may not be what she truly wanted. In those moments, the accompaniment nearly cuts out to copy the pop music style that Woman 2 is singing. These breaks are reminiscent of a bridge in pop songs at the time, where the music decrescendos in order for the lyrics to take focus and drive towards the next part of the song.

All of these aspects in "Stars and the Moon" show off not only Brown's ability to write in multiple styles (in this case, jazz and pop), but also the complexity of music writing through difficult piano lines. These aspects of Brown's ability are showcased throughout every piece in the show, which is why *Songs for a New World* was well received when it was first released. It was new, it was unique, and it highlighted the compositional strengths of Jason Robert Brown.

PARADE

After finding success with his debut musical, Jason Robert Brown would soon release *Parade*. Brown wrote the music and lyrics for this show, with the book being written by Alfred Uhry. This was Brown's first of many shows that would make it to Broadway, opening there in December 1998 ("Parade (Musical)"). The show would not last long on Broadway, closing to mixed reviews after four months before going on tour across the U.S. in 2000 (Voelker 81).

Hal Prince commissioned Brown and Uhry to write *Parade*, a dark "'American opera' based on the story of Leo Frank, a Jewish factory owner falsely accused and convicted of murdering a young girl in Atlanta

GA in 1913" (Brown, "Parade"). The musical is a dramatization of the story centering the plot around Frank and his wife, Lucille, making multiple songs and scenes about their love ("Parade (Musical)"). By focusing on this relationship, it makes the kidnapping and lynching of Leo Frank even heavier for the audience to watch. In addition to the compelling relationship, Brown and Uhry named specific "villains" (Hugh Dorsey and Tom Watson) for their show, rather than just blaming the general public or the KKK ("Parade (Musical)").

Parade was a sharp turn from what Brown wrote for *Songs for a New World.* According to Brown, it received mixed reviews on its Broadway debut with critics reacting positively and the public audience reacting negatively ("Parade"). While it may have led to the show having a short run on Broadway, it did lead to the show receiving Tony Awards for Best Book and Best Original Score, which is similar to the history of Sondheim's *West Side Story* (Voelker 82).

Critics and reviewers of the musical sing the praises of Brown's music in *Parade. The New York Times* writer Ben Brantley praised the score: "while artfully shading classic hymn and march forms with dark dissonance, also keep you at an intellectual remove" (qtd. Voelker 82). Charles Isherwood said it has "subtle and appealing melodies that draw on a variety of influences, from pop-rock to folk to rhythm and blues and gospel" ("Songs"). Brown continued to show his ability to write in a variety of song styles while still having purpose and complexity.

One song from *Parade* that has a mixture of styles is "It's Hard to Speak My Heart." The song plays towards the end of Act 1, performed in the show by Leo Frank. This piece is sung at the height of his trial, acting as his last chance to prove his innocence. The evidence was stacked against him, painting a narrative that not only proves him guilty, but makes the crowd want him to be punished for the crime. Thus, Frank has no choice but to sing his feelings, begging for forgiveness. The song shows complexity, starting off simply with piano accompaniment that only plays quarter notes. However, as the song progresses, the quarter notes turn into sixteenth notes with supporting chords underneath, personifying the energy, fear, and

desperation that Frank feels in this moment. The vocal line also personifies this complexity, starting off quiet and not varied in range before turning into a fortissimo of vocal range and emotion for the baritone voice. The variety in Brown's song genres also comes into play with this piece. This ballad feels like a folk song, with hints of gospel in the piano and other hints of pop-rock in the vocals.

"It's Hard to Speak My Heart" provides a small glimpse into the dark, yet beautiful show that is *Parade.* The 2023 Broadway revival of the show reveals just how amazing of a piece this really is, getting the audience appraisal that it should have received nearly 25 years earlier. Now, Brown had another success under his belt, and he was well on his way to becoming a Broadway legend.

THE LAST FIVE YEARS

The Last Five Years would not only be Jason Robert Brown's next musical, but perhaps his biggest undertaking yet. Brown created the show completely on his own, writing the music, lyrics, and book singlehandedly. The show would premiere in Chicago in 2001 before going Off-Broadway in March of 2002, followed by other revivals in the mid-to-late 2010s and a film adaptation in 2015 ("The Last Five Years").

The Last Five Years is considered a "concept musical," widely regarded for its unconventional style. Brown's website describes the work as "a powerful and intimate musical about two New Yorkers in their twenties who fall in and out of love over the course of five years" (Brown, "The Last Five Years"). The show involves two characters: Cathy and Jamie. Brown wrote the concept musical this way because "on a metaphorical level, it said exactly what I wanted the show to say: these are two people who were never really in the same place at the same time" (qtd. In Voelker 82-83).

Brown produced this musical completely on his own, inspired by his own failed relationship and divorce from Theresa O'Neill (Tran). He also incorporated other aspects from their lives, including a Jewish writer as the male character and an Irish Catholic actress as the female character. While the similarities

led to Brown getting sued by O'Neill (which was quickly responded to with a counter-lawsuit), they gave the show a personal feel. B.J. Jones, who helped debut the show at the Northlight Theatre, said that *The Last Five Years* is "close to the bone for anyone in this day and age of two-career partnerships… it makes each song more resonant because of where it lies in the journey" (Jones). The music in the show, in classic Brown fashion, draws from a variety of genres, including pop, jazz, classical, Klezmer, Latin, blues, rock, and folk ("The Last Five Years").

The best song to exemplify Brown's work in *The Last Five Years* would be "Goodbye Until Tomorrow/I Could Never Rescue You." The dichotomy of storytelling in this show comes into full effect in this song. With Cathy singing the "Goodbye Until Tomorrow" half, and Jamie singing the other half "I Could Never Rescue You," the clear switches in style and musicality summarize the show perfectly. The genre variety of this show comes into full effect in this show's finale, mainly centering around a pop feel, but having the full orchestra of the musical include elements of folk, jazz, and rock. The mixing of melodies at the end is one of Brown's best examples of his intelligent and complex compositions, using the orchestra to blend these two stories, separated by five years and contrasting emotions, to connect the two lovers of the show in a final crescendo. The simple ending of a piano playing the motif of the song with a gradual slowing of tempo allows the show to end on an emotional, yet complete notion. That is the beauty of both this piece and the show: despite how complex the story and the music can be, Jason Robert Brown is able to tie everything together through his brilliant approach to creating this musical. The show received two Drama Desk Awards (Outstanding Music and Outstanding Lyrics). After *The Last Five Years*, Brown released a flop of a musical (*Urban Cowboy*) and a musical success (*13*) before releasing the next musical discussed below.

THE BRIDGES OF MADISON COUNTY

The Bridges of Madison County is Jason Robert Brown's most decorated musical to date, including two Tony Awards (Best Original Scores and Best Orchestrations), two Drama Desk Awards, and an Outer Critics Circle Award. Based on the 1992 novel by Robert James Waller of the same name, the musical *The Bridges of Madison County* was written by Marsha Norman, with lyrics and music written by Brown. The show was released in August 2013 before premiering on Broadway in 2014, running from January to May. The show also had a national tour that ran in 2015 ("Bridges").

Like the original book, the musical follows Francesca Johnson, a war bride from Iowa. Francesca stays home while the rest of her family visits a state fair in Indianapolis. While home alone, Francesca meets Robert Kincaid, a photographer for *National Geographic*, who pulls into her driveway and asks for directions. The two immediately fall in love and proceed to have a four-day love affair, all the while telling "the tale of two people caught between duty and desire" ("The Bridges of Madison County (Musical) Plot & Characters"). The story follows different themes, and it seems to relate to Brown's personal life and struggles with relationships. The show description says it is about "the roads we travel, the doors we open, and the bridges we dare to cross" (Music Theatre International).

Jason Robert Brown showed his composition expertise through *The Bridges of Madison County*, flexing his knowledge of song genres and music complexity to create his most awarded libretto to date. While Brown sprinkled other song genres throughout the show, he mainly centered the music around American folk music and utilized a smaller orchestra than normal, including a basic string quartet with three violins, two guitars, piano, and drums ("The Bridges of Madison County (Musical)"). In the song "Wondering," Robert sings about the inner struggle of his life. He sings about how one little thing, like meeting Francesca by circumstance, can turn into something much more. The full orchestra plays throughout the piece, driven by the piano playing eighth note chords throughout the piece. All the while, the guitar, violins, and bass gradually grow in volume, symbolizing the rising excitement in Robert and his willingness to accept his wandering mind. The true complexity of the piece comes with the mix of syncopation with straight rhythm and different instruments and vocals. Robert's vocal line in this piece is nothing short of a technical masterpiece, with rhythms signifying a free-speaking

style and a very wide vocal range. Everything in this piece has its own personality, yet they cleverly blend together to create one beautiful song of curiosity and taking chances.

When listening to songs like "Wondering," it is not hard to see why Jason Robert Brown received such universal praise for this score. To this day, *The Bridges of Madison County* is Brown's most decorated musical, proving that he has an amazing talent for creating music. During the run, the show faced mixed reviews. For example, Ben Brantley, of *The New York Times*, said that the musical was "disproportionately long," but credited Brown's work as "sumptuous" ("Bridges"). Joe Dziemianowicz, of the *New York Daily News,* who reviewed the musical, wrote that "Broadway's lush musical version [as opposed to the film] is grown-up and plain old-fashioned beautiful" and that Brown created "the greatest score of the past decade." Despite the short run time that this show had on Broadway and some negative reviews it received, Jason Robert Brown is praised for his work on *The Bridges of Madison County*.

CONCLUSION

This essay highlighted four of Jason Robert Brown's well-known musicals, as well as his childhood and education. However, there is one key element of his work that, despite highlighting his variety in genre and complexity in music, this paper has not explained: how Jason Robert Brown actually writes his music. The problem with explaining that element of Brown's work is that his tactics are actually quite simple. In an interview with the Library of Congress, Brown said his way of writing a song "used to be that I would sit at the piano and sort of bang things out" ("Conversation," 1:17). Later in the interview, he explained that his way of writing music for musicals mainly stems from "being able to anticipate the performative aspects of the material" ("Conversation," 15:23). In other words, for a majority of the shows that Brown has composed, he writes his scores by thinking about how they will be performed on stage, then just sits at a piano and plays.

That is the brilliance of Jason Robert Brown, whose intelligence in music allows him to write award-winning musicals without having to stress and revise for years. That is how he has been able to break the mold in modern musical theatre. Jason Robert Brown, through his knowledge of song genres and musical complexity, has written renowned musicals and has become a respected and beloved name in musical history now and forever.

Works Cited

Brown, Jason Robert. "In Conversation with Jason Robert Brown," Blog, 1 January 2005, https://jrb-3bd89b.webflow.io/news/in-conversation-with-jason-robert-brown

---. "Parade," 2025, https://jrb-3bd89b.webflow.io/projects/parade.

---. "The Last Five Years," 2025, https://jrb3bd89b.webflow.io/projects/the-last-five-years

"Conversation with Jason Robert Brown." *YouTube*, Library of Congress, 7 July 2017, www.youtube.com/watch?v=gatlzn2HS_4.

Dziemianowicz, Joe. "The Bridges of Madison County: Theater Review," *New York Daily News*, 20 February 2014.

IMDb. "Jason Robert Brown - Biography." *IMDb*, IMDb.com, www.imdb.com/name/nm2212346/bio/. Accessed 24 Oct. 2023.

Jones, Kenneth. "Marriage Dissected: Brown's Musical, Last Five Years, Opening May 23 in IL." *Playbill*, 23 May 2001, www.playbill.com/article/marriage-dissected-browns-musical-last-five-years-opening-may-23-in-il-com-96769.

Miller, Scott. "Songs for a New World, an Analysis by Scott Miller." *Rebels with Applause: Broadway's Ground-Breaking Musicals*, 31 July 2001, www.newlinetheatre.com/newworldchapter.html.

Music Theatre International. "The Bridges of Madison County," https://www.mtishows.com/the-bridges-of-madison-county

"Parade (Musical)." *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 18 Oct. 2023, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parade_(musical).

"Songs for a New World." *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 11 Aug. 2023, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Songs_for_a_New_World.

"The Bridges of Madison County (Musical)." *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 23 Aug. 2023, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bridges_of_Madison_County_(musical).

"The Bridges of Madison County (Musical) Plot & Characters." *StageAgent*, stageagent.com/shows/musical/3713/the-bridges-of-madison-county. Accessed 29 Nov. 2023.

"The Last Five Years." *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 17 Oct. 2023, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Last_Five_Years.

Tran, Diep. "Still Hurting: Look Back on the Original Productions of The Last Five Years." *Playbill,* 18 March 18, 2025, https://playbill.com/article/still-hurting-look-back-on-the-original-productions-of-the-last-five-years

Voelker, Kathryn Laura. *The Musical Theater Style of Jason Robert Brown*, University of Northern Colorado, December 2015, https://digscholarship.unco.edu/dissertations/314.

"From the Quill"
Aspen Durham
Digital Communication and Media
Minor in Creative Writing
Junior

Christina Rossetti's Portrayal of Addiction in "Goblin Market"

By Mackenzie Farmer

"Christina Rosetti's Portrayal of Addiction in 'Goblin Market'" addresses the addiction reading of "Goblin Market" and its complications. This essay uses close reading and comparative analysis to establish many similarities between Laura's experiences and two first-hand accounts of addiction from the nineteenth century. The second half of the essay presents an explanation why the addiction reading suddenly stops working with Laura's recovery. Rosetti's connection to the Mary Magdelene's Penitentiary paired with the poem presents a literal, or potentially religious, sisterhood that rescues Laura from addiction.

"Goblin Market" by Christina Rosetti follows the story of Lizzie and Laura as they encounter the goblin market. There are many potential readings, including those related to Christianity, particularly the fall and redemption. Other readings include commodification, racial or ethnic otherness, or addiction. The poem's components that contribute to the many potential readings combine or cancel each other out depending on the section of the poem. Laura's experiences with the goblins' fruit, in many ways, closely mimics addiction and withdrawal symptoms, while the ending of the poem seems to move away from a focus strictly on Laura's addiction to Lizzie's assistance through her personal risk and constant care that is crucial in Laura's recovery. Comparing the portrayal of addiction in "Goblin Market" with the works "Confessions of an English Opium Eater" and "Confessions of a Young Lady Laudanum-Drinker" displays the shift over the 19th century surrounding people's perception of addiction. Additionally, the second half of the poem suggests that family ties, whether biological or religious, are essential to recovering from addiction and the "fallenness" resulting from a person's actions.

Christina Rossetti was the youngest child of an Italian immigrant family who encouraged her and her older brothers, Dante Gabriel and William Michael, to create art and poetry. Her poetry often focused on Christianity or women's place and experiences within Victorian English society. "Goblin Market" addresses both of these ideas in a fairytale setting. Her family suffered financially after Rossetti's father became a permanent invalid, which prompted her increased focus on religion. For ten years, she volunteered at St. Mary Magdalene's Penitentiary where she helped with the rehabilitation of "fallen" women. This work with "fallen" women influenced "Goblin Market" in its portrayal of Laura's fall and redemption and the relationship between the poem's protagonists.

Addiction Reading

Rossetti wrote "Goblin Market" at a time when doctors regularly prescribed laudanum, which consists of opium dissolved in alcohol, to patients for various illnesses or pain. This led to addiction being a common problem in the Romantic and Victorian eras; although, many people were starting to question this practice toward the end of the nineteenth century. Addiction was not considered a disease as many contemporary people understand it until the 1940s (Travis 210); however, many Victorians considered non-medicinal alcohol and drug usage toxic to both "the individual and to the society" (Travis 214). Medicinal use did not carry this stigma, although it caused many cases of addiction as well. "Goblin Market" mirrors this idea through the destruction

of Jeannie and Laura's health after consuming the goblins' fruit; however, there is relatively limited focus on the impact it has on the society in which Lizzie and Laura live.

Thomas De Quincey published "Confessions of an English Opium Eater" in 1821, over forty years before Rossetti published *Goblin Market and Other Poems*, and there is a clear difference between the way the two authors discuss using addictive substances. "Goblin Market" warns against consuming addictive substances, although she does not condemn people like Laura. "Confessions of a Young Lady Laudanum-Drinker" contains a similar warning to the readers. De Quincey's confessions of his experiences do not have the same clear warning for his readers. The three works suggest a major change in how people understood and considered addiction from a minor inconvenience to something that could ruin a person's life and should be avoided.

In "Confessions of an English Opium Eater," Thomas De Quincey describes his personal experiences regularly using opium for seventeen years. He initially demonstrates concern over "tearing away that 'decent drapery'" behind which the English hid their difficulties and failures (De Quincey III). This suggests that while he does not feel shame over his experiences, English society would most likely disapprove; however, De Quincey published under his name suggesting addiction did not have enough of a stigma to prohibit this choice. His account demonstrates a much more ambivalent attitude toward the use than "Goblin Market" or "Confessions of a Young Lady Laudanum-Drinker." In his introduction, De Quincey describes his addiction as both a "fascinating enthralment [sic]" and "the accursed chain which fetter[ed]" him (vi).

After explaining how he started taking opium, De Quincey discusses, at length, the positive effects of taking opium, which he describes as "the secret of happiness, about which philosophers had disputed for so many ages" and claims that "(if taken in a proper manner,) introduces amongst them the most exquisite order, legislation, and harmony" (84-87). Aside from the positive mental effects that De Quincey describes, he discusses immediate relief from long-term pain

resulting from malnutrition during his travels as a teenager. While the work gently warns against allowing oneself to fall victim to an opium addiction, he has a very positive view of the drug's effect on a person's mental and physical well-being.

Laura's initial experience with the goblins' fruit seems to show a similar mindset toward the fruit. Laura eats until there is no more fruit. Rosetti's poem describes the fruit as "Sweeter than honey from the rock / Stronger than man-rejoicing wine" (lines 129-30), suggesting an intense joy from eating it. Additionally, De Quincey's statement that "the temptations to it were potent from the first" match the immediate addictive behavior Laura demonstrates after eating the fruit (v). Most of the negative effects of eating the fruit begin shortly after Laura returns home from eating at the goblins' feast, so Rossetti does not describe the long-term effects of contributing to the addiction. Laura's eating of the fruit is not entirely enjoyable, however. While she eats, the poem describes Laura eating until "her lips were sore" (136), which shows that while most of her misery begins after she cannot consume more fruit, she is still hurting herself immediately by eating the fruit. Instead, Laura's experiences quickly start to resemble those of a person experiencing withdrawal.

After describing the positive effects, De Quincey writes about the events that led to him ending his addiction. He describes a growing inability to focus on the studies he previously devoted most of his time to completing, and states "the sense of incapacity and feebleness" led him "to the neglect or procrastination of each day's appropriate duties" (De Quincey 143-44). Laura's withdrawal produces a similar effect in lines 199-214 while she goes about her daily activities "in an absent dream" (Rossetti 210). De Quincey emphasizes his helplessness by explaining that an addict "would lay down his life if he might get up and walk; but he is powerless as an infant." "Goblin Market" suggests a similar helplessness through the description that Laura "but sat down listless in the chimney-nook / And would not eat" (297-98).

While De Quincey focuses on many of the positive experiences during his laudanum addiction, he does not hide that he "made attempts innumerable

to reduce the quantity" but found himself unable to cope with the negative effects of lowering the dosage by himself (135). He briefly discusses another medicine that helped him lower the dosage successfully but clearly admits that most of the treatments he tried failed. "Goblin Market" does not contain failed attempts to end the addiction; although Laura does fail to treat her addiction on her own through attempting to grow the "kernel-stone" (Rossetti 138) she brought with her after eating at the goblins' feast. This failure results in her giving into her despair.

De Quincey ends "Confessions of an English Opium Eater" with a claim that he "wholly renounced the use of opium" (176). However, his writing does not create the same warning effect found in "Goblin Market" or "Confessions of a Young Lady Laudanum Drinker." He repeatedly denies any reason for shame and argues against the belief that, assuming a person properly controls their dosage, opium can have a very positive effect on the person consuming it. His intention for writing the story surrounding his addiction seems to be to explain his personal experiences instead of warning his readers against putting themselves into the same situation.

Another example of these experiences, although she more clearly questions the usage of laudanum, is "Confessions of a Young Lady Laudanum Drinker," which is a first-hand account from a woman who recovered from a laudanum addiction. She, like De Quincey, started to use laudanum to reduce discomfort and quickly found herself addicted. Unlike "Confessions of an English Opium Eater," the author of this work chose to keep her identity a secret from those who might read her letter. The difference between the time periods and genders of these two would have impacted people's perception of their experiences with addiction. *The Journal of Mental Sciences* published this account 17 years after Rossetti published "Goblin Market," but other people Rossetti would have encountered while volunteering before she wrote the poem would have had similar experiences. In the letter, the anonymous author recounts her experience with addiction, starting with her introduction to laudanum and ending with her recovery and a warning for others. The descriptions

the author provides are, in many ways, similar to Laura eating the goblins' fruit and nearly dying as a result.

From the beginning of the poem, Lizzie warns her sister against listening to the goblins' cry and eating their fruit. She uses the story of Jeannie, the young woman "who dwindled and grew grey" (Rossetti 156) before she died after eating the fruit, to warn Laura from falling for the temptation of the goblins and their unnatural fruit. Lizzie warns that if Laura does not resist, she will find herself in the same situation as Jeannie. The speaker in "Confessions of a Young Lady Laudanum-Drinker" admits to receiving similar warnings from her mother. She, like Laura, decides to disregard this advice and finds herself unable to stop her laudanum consumption. Once Laura starts to eat the fruit, "sucked and sucked and sucked the more...She sucked until her lips were sore." (134, 136) and admits when she returns home with Lizzie, "I ate and ate my fill, / Yet my mouth waters still" (165-66), demonstrating her insatiable appetite for the fruit.

After the young lady laudanum drinker's family discovers her addiction, the speaker explains, "I had no means of getting any more (I hate having to own that I tried to do so)" (Anonymous 2), which expresses her need to continue her addiction. She admits to resorting to dishonesty surrounding her continued addiction and the effect it had on her mind and body. Laura remembers a "kernel stone" she took from the goblins' feast, and in a last desperate attempt to end her suffering, she tries to grow her own fruit. She is unsuccessful, and it leads to her near-death state and later to Lizzie risking her safety to save her sister. These relatively small incidents in both "Confessions of a Young Lady Laudanum-Drinker" and "Goblin Market" point out the desperation these people experience when they cannot escape their body's need to consume more of the substance causing the addiction.

While Laura does not die from her decision to eat the goblins' fruit, her health rapidly worsens before Lizzie rescues her. After the initial feast, Laura loses the ability to hear the goblins' cry and, as a result, cannot buy more of the fruit she craves. This section of the poem demonstrates the withdrawal that "Confessions

of a Young Lady Laudanum Drinker" also addresses. The speaker describes how she "always seemed to be in a half-dazed state, and not knowing what I was doing" (Anonymous 2), while Rossetti describes Laura as "in an absent dream/… one sick in part" (211-12). In both cases, these quotes describe before the addicted women are forced to experience prolonged separation from the addictive substance. The anonymous speaker describes her agony and inability to do anything but lie in bed. Laura finds herself unable to continue her daily chores or eat.

Unlike Jeannie, Laura recovers from her near-death experience. Once she recovers, Laura immediately regains her health. In contrast to the graying of her hair and the dwindling health, "Her gleaming locks showed not one thread of grey" and "Tears once again/ Refreshed her shrunken eyes" (487-88). While the anonymous speaker's recovery is much more gradual than that of the poem, she describes the same helplessness that Rossetti includes in her poem. Lizzie must take care of Laura while she lies in bed. However, like the anonymous speaker in "Confessions of a Young Lady Laudanum Drinker" who "gradually got over that, and now am perfectly well," Laura recovers, and the end of the poem shows her and Lizzie married with children of their own.

In contrast to De Quincey, the anonymous woman emphasizes her shame over becoming addicted to laudanum and the effect it had on her behavior. She does claim that laudanum's effects "differ depending according to one's nature," which would allow for people like De Quincey who claimed opium did not have an effect on his morality, but nowhere in her letter does she suggest there are positive effects surrounding laudanum usage. This suggests that, at least for the anonymous author, the attitude toward addiction and laudanum usage started to change in the period of time between the writing of "Confessions of an English Opium Eater" and "Confessions of a Lady Laudanum Drinker." Although opium and laudanum were still widely available, people started to recognize that the addictions that surrounded these substances were not enough to justify the "positive" effects De Quincey, a part of the previous generation, praised.

At this point, both the anonymous speaker and Laura take on the role of warning those who come after them. The anonymous speaker warns against thinking someone can stop whenever they like because "opium takes away the power to do that" (Anonymous 3). This suggests this was a common belief of people at the time, and Rossetti's poem warns her readers about starting down the path to addiction because they could end up like Jeannie. The end of the poem describes her telling a simplified version of her story to her children, warning them against eating the goblins fruit that is "Like honey to the throat/ But poison in the blood" (Rossetti 554-555). This demonstrates a continued desire to warn those who might fall into the same situation as Laura and Jeannie. However, the positive ending and Laura's miraculous recovery does not demonize the people like Laura and the anonymous speaker who find themselves addicted.

Initially, the poem seems to demonstrate an almost biblical punishment toward women like Laura who "fall," whether that was the result of addiction or sexual impropriety. Jeannie falls for the goblins' tricks, eats the fruit, and dies as a result. Laura's story follows the same pattern until Lizzie comes to her rescue with the fruit juice. Lizzie repeatedly warns Laura against eating the fruit, but Rossetti does not condemn her to Jeannie's fate. After Laura falls ill, Lizzie risks her personal safety for Laura instead of watching her die, which might represent Laura receiving the punishment she "deserves" for choosing to fall for the goblins' temptation. Instead, Lizzie is able to save her sister from her addiction. In the end, both women are alive and healthy with families of their own who they can warn not to listen to the goblins' calls and to stick together and retain the family bond that helped Laura survive her own experiences.

While there are many similarities between addiction and "Goblin Market," the ending complicates this reading. Laura consumes the fruit juice from Lizzie's body, and after one night, she fully recovers. The poem does not provide a clear explanation for why the juice solves her addiction when the fruit originally caused it. Even if the fairytale elements of the poem

account for the accelerated rate of addiction and recovery, the source of her addiction should not also be the cause of her recovery. In "Confessions of a Young Lady Laudanum-Drinker," the speaker's family deprived her of laudanum, which allowed her to slowly recover, and De Quincey had to rely on a different medicine to help him recover. While there are other readings that could explain Laura's miraculous recovery, there is another important component of a reading centering addiction that quickly becomes important. Rossetti seems to turn her focus away from a strictly addiction-focused reading at the end of the poem to highlight Lizzie's actions and the devoted sisterhood they represent, which ultimately saves Laura from her impending death.

An important distinction between Jeannie and Laura is their connections to other people. According to the poem, Jeannie does not have anyone in her life besides her unnamed fiancé. Lizzie's description of Jeannie's death suggests there are people watching her but nobody helping her out of her situation. Alternatively, Lizzie and Laura are rarely apart throughout the poem. Laura could not help herself to recover from her addiction, and her health quickly deteriorated like Jeannie's. Unlike Jeannie, Laura had her sister to assist with her recovery. After Lizzie returns with the juice after the goblins' attack, she remains vigilant and "[c]ounted her pulse's flagging stir/ Felt for her breath/ Held water to her lips and cooled her face" (Rosetti 526-28), demonstrating her constant care for her sister while she recovers. Laura's recounting for the children at the end of the poem also emphasizes the importance of the relationship between her and Lizzie.

Religious Sisterhood

In "Goblin Market," the relationship between the protagonists is a biological sisterhood, but Rossetti's work at Mary Magdalene's Penitentiary could suggest a different type of sisterhood that does not rely on familial relations. The "solidarity, activism, and rescue" (Rappaport 855) that Lizzie shows toward Laura was evident in the religious sisterhoods like the one Rossetti would have been a part of during her

volunteer work at the penitentiary. However, these religious orders presented their own set of problems that prevented the type of sisterhood that the sisters in "Goblin Market" symbolize. Certain aspects of the sisters' journey closely resembles the ideas the volunteers at the penitentiary would have used during their attempts to rehabilitate fallen women.

Aside from addiction being a common problem in the 19th century, Rossetti would likely have seen many instances of addiction both in her personal life with her sister-in-law and the women at the penitentiary. The high addiction rates in the Victorian era would have ensured Rossetti working with people who suffered like De Quincey and the anonymous author. While the penitentiary primarily focused on women who either worked as prostitutes or became pregnant out of wedlock, addiction contributed to some women becoming prostitutes (Laite 119). The poem also ties these two concepts together when Lizzie gives a part of her body through the lock of hair, which, later in the poem, robs her of the rest of the strength in her body.

The women, like Rossetti, who volunteered at St. Mary Magdalene's Penitentiary focused their efforts on rehabilitating fallen women. The women who came to the penitentiary for rehabilitation, or "'inmates' (the chosen term for many such institutions)" (Rogers 63) experienced a strict schedule, isolation from the outside world, and constant observation. The women lived in a home that left them isolated from the world that initially caused their "fallenness." The buildings these women lived in were sufficiently far from the city to avoid the sounds and people that led these women to fall. The idea was to separate them from the negative influences and surround them with positive influences, like the women who volunteered at the penitentiary. "Goblin Market" reflects this idea through the sisters hearing the goblins' cries from the brook (Rogers 65-66). While the poem does not specify how far the brook is from their home, the women only hear the calls when they are outside their house. Additionally, these cries are what leads Laura to eat the fruit and begin her addiction.

The term "inmate" highlights the fact that, unlike Lizzie and Laura's home, these women did not have a nurturing familial relationship with the other women at the penitentiary. The volunteers at the penitentiary did not take care of the inmates the way Lizzie takes care of Laura. These women working at the penitentiary watched the inmates constantly to ensure these women did not return to the behaviors that resulted in their need for rehabilitation. In "Goblin Market," Lizzie and Laura demonstrate the dangers of leaving women alone through Laura's fall happening after Lizzie runs alone from the goblins. The women's time at the penitentiary was, in some ways, similar to a prison. They had to wear a uniform and the penitentiary's volunteers enforced a strict schedule for the inmates (Rogers 63). Lizzie and Laura seem to follow a regular schedule that they perform together in lines 199-215, but Rossetti diverges from these similarities when Lizzie attempts to buy the fruit from the goblin men.

Many of the Victorians believed that working with these "fallen" women would result in the women who tried to help becoming "infected" themselves (Rogers 68). "Goblin Market" seems to demonstrate the opposite. Lizzie spends the days after Laura's encounter with the goblins side by side with Laura. However, she takes a significantly higher risk when she chooses to visit the goblins in the hopes of saving her sister. She worries that if she were to try to help her sister, she would find herself in the same situation as Laura and Jeannie, growing weaker until they died. Crucially, she is able to go to the goblins and return with the antidote for her sister's addiction without any permanent damage because she still refuses to consume the fruit the goblins forced upon her. Lizzie risks her personal safety and likely her life to save her sister. At first she refuses to listen to the goblins' cries because she knows they will take her life if she eats their fruit like Jeannie and Laura did.

While she does not have to give up her permanent well-being, Lizzie's willingness to sacrifice herself and her choice to endure the goblins' attacks seem crucial to Laura's recovery. If she had not chosen to go to the goblins and experience their violence toward her, Laura would have died like Jeannie. Rossetti's poem suggests that the devotion and sacrifice in these ideal

sisterhoods is as crucial to the recovery of addicts and other fallen women as it was for the sisters in the poem; however, this was not always possible with the way the penitentiary worked.

These religious orders emphasized the nonprofit nature of their actions, but this created a divide between the women in different economic classes (Rappaport 860). Women who had personal wealth could contribute more heavily to their causes while the lack of wealth prevented the other women from doing the same. Those without the wealth to sustain their work consisted of a lower percentage of the women in these religious sisterhoods and did not have equal power or abilities as the wealthier women. For Rosetti, Lizzie and Laura also represent this difference in wealth because Laura claims she has "no copper in [her] purse" and "no silver either" (544) when she talks to the goblins, while Lizzie has a single silver coin that she takes to the goblins to purchase more fruit. An important detail that Rossetti includes is that Lizzie's silver coin is not what saves Laura. Her willingness to sacrifice and her devotion to Laura saves her.

Despite this economic and moral differentiation between the two women, Rossetti makes the women indistinguishable from each other, particularly when she describes them together after Laura's return:

> Golden head by golden head,
> Like two pigeons in one nest
> Folded in each other's wings,
> They lay down in their curtained bed:
> Like two blossoms on one stem
> Like two flakes of new-fall'n show,
> Like two wands of ivory (Rossetti 184-190)

These lines occur right after Laura has eaten the fruit and emphasize the similarities and closeness between the two sisters (Plourde 1086). Despite the economic difference and the fact that Laura has "fallen" at this point in the poem, Rossetti shows the closeness the two women have and how this family connection is enough to overcome not only the differences, but the problems Laura develops because Laura ate the goblins' fruit.

Lizzie's responses toward Laura's addiction demonstrate another important part of the poem's narrative. Despite Lizzie's repeated warnings against eating the goblins' fruit in the beginning of the poem and Laura's choice to ignore them, Lizzie continues to care for and to protect Laura willingly, which shows a lack of judgment toward her sister's poor decision making. Lizzie's "wise upbraidings" (Rossetti 142) that Laura receives after the goblins' feast change to descriptions that "[t]ender Lizzie could not bear/ To watch her sister's cankerous care" (Rossetti 299-300). The end of the poem continues to demonstrate Lizzie's love and concern for Laura. This poem points out the pain both the addict and the people close to them experience, but neither Rossetti nor Lizzie condemns Laura for not heeding the warnings Lizzie gave. Rossetti also provides a much more positive outlook on helping these women than many people in the Victorian era believed possible.

Addiction would have been a common problem for both men and women during the Victorian era, but members of English society, particularly men, held women to a different standard than the men. "'Goblin Market' and sisterhood" acknowledges "Reverend Carter's belief that large groups of fallen women generate 'an atmosphere of evil'" (Rogers 68), which demonstrates the idea that not only were these women at fault for their situation, they were likely to influence others to do the same. Rossetti's poem demonstrates a different mindset toward both the women and the influence men have on fallen women. When she refers to the goblins, Rossetti clarifies that they are goblin men in comparison to the young women of the poem. The goblins' animal characteristics emphasize the goblin men's predatory behavior toward the women in the poem. Laura and Jeannie both fall victim to the goblin men's cries, and the work of a woman, instead of another man, saves them.

Despite the volunteers for these penitentiaries being women, men oversaw the work of these penitentiaries. In "Goblin Market," aside from the goblins' there are no other men on which the poem focuses. Rossetti's almost complete lack of men where the sisters live suggest a desire to focus on how the men in the poem, and likely the men in Victorian England, contributed heavily to the problems and quickly condemned the women to their fate. While there is a clear connection between the prostitutes and women who were pregnant out of wedlock and men, there is also a connection surrounding addiction. Most doctors during the nineteenth century were male. Their prescriptions heavily contributed to the rate of addiction during this time, which the anonymous writer also acknowledges in "Confessions of a Young Lady Laudanum-Drinker" through her question "Oh, doctors why do you not try prevention as well as cure?" (Anonymous 2). The lack of human men in the poem suggests that the way to save these women is through the efforts and willingness to sacrifice of women like Lizzie.

"Goblin Market" suggests that without a strong sisterhood with women like Lizzie, these women would never be able to recover from addiction. Lizzie does not strictly avoid the members of the penitentiary expected from both inmates and volunteers, yet her risk prevents Laura from meeting Jeannie's fate. Rossetti used that to demonstrate the importance of having someone who is willing to stay near the person struggling with addiction and its effects. Rossetti's choices surrounding Laura's addiction and recovery provide a hopeful outlook on the ability to help women like those she worked with in the penitentiary when the volunteers could move beyond perceived differences. "Goblin Market" seems to show that only by establishing a sisterhood like Lizzie and Laura can women like Laura successfully recover from their addiction.

Works Cited

Anonymous. "Confessions of a Young Lady Laudanum Drinker." *The Journal of Mental Sciences,* 1889, pp. 1-3.

De Quincey, Thomas. "Confessions of an English Opium Eater: Being an Extract from the Life of a Scholar, From the last London Edition." Boston: W.D. Tickner, 1841. *Internet Archive,* https://archive.org/details/confessionsofeng00dequ/mode/2up.

Laite, Julia. "A Global History of Prostitution: London", *Selling Sex in the City: Global History of Prostitution, 1600s-2000s.* Edited by Rodriguez Garcia, Magaly, Lex Heerma van Hoss, and Elise van Nederveen, 2017, pp. 111-137. https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1163/j.ctv2gjwwht.10

Plourde, Aubrey. "The Innocent Old Way: Reserved Interpretation and Christina Rossetti's 'Goblin Market'" *PMLA*, 2019, pp. 1076-1090. https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2019.134.5.1076

Rappaport, Jill. "The Price of Redemption in 'Goblin Market.'" *SEL Studies in English Literature*, vol. 50, Number 4, Autumn 2010, pp. 853-875. https://doi.org/10.1353/sel.2010/a.404723

Rogers, Scott T. "'Goblin Market' , Sisterhood and the Church Penitentiary Association". *Journal of Victorian Culture,* vol 27, no.1, 2022, pp. 63-78.

Rosetti, Christina. "Goblin Market." *Poetry Foundation*, https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44996/goblin-market

Travis, Trish. "Toward a Feminist History of the Drug-Using Woman—and Her Recovery." *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 45, No. 1 (2019), pp. 209-233. https://doi.org/10.15767/feministstudies.45.1.0209

Van Hout, Marie Claire, and Evelyn Hearne. "'Vintage Meds': A Ethnographic Study of User Decision-Making, Home Preparation, and Consumptive Patterns of Laudanum." *Substance Use and Misuse*, Vol 50, Issue 5, April 2015, pp 598-608.

"Sugar-Baited Words:"
"Goblin Market" in the Post-MeToo Era

By Katelyn Fergerson

The primary purpose of "'Sugar-Baited Words:' Goblin Market in the Post-MeToo Era" is to reexamine Christina Rossetti's famous poem "Goblin Market" through our linguistic understanding of feminist concepts in the post-MeToo era. The means of doing so consists of extrapolating Rossetti's intended message through close reading, viewing those words through the ideas of the societal values and standards of the Victorian era, as well as Rossetti's personal world, while additionally recontextualizing those ideas through language popularized largely through fourth-wave feminist theory and ideas. By exploring the poem through a modern, post-MeToo, fourth-wave feminist lens, we can examine what new contributions Rossetti's work can offer to contemporary feminist discourse, particularly when it comes to subjects such as sexual assault, grooming, and the way that communication amongst women serves as a vital point of sisterhood.

Christina Rosetti's 1862 poem "Goblin Market" has been an enigmatic staple within the literary canon, primarily due to its elusive use of language, genre, and allegorical elements. The poem has been exhaustively examined, deemed anything from "a nursery rhyme, a fairy-tale or a fairy-tale for adults, an erotic fantasy, a Gothic tale, a horror story, a Christian allegory" to a "critique of capitalism, a celebration of sisterhood, a propaganda piece for lesbianism, a case study of anorexia nervosa, a rewriting of the Fall, a story of redemption" (Zangen 248). The poem's ambiguity and unconventional nature have served to make it an incredibly compelling piece of literature to discuss, but perhaps the most prolific and withstanding forms of discussion about the poem is its place as a feminist text. "Goblin Market" has been fully embraced by the realm of feminist literary scholars, particularly within the second-wave feminist movement of the 1970's, due to its themes of female sexuality, sisterhood, and the perceived undertones of lesbian eroticism. It has been lauded as a staple of proto-feminist Victorian poetry for over fifty years. However, many different shifts have occurred in terms of feminist thought and its relationship to the culture, and thus how "Goblin Market is read deserves to be shifted accordingly. Examining the poem through a modern, post MeToo, fourth-wave feminist lens shines light on what new contributions Rossetti's work can offer to contemporary feminist discourse, particularly when it comes to subjects such as sexual assault, grooming, and the way that communication amongst women serves as a vital point of "sisterhood." It will also help to parse out what it is exactly about "Goblin Market" that endears it to so many feminist scholars, and women in general.

To explore this reading, it is important to note the pointed way Rossetti chooses to portray the characters in the poem, as it is an essential key to properly viewing and understanding the dynamics that are at play within the text. Laura and Lizzie are painted as young women. Exactly how young is never explicitly stated, but their youth is displayed throughout the subtext of the poem, with the girls being described as "[like] two blossoms on one stem, / [like] two flakes of new-fall'n snow," (lines 188-189) displaying just how fresh to the world they are. Rossetti comparing the girls to newly fallen snow also places emphasis on the girls' purity, a motif that reappears throughout the poem. Additionally, Lizzie

and Laura are described as "maids" (2) or "maidens" (144) throughout several instances in the poem, which is likely similarly indicative of their youth as well as their status as virgins. This portrayal of the sisters stands in stark contrast to the portrayal of the goblins. The decision to make the antagonists of the story goblins specifically is notable due to widely held associations with the creatures. As folklore historian Matt King explains in his article "Taxonomizing Goblins from Folklore to Fiction," while it is "a common trope across folklore and fiction" (King 96) to depict goblins as "[seeking] to harm youth" (King 96), prior to the late 19th century goblins were generally considered ambiguous creatures "frequently used as generic catchalls to indicate 'a twilight domain of the spooky, the eerie, the unknown' during the early modern period" (King 89). King references Kathryn Briggs' *Encyclopedia of Fairies*, in which Briggs classifies goblins as "a general name for evil and malicious spirits, usually small and grotesque in appearance' (King 194). They have additionally "often [been] classed...as devils or illusions created by devils" (King 89). The lack of a specific and reliable classification for goblins in Rossetti's era provides another layer of ambiguity within the poem, requiring a close examination of Rossetti's choices when depicting the creatures.

King notes that Rossetti's goblins, "called 'goblin men' in juxtaposition with the sisters at the heart of the story, are a corrupting influence on these young women" (King 96). The decision to classify these creatures as "goblin men" as opposed to simple "goblins" implies a level of humanity to the creatures and provides the basis for an inherently gendered dynamic to take place. Additionally, Rossetti "does not provide a taxonomic origin for these goblins." King adds, "rather, she situates them as age-old beings with animalistic characteristics that sought to seduce women going to the market" (King 96). Rossetti's lack of origin for these goblins adheres to the common thread of ambiguity presented throughout "Goblin Market," while her categorization of the goblins as "age-old beings" suggests that they posses a level of knowledge or wisdom inherently unobtainable to the humans of the story, with this characterization

also implying that the goblins "presumably continue to exist as timeless corruptors of women" (King 96). All these characteristics indicate a vast power dynamic between the goblins and the girls that they ensnare. The goblins are well aware of this and are not afraid to use the dynamic to their advantage, as they work with one another "[signaling] each other, / [brother] with sly brother" (95-96) in a concerted effort to lure the girls in to eat their fruits. Notably, Rossetti presents the goblin's calls as an "iterated jingle / [of] sugar-baited words" (233-234) alluding explicitly to effort on behalf of the goblins to appeal to the youth and naivety of the girls that they want to lure in, presented as the verbal equivalent of luring in children with candy. The approach the goblins take is particularly devastating when considering what ultimately happens to the girls once the fruit is consumed by them.

So, what happens to the girls once they eat the fruit? This information can be gleaned through the cautionary tale mentioned throughout the poem, the story of a girl named Jeanie. Jeanie is a girl who the sisters knew, or at the very least knew of, who ate the goblins' fruit and suffered the consequences, with Lizzie warning Laura that Jeanie "[took] their gifts both choice and many" (149) and subsequently "[found] them no more, but dwindled and grew grey; / [then] fell with the first snow" (156-157). Additionally, Jeanie is buried in a plot of land where "to this day no grass will grow," (158). Jeanie's story is one of the elements that contributes to one of the most contemporarily relevant ideas portrayed throughout the poem; that being the use of communication amongst women to keep themselves and each other relatively safe. This idea is echoed again through the poem's ending, with Laura retelling the story to her children. In a way, what Rossetti is depicting through the warnings shared throughout the women of the poem is parallel to the purpose of the MeToo movement. These whispered warnings amongst women have been embedded in society for what can only be presumed to be forever, and they're an integral part of Rossetti's narrative throughout the poem. *Washington Post* writer Alana Massey articulated the idea in an article that came

out around the time of the MeToo movement titled "Women have always tried to warn each other about dangerous men. We have to:

> Until the institutions that define, enforce and deliver consequences for these violations actually start protecting women, women will have to make do with what we can. These informal networks of information-sharing are not battle cries to pursue vigilante justice; they are calm directives to other women to simply be vigilant…If our employers and our legal system and our social niceties will not keep predators away from us, we will keep ourselves away from them. It might be a whisper in the bathroom at the holiday party, a quick and earnest DM on social media, a dead-serious directive at a wedding, a list that goes around some Wednesday night. (Massey)

As Massey elucidates, one of the most important aspects of the MeToo movement is that it highlighted the level at which women will support each other in these difficult situations, even at the risk of compromising their own livelihoods, careers, reputation, etc. The thread that runs throughout "Goblin Market" directly depicts this element of sisterhood, with Rossetti insinuating that women can only find salvation through their bonds with other women, i.e. sisterhood. The entire poem leads to a precise emphasis on the importance on sisterhood in the final stanza; and thus serves, in the post MeToo era, as a stark reminder of the harsh reality many girls and women have experienced, a shared reality experienced by women in 1862 and in modern times.

Another reminder of this shared reality is Laura's initial arc with the goblins. Laura approaches the goblins with the intentions of buying their fruit despite having "no copper in [her] purse…[and] no silver either" (118-119). This prompts the goblins to suggest that Laura "[buy] from [them] with a golden curl," (125) an act that serves to blur the lines of the interaction. Laura's buying of the fruit goes from a normal, socially acceptable act of exchanging money for a good to now offering a part of her body in exchange for the good. This is a bait-and-switch tactic, luring the girls, under the pretense of a socially normalized prosses of exchanging money for a good, to a vaguely similar but ultimately perverse and boundary-pushing version of this transaction. This act is essentially akin to prostitution, or as close to prostitution that one could get within the confines of a children's fairytale. The goblins are testing to see if Laura is willing to give up a piece of herself. She follows through with this act, despite clearly finding it upsetting, as while doing so "[she] drops a tear more rare than pearl" (127). The goblins know that her boundaries can be further molded to fit their needs.

Laura's act of paying with a golden curl is also notable due to Victorian culture's relationship with hair. As Elisabeth Gitter writes in her paper "The Power of Women's Hair in the Victorian Imagination," "[while] women's hair, particularly when it is golden, has always been a Western preoccupation, for the Victorians it became an obsession" (Gitter 936). This obsession with hair manifests in several facets of Victorian life, with a notable example being the Victorian custom of exchanging locks of hair with a lover, with the lock of hair often being either kept in lockets worn around the lover's neck or kept in a safe place. With this, Gitter notes that "[hair] was powerful, and the ubiquitous Victorian lock of hair, encased in a locket or ring or framed on the wall, became, through a Midas touch of imagination, something treasured, a totem, a token of attachment, intrinsically valuable, as precious as gold. Because hair was so precious, however, no counterfeit would do: the hair itself was needed for the magic to work" (Gitter 942-943). Through this social power given to the act of exchanging hair, it became an extremely intimate act, with Gitter going on to suggest that the exchange is "next to a request for sexual surrender, the most intimate and serious of demands" (Gitter 943). Within this context, Laura giving the goblins a lock of her golden hair becomes scandalous, an act of giving over something so powerful and valuable to what are essentially strangers to her. Additionally, within this context, hair becomes not unlike maidenhood conceptually, something to be protected and valued, only to be given to someone who truly deserves it, and values it equally.

Hair was valuable to the Victorians as it provided a physical piece of deceased loved ones. Frequently the hair of a deceased loved one would be incorporated into jewelry for those who were close to them to wear in remembrance. Other times, the aforementioned lockets with hair in them would be passed down as family heirlooms, a physical and deeply human reminder of one's memory. Jane Wildgoose explores this in her article "Beyond All Price: Victorian Hair Jewelry, Commemoration & Story-Telling." While exploring what compelled the Victorians to collect these withstanding physical remains of their loved ones, Wildgoose notes that "[this] willingness to acknowledge the role that flights of imagination played in [the] impetus to collect...identified the way in which the past may be 'held captive' in some 'inanimate object' and recaptured through the effect it might have on our senses." (Wildgoose 703) With the exchange of the golden curl, Laura is now being "held captive" in essence by the goblins, with the golden curl metaphorically containing both her past and her future, which no longer belong to her. Between these two ideas, the action becomes both an intensely intimate, even sexual, act and a morbid acknowledgement of what is soon to be Laura's fate. Ultimately the language of the act suggests that Laura has participated in a very intimate act, hesitantly giving the goblins one of the most precious things a young Victorian girl could offer them, in a way that Victorian readers would generally be aware of. The interactions between the girls and the goblins mirror the fairly modern concept of "grooming," an act commonly defined asusing manipulative tactics used to gain trust, blur boundaries, and leverage naivety and inexperience to make it easier to abuse someone. While the act of grooming isn't always sexual by nature, within the context of "Goblin Market" it certainly seems to be. The goblins' decision to prey exclusively on young, inexperienced "maids" only echoes these ideas further, because it raises a question. If the temptation wasn't sexual in nature, then why would such an emphasis be placed on the need for the goblins' victims to be young, unmarried women? The common thread amongst the various interpretations of the poem is the goblins' fruit as a metaphor for temptation, but it is the erotic language littered within the text, particularly in the moments where the girls interact with the goblins, that ultimately produces the idea that the temptation is sexual in nature.

The erotic language appears most prevalently in the moments in which the girls of the poem interact with the goblins. For example, when Laura decides to indulge in the goblins' fruit the language of the poem immediately becomes viscerally erotic, with Laura "[sucking] their fruit globes fair or red: [sweeter] than honey from the rock," (129) with Laura finding the ecstasy of finally consuming the fruit sweeter than the biblical "honey from the rock." Rossetti's reference to "honey from the rock" alludes to Deuteronomy 32:13, where this phrase symbolizes God's provision of nourishment for his followers. Laura's reaction to the fruit is justified, as she has "never tasted such before," (132) and thus feels pure joy and emotion as she experiences this new sensation. However, this line is immediately followed by a question: "[how] should it cloy with length of use?" (133). The use of "cloy" in this line references means to "disgust or sicken (someone) with an excess of sweetness, richness, or sentiment." This question is used to do two things. For one, it highlights Laura's inexperience, as this is her first time experiencing this sensation, and so the line questions if the experience will remain as sweet or enjoyable as this introduction was or if it will cloy and become less enjoyable as she grows more experience. The question also could be directed at Laura herself; will she cloy with length of use, becoming socially undesirable after being "used." Laura fails to register the question though, as "[she] suck'd and suck'd and suck'd the more / [she] [sucked] until her lips were sore; / [then] flung the emptied rinds away" (133-137). Laura's flinging of the emptied rinds away again seems to allude to what will happen to her position in society after eating the fruits; with the quick disposal of the rinds being directly reflective of her experience with the goblins. The goblins have gotten what they want out of her and now view her as "used up" and ultimately useless to them, something Laura fails to realize.

Laura's sacrifice and unbridled experience of ecstasy contrasted with the goblins' malicious intent and concerted manipulation is one of the aspects that makes Laura's realization that she has been abandoned by the goblins so devastating. Upon

discovering that she is now excluded from the goblin cries, "Laura turn'd cold as stone" (253) as "[her] tree of life droop'd from the root," (260) indicating a sense of sorrow inside Laura surrounding the situation. Despite this deep sorrow, "[she] said not one word in her heart's sore ache," (261) perhaps due to self-blame indicative of the isolation one experiences after going through a situation similar to the one Laura has gone through, be it from shame, or embarrassment that she was duped by the goblins, or from general depression stemming from the situation. Her condition worsens as time passes, and, after her sister Lizzie falls asleep at night, Laura "[sits] up in a passionate yearning, / [and] [gnashes] her teeth for baulk'd desire, and [weeps / [as] if her heart would break," (266-268) further emphasizing both the pain and isolation the ordeal is leading Laura into. As the poem progresses, Laura carries on "[in] sullen silence of exceeding pain" (271) as the peril that her interaction with the goblins has prompted greatly impacts her ability to function and survive. This depression causes her to physically deteriorate, as "[her] hair [grows] thin and grey / [she] [dwindles], as the fair full moon doth turn / [to] swift decay and burn / [her] fire away" (277-280). As if Rossetti was attempting to foreshadow Laura's experience as she was eating the fruit, the interaction caused Laura to cloy, although not in the standard of societal value or viewing, but rather in a much more internal, cerebral way. This internal impact leads Laura to essentially be unable to function, causing her to neglect both her surroundings and her well-being as:

> She no more [sweeps] the house,
> [Tends] the fowls or cows,
> [Fetches] honey, kneaded cakes of wheat,
> [Brings] water from the brook:
> But [sits] down listless in the chimney-nook
> And [will] not eat (293-293).

Laura's sudden lack of will to carry on and inability to experience happiness is evocative of the intense mental health struggles those who experience any sort of sexual violation, be it grooming or otherwise, face in the aftermath. In a study conducted examining the of associations between sexual assault and health problems, the researchers found that "[sexual] assault at some time and of whatever kind…is similarly

associated with serious physical and mental health problems" (Turgumbayev 197). It is important to note that while Laura's interaction with the goblins is not particularly violent, it still impacts every facet of her life with impunity. Her betrayal by the goblins turns her from a normal, happy, healthy girl to a sullen shell of her formal self. Her refusal to eat reflects this idea as well, with loss of appetite being associated with depression, and sexual trauma survivors typically showing higher rates of eating disorders than the general population. One study notes "that about 30% of patients with eating disorders will reveal that they were sexually abused as children" (Abraham 48). Laura's story begins to mimic Jeanie's, as she continues to spiral and decline.

It is this mental and physical spiral that prompts Lizzie to approach the goblins in an attempt to save her sister. Lizzie is keenly aware of the danger that she faces, as she "[longs] to buy fruit to comfort [Laura,] / [but] [fears] to pay too dear" (310-311). However, as Laura continues to dwindle to the point where she "[seem'd] knocking at Death's door," (321) Lizzie accepts that she must either face the danger or watch her sister die. Lizzie's understanding of what occurred between Laura and the goblins is very basic. She knows that Laura ate the fruit, enjoyed it, and planned to return for more. That is all. So before she embarks on her mission she "[puts] a silver penny in her purse," (324) completely unaware that coin is not the goblins' preferred currency.

Upon seeing Lizzie approaching them, the goblins are giddy with excitement, crowding around her and dosing her with affection as they "[hug] her and [kiss] her: / [squeeze] and [caress] her" (348-349) before offering her their fruits. The goblins' attempts at physical affection in this interaction are another instance of the goblins attempting to cross boundaries. They are testing how Lizzie will receive them, what all they can get away with. What they discover is that Lizzie is much less receptive to their actions than her sister, as she tosses her penny to the goblins and asks for fruit in return, to take home to Laura. The goblins urge her to "take a seat with [them], / [honor] and eat with [them]," (368-369) as it is imperative that Lizzie eat the fruit with the goblin's present, and thus they refuse to sell her any despite

her payment. Their pleading, while initially seeming rather innocuous, ends with the goblins asking Lizzie to "[be] welcome guest with [them], / [cheer] you and rest with [them]," (381-382) insinuating that Lizzie must sleep with them for this interaction to be successful in their eyes. If they are unable to corrupt the girls that they interact with, then it is simply a waste of fruit. Lizzie is well aware of the goblins' dangerous nature and continues to deny their advances, insisting that they simply give her the fruit that she has paid for so that she can be on her way.

Lizzie's denial angers the goblins, with their demeanors quickly turning sour. The goblins are "[no] longer wagging, purring, / [but] visibly demurring" (391-392) as they begin to turn on Lizzie. This shift in attitude is demonstrative of the goblins' longing to assert dominance over the girls they encounter, to essentially be allowed to push their boundaries with no resistance. Additionally, they begin hurling verbal insults at her, with one of the goblins "[calling] her proud," (394) an insult reminiscent of the outbursts many women have had to deal with upon rejecting men's sexual advances, an idea that becomes more observable once the goblins' attack turns physical, as they:

> [Lash] their tails
> They trod and [hustle] her,
> [Elbow] and [jostle] her,
> [Claw] with their nails,
> Barking, mewing, hissing, mocking (394-398).

And quickly this violence turns sexual in nature, as the goblins:

> [Tare] her gown and [soil] her stocking,
> [Twitch] her hair out by the roots,
> [Stamp] upon her tender feet,
> [Hold] her hands and [squeeze] their fruits
> Against her mouth to make her eat (389-407).

The goblins' attempt to use force to make Lizzie eat their fruit, to penetrate her mouth, is a depiction of violent sexual violation, marked even more vividly by the goblins tearing off her layers of clothing to the layer closest to her skin. The penetrative imagery is similarly evoked a few lines later, when Lizzie is

described as "[white] with blossoms honey-sweet / [sore] beset by wasp and bee" (416-417). This line emphasizes Lizzie's unbreakable purity, even as she's being swarmed and attacked by the goblins, whose comparison to wasps and bees elicits another instance of unpleasant penetrative acts.

During the attack, Lizzie is portrayed as the ultimate innocent, even being portrayed as angelic at many points. She is described as standing "[white] and golden /.../ [like] a lily in a flood," (408-409) with white on its own being often associated with purity, and the combination of white and gold being calling to mind angelic and biblical imagery. Additionally, the use of the lily specifically in this instance is likely being used to allude to Lizzie's purity, innocence, and chastity despite the violent assault being inflicted on her. Lizzie's purity is further solidified by the simile Rossetti utilizes later in the passage, with Lizzie being compared to "...a royal virgin town / [topp'd] with gilded dome and spire / [close] beleaguer'd by a fleet / [mad] to tug her standard down" (418-421). Lizzie maintains her dignity during the violation, as she does "...not open lip from lip / [lest] they should cram a mouthful in" (431-432). She keeps her mouth stringently closed until the goblins are so "[worn] out by her resistance" (438) that they "[fling] back her penny, [kick] their fruit / [along] whichever road they took, / [not] leaving root or stone or shoot" (439-441). Lizzie has successfully managed to make it out of the goblin's grips relatively unscathed by refusing to compromise her purity. As she walks home to save her sister she "[hears] her penny jingle / [bouncing] in her purse,— / [its] bounce was music to her ear," (452-454) further reinforcing her unbroken maidenhood.

Rossetti's concerted focus and reinforcement of Lizzie's purity leads a different element of "Goblin Market" that is equally fascinating to view through the post MeToo lens: the way in which Rossetti's writing interacts with purity culture and by proximity, rape culture, and the subtle way in which these concepts are embedded in the poem's thematic narrative. Upon Lizzie's return to Laura, Lizzie is portrayed as a virtuous and Christ-like figure, with Lizzie imploring Laura to "[eat] [her], drink [her], love [her]," (471) a request that evokes the Christian

tradition of communion. Laura fortifies Lizzie's martyr status by asking Lizzie if she has "tasted… / [for] [Laura's] sake the fruit forbidden," (479) alluding to the biblical story of Adam and Eve. Lizzie's sacrifice is essentially Rossetti presenting the idea that only through turning to Christ can one be redeemed from their fallen status, and through this redemption can once again be reintegrated into society. While Rossetti's goal of offering "fallen" women redemption through religion is well intentioned and admirable, particularly when viewed in the context of Rossetti's life[1], it is also emblematic of the enforcement of purity culture that was emphasized in the 19th century. A culture that holds sexual and religious purity to that high of a standard inherently contributes to and enables rape culture. Elements and rhetoric associated with rape culture bleed through in specific instance of the poem, from the suggestion that the girls of the story are committing acts punishable enough to require "redemption," to the barren plot of land Jeanie is buried on, where "to this day no grass will grow" (158). Rossetti's language in describing this suggests that the land is now barren due specifically to wrongdoing on Jeanie's part, conjuring imagery evocative of infertility, a symptom associated with sexually transmitted infections and diseases. The blame is placed on Jeanie again, as Lizzie reflects on Jeanie when making the decision to save her sister, as Lizzie begins:

> [thinking] of Jeanie in her grave,
> Who should have been a bride;
> But who for joys brides hope to have
> Fell sick and died
> In her gay prime (312-316).

With the implication being that Jeanie, in her rush and eagerness to obtain the "joys brides hope to have" essentially caused her own death by not being patient and waiting for marriage. The underlying reflection of the culture in which Rossetti lived in that permeates the poem is unsurprising and is made further so when considering her deeply religious personal endeavors.[2] However, it is worth acknowledging that she presumably was not intentionally contributing to any elements of rape myths or rape culture in general, and rather was acting in good faith, and with good intentions, in order to aid socially disregarded women, the only ways in which she knew how. This information does not make these elements of the poem any less important to examine though, as they contribute to the poem's narrative in an impactful and important way.

Reading the poem through the lens of post MeToo feminism, or fourth-wave feminism, revels the way in which "Goblin Market" relies on juxtaposition to weave its narrative. The poem's perennial relevancy lies in its ability to blur the lines and contrast between childish whimsy and eroticism, fragility and brutality, girlhood and womanhood, offering a harsh critique of rape culture while subconsciously upholding rape culture. In that lies something compellingly real. Christina Rossetti somehow manages to concentrate the feelings that accompany the transition from girlhood to womanhood into a poem. In doing so, she depicts it, with explicit preciseness, exactly how it is; terrifying and thrilling, disgusting and exciting, stiflingly oppressive and unimaginably empowering. While this idea initially seems uncomfortable both because of the feeling that it creates as well as the general idea that these experiences were occurring in 1862 and are still prevalent today, with "Goblin Market" Rossetti emphasizes the importance of sisterhood and community amongst women in these situations. In this context, she expresses to the reader that these struggles are nothing new. Women have been experiencing these things and will continue to experience these things. But through the sisterhood created through the inherent bond of womanhood, women will continue to survive and persist, leading happy, fulfilling lives regardless. And in doing so Rossetti creates a thread of solidarity between women of the Victorian era and women of today.

Works Cited

Abraham, Suzanne. *Eating Disorders: The Facts.* Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2016. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, https://ebookcentral. proquest.com/lib/wtamu-ebooks/detail. action?docID=4083318.

Barfoot, C. C., Britta Zangen. "Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market: The Eroticism of Female Mystics" *"And Never Know the Joy:" Sex and*

the Erotic in English Poetry. Brill Academic Publishers, 2006. https://search-ebscohost-com.databases.wtamu.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,cookie,url,uid&db=e000xna&AN=198382&site=ehost-live&scope=site. Accessed 1 May 2024.

Barnett, Sligar, K. B., & Wang, C. D. C. "Religious Affiliation, Religiosity, Gender, and Rape Myth Acceptance: Feminist Theory and Rape Culture." *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 33(8), 1219–1235, 2018. https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260516665110. Accessed 1 May 2024.

Gitter, Elisabeth G. "The Power of Women's Hair in the Victorian Imagination." *PMLA*, vol. 99, no. 5, 1984, pp. 936–54. JSTOR, https://doi.org/10.2307/462145. Accessed 1 May 2024.

Harrison, Antony H. "Christina Rossetti: illness and ideology." *Victorian Poetry*, vol. 45, no. 4, winter 2007, pp. 415+. Gale Literature Resource Center, link.gale.com/apps/doc/A173970532/LitRC?u=txshracd2629&sid=summon&xid=665cf5d8. Accessed 1 May 2024.

King, Matt. "Taxonomizing Goblins from Folklore to Fiction." *Folklore* vol. 135, no. 1 (2024): 87-109.

Massey, Alana. "Women have always Tried to Warn each Other about Dangerous Men. We have to." WP Company LLC d/b/a *The Washington Post*, Washington, United States Washington, 2017. ProQuest, https://login.databases.wtamu.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/blogs-podcasts-websites/women-have-always-tried-warn-each-other-about/docview/1950584220/se-2. Accessed 1 May 2024.

Rossetti, Christina. "Goblin Market." *Representative Poetry Online,* University of Toronto Libraries, 1997. https://rpo.library.utoronto.ca/content/goblin-market. Accessed 1 May 2024.

Turgumbayev, Marlen, et al. "An examination of associations between sexual assault and health problems, depression or suicidal ideation in a large nationally representative cohort of male and female 20-30-year olds." *Criminal Behaviour & Mental Health*, Vol. 33, no. 3 (2023): 196–212. https://doi.org/10.1002/cbm.2280

Wildgoose, Jane. "*Beyond All Price:* Victorian Hair Jewelry, Commemoration & Story-Telling." *Fashion Theory*, vol. 22, no. 6 (2018): 699–726. https://doi-org.databases.wtamu.edu/10.1080/1362704X.2018.1533345 Accessed 1 May 2024.

Endnotes

1 Christina Rossetti volunteered at St. Mary Magdalene Penitentiary in Highgate, making efforts to rehabilitate "fallen women" for over a decade. For more on Rossetti's volunteer work, see Anthony Harrison's article "Christina Rossetti: illness and ideology."

2 A 2018 study determined that "religiosity was positively associated with rape myth acceptance, even after controlling the effect of conservative political ideology" (Barnett 1219). This is worth noting, as it demonstrates that for Rossetti these are essentially facts of life as opposed to "rape myths" such as "she asked for it," "she lied" etc. Rossetti existed in a period where rape myths were generally accepted by most of society.

Can Eye-Tracking Glasses Measure Consumer's Buying Habits in a Grocery Store Setting?

By Bryce Hutson

This proof-of-concept study evaluated whether Tobii Pro Glasses III can reliably measure consumer visual behavior in a retail meat environment. Ten shoppers at Doc's Prime Cuts were equipped with wearable eye-tracking glasses while conducting a timed shopping experience. Gaze patterns, fixation duration, and visual attention heat maps were analyzed to determine what products or labels drew attention. Results indicated that while the technology successfully captured broad attention patterns such as focus on mid-shelf products and pork coolers near the entrance, environmental motion and technological constraints limited data precision. Findings suggest that eye-tracking glasses demonstrate promise as a tool for improving product placement and marketing strategies in grocery settings, but further development is needed to strengthen accuracy and usability in dynamic environments.

In the developing world of agricultural communications and society, researchers and consumers constantly see a growing change within the marketing system of food across the country. From the aisles to the coolers in the back, companies have shifted the change in how they market the products consumers purchase. This challenge brings up new solutions to find attractions and distractions within the grocery stores. This problem must be brought with a solution to the marketing, layout, and the consumer behaviors within the store. The solution boils down to growing technology within the industry. Eye-tracking glasses have become a useful tool within the consumer behavior culture and research to find a solution to marketing trends. Tobii Pro Glasses III have been a tool to measure some of the attractions, distractions, gaze movements, fixations, and many more other calculations of the consumer behavior.

With the new technology, Tobii Pro Glass III could provide a reliable way to use the products to test attractions or distractions. Through this proof-of-concept study, the researchers dove into the actual methodology and technology with Tobii Pro Glasses III to discover if this type of technology is even worth the hassle. This technology has become a new and flashy product, but the researchers wanted it to be able to be used by the everyday person or company.

Analyzing Agricultural Communication Literature

Agricultural communications have long served as a bridge between food producers and the general public. Early agricultural journalism primarily relied on farmers and researchers to share information with consumers (Zumalt, 2007). As the agricultural industry expanded and diversified, communicators increasingly addressed audiences disconnected from production, processing, and other sectors of the food system (Zumalt, 2007). This shift underscores a growing need for communication strategies that support consumer understanding, particularly in settings where marketing influences how food is perceived.

Research shows that negative messaging and misinformation surrounding agricultural products frequently shape consumer beliefs (Fischer et al., 2020). Labels such as "non-GMO" or "no added

hormones" may trigger emotional responses, regardless of scientific relevance or accuracy (Center for Food Integrity, 2014). These perceptions carry into grocery stores, where shoppers quickly scan labels and packaging for familiar claims. Therefore, understanding what consumers visually attend to at the point of purchase is essential for bridging knowledge gaps and supporting informed decision-making.

Consumer Behaviors

Visual attention plays a crucial role in meat purchasing decisions. In fast-paced grocery environments, shoppers rarely have the time to fully evaluate every available option. Instead, they rely on mental shortcuts guided by brand familiarity, label design, product color, or other visual cues (Pieters & Warlop, 1999). These heuristics help consumers navigate crowded coolers and make purchasing decisions efficiently.

Meat selection is also influenced by psychological, sensory, cultural, and marketing factors (Font-i-Furnols & Guerrero, 2014). Motivation, past experiences, attitudes toward specific products, and personal belief systems can all shape final choices. Color and texture influence perceptions of freshness, while promotional claims or perceived product origins may create a feeling of trust. Because many of these influences operate automatically, tools such as eye tracking can provide valuable insight into how visual attention drives behavior at the meat counter.

Eye Tracking History and Capabilities

Modern eye-tracking technology evolved from early eye-gaze devices developed in the 1980s and 1990s (Drewes & Schmidt, 2007). Today's systems can measure pupil dilation, gaze pathways, fixation duration, and blink rate, offering detailed insight into how individuals visually interact with their surroundings (King et al., 2019). These developments have made eye tracking increasingly accessible for applied research settings.

Scholars highlight that eye tracking can reveal subconscious visual processes that consumers themselves may be unaware of (Graham et al., 2022). Researchers can capture how attention shifts moment-to-moment and how these shifts relate to decision-making. Mobile eye-tracking glasses expand this capability by enabling data collection in both laboratory and field environments (King et al., 2019).

Eye Tracking in Grocery Stores

Eye-tracking research involving food products and labeling continues to grow as companies invest in marketing strategies such as health claims and origin labeling (Van Loo et al., 2018). Label characteristics — including placement, size, color, and information content — significantly influence attention and purchasing outcomes.

However, many existing studies occur in controlled laboratory environments, where participants view static product images or make choices without environmental distractions (Bialkova et al., 2020). These artificial conditions remove common retail variables such as customer movement, lighting variation, noise, and time pressure — all of which influence real behavior inside stores.

Recent research comparing virtual and physical environments demonstrated similar fixation patterns, yet differences emerged when shoppers physically interacted with products (Peng et al., 2021). This suggests that real-world conditions provide a more accurate representation of how consumers shop.

Research on meat labeling, such as Lombard's (2022) study in South Africa, used eye-tracking technology to examine fixation on price, product information, and display location. Findings revealed important trends but were collected in a laboratory setting, limiting ecological validity.

Closure and Rationale for This Study

While Lombard (2022) and other researchers provide useful foundational insights, their studies lack natural store distractions and the dynamic decision-making environment found in everyday shopping. Consumers continually shift focus due to external factors such as movement, store layout, and interaction with

other shoppers. These influences can significantly alter visual attention patterns. Therefore, additional research is needed within functioning grocery stores to better understand spontaneous consumer behaviors at the meat counter.

Methods

This study asked participants to conduct their typical shopping experience at the Happy State Bank Academic & Research Building at West Texas A&M University, specifically at Doc's Prime Cuts, a retail store. Researchers equipped each participant with the Tobii Pro Glasses III eye-tracking system, a device designed to capture detailed eye movement data such as pupil dilation, blink rate, and eye gazes. Both investigators instructed the participants to continue their daily shopping habits in Doc's, ensuring that the shopping experience remained as authentic and natural as possible. The observation period of two minutes commenced as soon as the participants began their shopping sessions. Before the study commenced, the participants used a calibration tool to ensure each participant had the same software tracking their eye gaze. Calibration was key to ensuring participants had a high accuracy rating when tracking gazes. The data collected included the participants' gaze patterns and their field of view and provided a comprehensive visualization of what each participant looked at during their shopping. Additionally, the Tobii Pro Glasses III recorded audio and video on the participants. These recordings were used in the analytical portion of the study.

For the participants selected, researchers utilized a convenience sampling process. A booth was stationed outside Doc's Prime Cuts during August 1–2 during regular business hours. Participants selected were returning customers or graduate students at West Texas A&M University. They were over 18 and were the primary purchaser of meat products for their household. Participants were asked if they experienced any eyesight or vision issues before being included in the study. Due to the nature of the glasses, researchers had to select individuals who could see without their glasses, but they were permitted to use the device if they wore contacts.

The primary researcher was responsible for preparing each participant with the consent forms and discussing the project's purpose before entering the experiment. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym (e.g., P1, P2, P3) to maintain confidentiality and protect participants' identities. Each shopping experience took approximately two minutes per participant, allowing for a consistent timeframe across all participants.

The data collection sessions occurred during regular business hours to utilize the everyday environment customers would face in a standard setting. During the study, researchers left the shoppers on their own to experience the atmosphere independently. As shoppers looked throughout the store, the researchers monitored their movements on a screen outside the store to ensure there were no technical issues. Upon completing their shopping, the researchers carefully removed the eye-tracking equipment once the customers made their selections and thanked participants for their time. The Tobii Pro Glasses III were thoroughly sanitized between participants to maintain hygiene and prevent cross-contamination.

The use of the Tobii Pro Glasses III was approved by the Department of Agricultural Sciences at West Texas A&M University, providing the necessary technological support for the study. This advanced technology was instrumental in recording the participants' audio, visual, and eye-tracking data as they navigated specific environments, such as Doc's retail meat market. The eye-tracking data was securely stored on a university firewall-protected laptop and analyzed in the Happy State Bank Academic & Research Building media lab. The software program Tobii Pro Lab involved a detailed examination of the eye-tracking footage to identify patterns in visual attention, such as which products or labels drew the most attention and how long participants looked at different items. This software program created a detailed Excel spreadsheet with each column containing different eye-tracking components, such as blink rate, eye movement in seconds, and pupil dilation. Researchers also observed how certain aspects of the store either attracted or distracted shoppers from their shopping experiences. The audio recordings were analyzed

to capture any verbal cues or comments that could provide additional insights into decision-making. During the analytical portion of the study, data was imported into the Tobii Pro Lab software to begin analyzing gazes, movements, and attention. Through the program, each recording was started with an assisted mapping of participants' gazes. Mapping began with the use of a snapshot of the entire cooler space to track where the eyes were focused. The software analyzed only the "attention filter" rather than fixation, since participants were moving throughout the store. The filter began when participants first entered the store and ended when they finished shopping. Researchers set the similarity threshold to 50% and evaluated each assisted point to ensure the similarity reached 100%. Once processing was complete, researchers reviewed each frame, added attention points, and confirmed each assisted point.

After mapping the ten recordings, visualization charts were created to view the overall attention patterns across the study. The initial snapshot was used to create three styles of visualization maps: a scan path map, a bee map, and a heat map. Through assisted mapping and manual mapping, researchers exported an Excel spreadsheet containing pupil duration, gaze time, and additional factors. Another software tool, Areas of Interest (AOI), was also tested. However, AOI was limited because participants were moving and the tool performs best when subjects remain still.

Results and Detailed Findings

This study produced two categories of research outcomes: quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data revealed several findings that were not initially anticipated in this proof-of-concept study. Data analytics were run on all ten recordings to determine fixation points and fixation duration.

As noted in the Methods section, the Areas of Interest (AOI) tool was used to divide the cooler space into species-specific sections. These defined areas provided the basis for the quantitative analysis (see Figure 1). The software produced a dataset for each participant showing the frequency of gaze hits and duration within each AOI (see Figure 2).

The data indicated that the cooler section closest to the store entrance received the highest number of hits and fixations, particularly the lamb section. This location appeared to draw the participants' attention first upon entering the retail space. The results also showed variation in the percent of fixation points across the store. Coolers facing the entrance reached 100% fixation among participants, suggesting a strong initial visual draw compared to coolers deeper in the store.

When analyzing interval averages, participants spent the majority of their time viewing the pork coolers. This included both external viewing and time spent opening cooler doors and inspecting products more closely. Several participants (n = 4) demonstrated atypical patterns that functioned as outliers. These cases contributed to increased fixation counts in the "overall" cooler category, which captured gaze points falling outside specific AOI boundaries due to assisted mapping adjustments.

Visualizations generated during assisted mapping provided further insight into participant attention patterns. Scan path maps and bee swarm maps revealed denser gaze clusters in the central portion of the store (see Figures 3–5). Additionally, participants predominantly viewed products on the middle and upper shelves rather than lower shelves, which was supported by heat map intensity patterns. Longer fixation durations appeared on mid-shelf products, indicating priority visual engagement in locations aligned with natural eye level.

These visual findings demonstrate clear differences in attraction across product placements and cooler locations. Attention was concentrated in the middle of the store and toward eye-level displays, providing implications for strategic product placement in meat retail environments.

Qualitative and Limitations

During the study, the findings and results brought about limitations to completing the project. The hardships came from the different steps throughout the project. The significant issues with utilizing such a robust technology style came with many technical

difficulties. The Tobii Pro Glasses were highly intricate in terms of the glasses' connectivity to the recording pack that is harnessed with the participant. There were numerous ways, from a stiff wire to wireless, and many times, the device had trouble connecting with the glasses. For three weeks these issues would hinder the collection process, and the West Texas A&M University Informational Technology Department and Tobii Pro Software team would have to try to find solutions.

Moreover, the software used to analyze the data was sophisticated for the everyday researcher, involving certain aspects the project could not give to the program. This resulted in delays in using the software and even the beginning of finding results. The limitation of analyzing the data was how the software used its own AOI system. If the subject was moving, then AOI tools became more challenging to use and would miss much of the data collected. For this to work correctly, you must make the subject entirely still with no head movements, only eye movements. With that being acknowledged, the researchers also must ensure that if they use the AOI tool, the software will only use photos that are in an electronic copy of the area being studied rather than a photo from a phone or camera. The photo type or copy can significantly hinder when utilizing a retail or real-world setting. Not every situation has a PDF or electronic copy. Researchers cannot take pictures of the real-world setting to collect accurate data. In the real-world aspects, everything used in those settings is an average photo that may be taken professionally or through a phone. Without an electronic copy or document, the software has a harder time correctly collecting the data that is needed.

Another issue faced throughout the study came from the participants and the project's location. When selecting certain participants, the researchers had to ensure the subjects could vary without glasses or had any vision issues, which can create a challenge for researchers. Plus, when researchers were selecting candidates, potential challenges with the recorded data indicated some participant data was not captured, perhaps due to attention disorders such as ADHD or ADD. The researchers noticed that specific `individuals with those disorders caused the

glasses to miss numerous vital points throughout the study, and the eye-tracking glasses were challenged to record the rapid nature of their eye movements or gaze length throughout the study. On the other side of the spectrum, eye-tracking glasses produced more targets than needed for people with some eye disorders or vision loss, such as astigmatism. This caused over-produced targets for the same position and became trivial for the data. With both ideas in mind, researchers struggled to find perfect candidates for the study due to many individuals facing either of these issues.

Location also became a challenge as the researchers were unable to secure a retail space to conduct the study. Both large and small retail spaces have their own limitations. Throughout this study, smaller retailers were harder to communicate with as they had fewer employees and less time to discuss the project. Some were apprehensive of the potential disruption to consumers' natural shopping experiences. Larger retailers were delayed by corporate structure and lacked the localized control to make decisions on whether the research could be conducted in the retail space.

Further Discussion and Recommendations

This project was a proof-of-concept study to determine how eye-tracking glasses could be utilized within the U.S. meat marketing system. Due to the limitations, researchers believe this type of technology could not fully function within the scale of the marketing system. Tobii Pro Glasses cause might not be designed to work as accurately in a retail space where the environment is fluid. If researchers studied consumer behaviors, a quicker and more user-friendly product would have to be implemented. As stated by Hartson 2022, "the points mentioned about the concepts of the locations and participants cause complications in the data collection process. "Despite this move toward more real-world behaviors, the vast majority of gaze studies to date have taken place in highly controlled lab settings. In addition to the fact that behavior in a lab environment lacks ecological validity, being head-fixed for gaze-tracking experiments produces unrealistic gaze behaviors if

the dynamics of the body are not taken into account" (Harston & Faisal).

The motives to analyze the products and the behaviors of the consumers is an excellent start to future studies. However, this technology could be ageing and could have affected its accuracy and consistency. As consumer trends and marketing strategies evolve rapidly, the tools used to study these areas must keep evolving simultaneously. While the Tobii Pro Glasses have the potential to contribute to the U.S. meat marketing system, the useability for the research is a central issue and limits the reliability of the product. Consequently, the proof of concept in this study has not been entirely successful. In the future, researchers nationwide will have to invest and explore more advanced and user-friendly technologies that could enhance this area of research. Such tools could play a vital role in improving the U.S. meat marketing system and better serve consumers in the future.

References

Bansal, P., Kim, E.-J., & Orhun, S. (2024). Discrete choice experiments with eye-tracking: How far we have come and ways forward. *Journal of Choice Modeling*, 1–26.

Bialkova, S., Grunert, K. G., & van Trijp, H. C. M. (2020). From desktop to supermarket shelf: Eye-tracking exploration on consumer attention and choice. *Food Quality and Preference, 79*, Article 103742.

Center for Food Integrity. (2014). *Cracking the code on food issues: Insights from moms, millennials, and foodies.* https://s3.amazonaws.com/www.foodintegrity.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/CFI2014ResearchBook.pdf

Drewes, H., & Schmidt, A. (2007). Interacting with the computer using gaze gestures. *Lecture Notes in Computer Science*, 4663, 475–488.

Fischer, L., Meyers, C., Cummins, R., Gibson, C., & Baker, M. (2020). Creating relevancy in agricultural science information: Examining the impact of motivational salience, involvement, and pre-existing attitudes on visual attention to scientific information. *Journal of Applied Communications, 104*(2), 1–23.

Font-i-Furnols, M., & Guerrero, L. (2014). Consumer preference, behavior and perception about meat and meat products: An overview. *Meat Science, 98*(3), 361–371.

Gilboa, S., Seger-Guttmann, T., & Ofir, M. (2019). The unique role of relationship marketing in small businesses' customer experience. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services, 52*, 152–164.

Graham, L. J., Das, J., Moore, J., Godfrey, A., & Stuart, S. (2022). The eyes as a window to the brain and mind. In *Eye tracking: Background, methods, and applications* (pp. 1–14). Springer.

Harston, A., & Faisal, A. A. (2022). Methods and models of eye-tracking in natural environments. In *Eye tracking: Background, methods, and applications* (pp. xx–xx). Springer.

King, A. J., Bol, N., Cummins, R. G., & John, K. K. (2019). Improving visual behavior research in communication science: An overview, review, and reporting recommendations for using eye-tracking methods. *Communication Methods and Measures, 13*(3), 149–177.

Lombard, W. A. (2022). Comparison of the importance of beef price labelling aspects: An eye-tracking approach. *Heliyon, 8*(7), e09999.

Peng, M., Browne, H., Cahayadi, J., & Cakmak, Y. (2021). Predicting food choices based on eye-tracking data: Comparisons between real-life and virtual tasks. *Appetite, 166*, 105478.

Pieters, R., & Warlop, L. (1999). Visual attention during brand choice: The impact of time pressure and task motivation. *International Journal of Research in Marketing, 16*(1), 1–16.

Solomon, M. R., Bamossy, G., Askegaard, S., & Hogg, M. K. (2013). *Consumer behaviour: A European perspective* (5th ed.). Pearson Education.

Van Loo, E. J., Grebitus, C., Nayga, R. M., Verbeke, W., & Roosen, J. (2018). On the measurement of consumer preferences and food choice behavior: The relation between visual attention and choices. *Applied Economic Perspectives and Policy, 40*(4), 538–562.

Zumalt, J. R. (2007). Identifying the core periodical literature of the agricultural communications documentation center. *Journal of Agricultural & Food Information, 8*(3), 43–63.

Figure 1- "Area of Interest Sections"

Figure 2- "Total Fixation Duration Datasheet"

Total duration of fixation in AOI	Participant	Beef 1	Beef 2	Beef 3	Cooler	Lamb 1	Lamb 2	Pork 1	Pork 2	Average	Median	Sum	Total Time of Interest	Total Recording Duration
Recording 5	P5				7.92	0.61	0.12	2.37	4.82	3.17	2.37	15.85	10.74	123.79
Recording 6	P6	2.60	0.56	4.83	29.09	2.70	5.43	1.86	2.91	6.25	2.81	49.99	32.86	125.95
Recording 4	P4	5.43	1.80	6.25	32.40	0.80	5.91	5.03	1.68	7.41	5.23	59.31	44.80	126.19
Recording 2	P2		0.30	8.57	75.71	14.51	1.40	21.94	23.22	20.81	14.51	145.64	98.37	124.23
Recording 7	P7				16.07	3.11	6.73	0.51	5.00	6.28	5.00	31.42	18.94	79.39
Recording 1	P1	10.60	6.89	6.79	47.93	3.13	1.30	6.73	8.82	11.52	6.84	92.19	69.43	124.64
Recording 9	P9	0.14	1.66	0.74	6.69	0.12	0.70	2.52	0.32	1.61	0.72	12.90	12.40	127.85
Recording 3	P3	2.04	3.99	5.63	33.64	2.04	0.54	11.40	5.67	8.12	4.81	64.96	54.16	125.22
Recording 10	P10	2.56	8.54	2.00	33.84	7.29	2.54	3.05	4.53	8.04	3.79	64.36	40.55	135.46
Recording 8	P8	0.28	0.22	2.99	10.06	1.10	3.21	0.38	0.24	2.31	0.74	18.47	21.08	125.59
Average		3.38	3.00	4.72	29.33	3.54	2.79	5.58	5.72	7.55	4.68	55.51	40.33	121.83
Share of Total Time (%)		4.26	4.32	6.81	52.85	6.38	5.02	10.05	10.31					
Percentage Fixated (%)		70.00	80.00	80.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00					
Variance		13.25	10.14	6.93	451.46	19.04	5.91	43.97	44.67	30.81	15.83	1669.17	773.98	233.57
Standard Deviation (n-1)		3.64	3.18	2.63	21.25	4.36	2.43	6.63	6.68	5.55	3.98	40.86	27.82	15.28

Entire Recording

Total duration of fixation in AOI	Participant	Beef 1	Beef 2	Beef 3	Cooler	Lamb 1	Lamb 2	Pork 1	Pork 2	Rectangle	Average	Median	Sum	Total Time of Interest Duration	Total Recording Duration
Recording 5	P5				7.92	0.61	0.12	2.37	4.82		3.17	2.37	15.85	123.79	123.79
Recording 6	P6	2.60	0.56	4.83	29.09	2.70	5.43	1.86	2.91		6.25	2.81	49.99	125.80	125.95
Recording 4	P4	5.43	1.80	6.25	32.40	0.80	5.91	5.03	1.68	99.29	17.62	5.43	158.60	126.19	126.19
Recording 2	P2		0.30	8.57	75.71	14.51	1.40	21.94	23.22		20.81	14.51	145.64	124.23	124.23
Recording 7	P7				16.07	3.11	6.73	0.51	5.00		6.28	5.00	31.42	79.39	79.39
Recording 1	P1	10.60	6.89	6.79	47.93	3.13	1.30	6.73	8.82		11.52	6.84	92.19	124.64	124.64
Recording 9	P9	0.14	1.66	0.74	6.69	0.12	0.70	2.52	0.32		1.61	0.72	12.90	127.76	127.85
Recording 3	P3	2.04	3.99	5.63	33.64	2.04	0.54	11.40	5.67		8.12	4.81	64.96	125.22	125.22
Recording 10	P10	2.56	8.54	2.00	33.84	7.29	2.54	3.05	4.53		8.04	3.79	64.36	135.44	135.46
Recording 8	P8	0.28	0.22	2.99	10.06	1.10	3.21	0.38	0.24		2.31	0.74	18.47	125.51	125.59
Average		3.38	3.00	4.72	29.33	3.54	2.79	5.58	5.72	99.29	8.57	4.70	65.44	121.80	121.83
Share of Total Time (%)		3.62	3.66	5.78	44.83	5.41	4.26	8.53	8.74	15.17					
Percentage Fixated (%)		70.00	80.00	80.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	10.00					
Variance		13.25	10.14	6.93	451.46	19.04	5.91	43.97	44.67		40.92	15.86	2738.83	233.21	233.57
Standard Deviation (n-1)		3.64	3.18	2.63	21.25	4.36	2.43	6.63	6.68		6.40	3.98	52.33	15.27	15.28

Figure 3 "Scan Path Map"

Figure 4 "Heat Map"

Figure 5 "Bee Swarm Map"

The Evolution of Artificial Intelligence in the Field of Game Development

By Ashley "Kai" Jenkins

"The Evolution of Artificial Intelligence in the Field of Game Development" examines the history and capabilities of the existing technology at the time in order to determine whether artificial intelligence is capable of developing a video game with as little human direction as possible. It seeks to combat fear mongering surrounding the idea that artificial intelligence will eliminate game studios' needs for human employees. It then examines artificial intelligence as a player element, and how well it would do at both masking its status as something non-human, and at winning at selected games against human players.

As technological capabilities continue to advance, the usage of artificial intelligence (AI) has increased and has brought with it a variety of issues that cover a wide range of topics, including its effect on the need for a human workforce, copyright, and its involvement in both the creation and consumption of games. This study discusses AI and its different impacts in the fields of gaming and game development, seeking to confirm that AI currently does not have the capabilities to eliminate the need for human numbers in game development, and that it cannot establish the kind of emotional connection required for AI to effectively work as either the game's developer or its audience. To understand the different viewpoints that exist surrounding these issues, and to dispel any misinformation or fear mongering that has gained traction, this study seeks to first define AI as a term and establish some of the history surrounding said term. After establishing exactly what AI is, this study then divides further into two different branches of thought: AI as a creator of games, and AI as a consumer of games. This study acknowledges that most of the misinformation surrounding AI concerns its ability to create games fully on its own with minimal human assistance, so the study will provide information that contradicts this misinformation and elaborate on why this possibility is not likely. To ensure that this study considers both sides of the conversation, it will analyze complete and incomplete games that have parts generated by AI, positing that when it comes to the usage of AI in game development and the level of human involvement a kind of spectrum exists. How specific individual games fit along this spectrum depends on the nature of the relationship between AI and the human game developers.

Moving on from AI as a creator of games, this study also analyzes AI as a consumer of games. On one hand, drawing attention to examples of AIs that have been trained using games, and who have learned to interact with humans playing the same game in either a collaborative or competitive manner, where the AI agents can be thought of as acting similarly to their human counterparts while still being understood to be AI. In contrast to that, this study also analyzes examples of AI that deliberately attempt to pass themselves off as human, such as when the AI communicates with human players while playing Diplomacy. The idea that AI can be tasked with passing as human raises the question of how this would affect the AI playing a single-player game. Namely, would there be a difference between how AI plays a game if it is only tasked with playing the game compared to how the AI would play the game if it was specifically asked to play like a human would play it? This variety of questions and ideas surrounding AI hints at how high the likelihood is that a layperson has incorrect information about AI and its capabilities in some way. While this study seeks to disprove misinformation and show

that an AI is a tool to be used to achieve any of a variety of goals, this does not at all diminish the importance of human involvement in the field, and entirely disagrees with the idea that, even if an AI was currently capable of doing the job of a human developer (which it currently is not), that it should not be asked to, regardless of whatever reasons people may have to do so.

In order to begin talking about AI, it first needs to be established what exactly AI is and what it is capable of. The phrase "AI" refers to "computer systems that can perform tasks commonly associated with human cognitive functions — such as interpreting speech, playing games and identifying patterns" (Schroer). There are multiple men who are described as being one of the "fathers of artificial intelligence," though the reasons they have earned this title differ. Alan Turing, a British computer scientist, is seen as one of the fathers of AI due to his creation of an "imitation game" in 1950 that is known today as the Turing Test. The Encyclopedia Britannica outlines how the Turing Test is supposed to work, when "a remote human interrogator, within a fixed time frame, must distinguish between a computer and a human subject based on their replies to various questions posed by the interrogator. By means of a series of such tests, a computer's success at 'thinking' can be measured by its probability of being misidentified as the human subject" ("Turing Test"). While the Turing Test is a way to measure AI's potential, and how similarly they can behave compared to a human, this is not where the term "artificial intelligence" originated from. That came less than a decade later when "John McCarthy coin[ed] the term 'artificial intelligence' at the first-ever AI conference at Dartmouth College" (IBM, History of Deep Blue). With a rudimentary history established, this study turns its attention to AI as it exists in the modern day, and how it has impacted the field of game development.

AI can be trained in a variety of ways, but this study believes that one type of AI and method is most like the AI analyzed here: a limited memory AI that learns through employing the use of neural networks. A limited memory AI "has the ability to store previous data and predictions when gathering information and making decisions…" and a neural network is "a series of algorithms and a subset of machine learning that process data by mimicking the structure of the human brain" (Schroer). Since an AI like the one described can learn from its mistakes and can use this knowledge to determine what move it should make next, it is the type of AI most similar to a human. With a clearer idea of what exactly an AI is, it now becomes important to clarify what its capabilities are and to dispel any misinformation about those capabilities. In an article by Nicole Carpenter, she talks about ChatGPT and addresses the question of whether or not it is capable of creating a video game. According to the program itself, ChatGPT "works by leveraging the power of deep learning to understand and generate natural language, making it a powerful tool for a wide range of language-related tasks." In terms of creating a game, when asked to remake a pre-existing game, "ChatGPT can produce the code for a video game, but the video game can't run in ChatGPT" (Carpenter). While ChatGPT has certain capabilities, it is a long way from being capable of eliminating humans entirely from the field of game development, since it "cannot do anything without human input. It needs a person to undertake the task of telling it what to do, whether that is generating ideas, code, dialogue, or anything else creative. It's not advanced enough to do much of that work without mistakes, too. Headlines that suggest AI will put engineers, developers, artists, or writers out of their jobs are vastly overstated fear mongering" (Carpenter). An article written by Will Bedingfield agrees with Carpenter on this, stating that "AI could design some generic weapons or write some dialog, but compared to text or image generation, level design is fiendish. You can forgive generators that produce a face with wonky ears or some lines of gibberish text. But a broken game level, no matter how magical it looks, is useless." Bedingfield then goes on to draw a comparison between generative AI and procedural generation, using this comparison to illustrate how much human assistance procedural generation still needs, since with a procedural generator charged with making forests, "developers must keep vigilant for unscalable crevasses or monstrous trees" (Bedingfield).

When it comes to considering what role an AI should have in terms of game development, it is important to look at different, pre-existing games that have varying amounts of AI involvement. For a game that supposedly has "everything, from the art to the story to the music… generated by AI of some kind" (Hernandez), then this study looks at the game *This Girl Does Not Exist*, developed by Cute Pen Games. The game sets itself up to be a dating simulator game, where the player goes on dates with different girls to learn more about them. Each date consists of the player putting together an image of the girl in question, and at the end of the date, the player learns something new about the date in question. The gameplay itself is repetitive and thus hinges on the player's attraction to the woman portrayed by the jigsaw puzzle. The images are obviously photoshopped, giving each woman a vague and unsettling appearance, and if the game is played long enough for the player to get to a second date with a woman they have already dated, the second image does not bear much resemblance to the first, showing a lack of internal continuity by the AI. The game also seems to have been subjected to backlash on Steam, as the top comment on the store page for the game describes the game as "a jigsaw puzzle game with a very limited selection of about 5-6 girls that have about 5 pictures each" and "a very limited bunch of pretty faces and mediocre dialogue set to a basic jigsaw game." However, while the developers for *This Girl Does Not Exist* made use of an AI while already having a basic game concept in mind, the same cannot be said for Alex Anyfantis, who asked ChatGPT to create a game for him much like Cute Pen Games did. Anyfantis " (Anyfantis, I Tried Creating a Game Using OpenAI). From there, he had AI create sprites for the characters and the code for the game itself. His use of AI in this way eventually fell through,however, when the code provided by ChatGPT did not work, and while he tried to get ChatGPT to correct the code, it was unable to do so. Though he did not make any efforts to continue the project past this point, Anyfantis felt "sure that OpenAI would have done much of [his] work for [him]" (Anyfantis). Without the project being completed, this is merely speculation on Anyfantis's part, and if anything, the stalemate

he reached within the article itself contradicts his speculation since, without his ability to clarify why, exactly, ChatGPT's code would not work, his project was unable to progress.

ChatGPT's inability to understand why the code it produced would not work highlights that the program has shortcomings, many of which are further explained in an article by Grace Abels. This article was more focused on ChatGPT's ability, or inability, to correctly answer questions surrounding political topics. The findings laid out therein show the repercussions that would arise from relying entirely on ChatGPT in any capacity. Abels's article establishes that "...AI is not yet a reliable fact-checking tool '' since it "...lacks contemporary knowledge, it loses perspective and tells you what you want to hear and not always the truth" (Abels, Can ChatGPT fact-check? We tested.). Ultimately, "...the experts agreed that ChatGPT is not yet reliable or accurate enough to be used as a fact-checker" (Abels) and this inability to fact check any information it provides can be linked back to the incorrect code it provided Anyfantis.

In contrast to the efforts of smaller studios or individual creators using AI to create games in their entirety, there are a variety of more successful games that use AI to some lesser extent, such as Tom Clancy's *Splinter Cell: Blacklist*, which has notably advanced AI that "respond to what they see, what they hear, what they are aware of in their surroundings and how they understand different contexts" (Urwin). By using the AI as a tool responsible for determining how their NPCs (non-player character) would react, the game developers working with the AI had the opportunity to correct any errors that might arise with the AI, a possibility missing from *This Girl Does Not Exist*, since with that game, the AI was merely given a prompt by the developer who would "rerun a lot of the commands and try many times until [she] got out of it a set of pictures which would be the 'same person'" (Hernandez).

One factor that might have had some influence on how well AI succeeded in generating games is the style of game the AI was being asked to make. *This*

Girl Does Not Exist, for example, frames itself as a narrative-driven game in its Steam store page, with the player's task being "to put together puzzle pieces of beautiful girls as [the player] progress[es] through dating them" (*This Girl Does Not Exist*). According to Ten Pixel Studios, a narrative-driven game is "a unique genre of video games that focus primarily on storytelling and player engagement…" and it differs from other genres since it puts "... the player's immersion in a captivating narrative" (Ten Pixel Studio). *This Girl Does Not Exist* has a narrative in that the player dates the girls featured in the game's different puzzles, but the focus of the game itself is more on the puzzles themselves than the girls, meaning that this game is not a narrative-driven game. With that possibility eliminated, that makes this game a gameplay-driven game, defined in an article by Gabriel Lievano as a game that "will motivate the player to play the game for the fun itself" (Lievano). While Anyfantis had a story generated for his game, it is unclear what style of game the project would have become. If we assume that the game was going to be gameplay-driven, then it shows that both examples of games generated by AI were gameplay-driven, though they did still have accompanying stories. Hypothetically, if the AI responsible for generating the games was asked to create a narrative-driven game, then the difference between that and the mechanic-driven games it created would highlight where the capabilities of the AI truly lie. Unfortunately, since there are no examples of such a game, this possibility has to remain hypothetical for the time being.

While the possibility of AI replacing humans entirely in the field of game development is unable to happen in the immediate future, it presents interesting ideas surrounding ethics. Namely, if AI did replace humans entirely, would the AI then be considered employees of whatever gaming company used them to create games? Modern-day AI do not have a sense of autonomy and are currently nothing more than tools to be used by people, but the possibility of that changing at some point in the future is very real, with plenty of literature existing in the science fiction genre that has considered questions like these at length. Additionally, operating

under the assumption that AI gaining sentience at some point is a guarantee and not just a possibility, then would the AI fight to have rights just as humans have had to?? Would humans sympathize with the AI, or would they see the AI as responsible for eliminating humanity's place in the workforce, even though the decision to replace the humans with AI was ultimately made by a human who was simply in a position of power to make such a decision? While none of these questions are currently able to be answered, since the technology leading to the situation is not nearly advanced enough to be considered sentient, it ultimately provides an interesting basis for ethics discussions which might be able to better prepare humanity to make the decision when the time to make such a decision arrives.

AI usage in game development has had a variety of outcomes, both positive and negative, raising the question of whether the same could be said for AI that were trained to play games instead of create them. One of the earliest examples of an AI actually playing a game instead of being a part of its game development is the 1997 chess tournament between Garry Kasparov, the world chess champion from 1985 to 2000, and IBM's AI named Deep Blue, a tournament which the AI ultimately ended up winning. According to IBM's website, Deep Blue worked by using "32 processors to perform a set of coordinated, high-speed computations in parallel" which meant that it could "evaluate 200 million chess positions per second, achieving a processing speed of 11.38 billion floating-point operations per second, or flops'' ("Deep Blue"). As the technology used to develop games advances, the AI that are trained to play these games undergo similar advancements. An article published in 2022 draws attention to an AI algorithm that has been trained to play the game *Diplomacy*, where it must negotiate with humans who are also playing the game in order to win. The AI's ability to negotiate with humans already has researchers thinking about the potential applications, such as "virtual exercise coaches and dispute mediators…" and that "[i]nternational chatbot diplomacy may not be far behind" (Hutson 818). The possibility of diplomacy using AI as a mouthpiece highlights the potential for collaborative

relationships between AI and humans in a variety of scenarios, game development being among them.

In looking for examples of AI learning games that need more skill and less direct communication, a study by Max Jaderberg and others showed how Jaderberg's team "used a tournament-style evaluation to demonstrate that an agent can achieve human-level performance in a three-dimensional multiplayer first-person video game, *Quake III Arena* in Capture the Flag mode" (Jaderberg 859). The "agent" mentioned is an artificial intelligence agent, which is "a software program that can interact with its environment, collect data and use that data to perform self-directed tasks that meet predetermined goals. Humans set goals, but an AI agent independently chooses the best actions it needs to perform to achieve those goals." (Bansall). Jaderberg's study ultimately ended up concluding that the method they used to train the AI agents "makes minimal assumptions about the game structure and therefore could be applicable for scalable and stable learning in a wide variety of multiagent systems" (Jaderberg 864). This study was also mentioned in an article that drew comparison between it and other examples of AI that were trained using reinforcement learning and ended up winning against humans in the game of choice. The article focuses on how the AI's capability to perform on a similar level to humans provides a look into a future where an AI could be "a fully-fledged team member, performing the same task as human beings" (Joshi & Lavanchy). Interviews with the people who played alongside the AI in a different game, *DOTA 2*, were included in the article, with one quoted as saying "It actually felt nice; [the AI teammate] gave his life for me at some point. He tried to help me, thinking 'I'm sure she knows what she's doing' and then obviously I didn't. But, you know, he believed in me. I don't get that a lot with [human] teammates" (Joshi and Lavanchy). And while this sentiment was not shared among all the people who had played either with or against the AI, it shows that the potential for collaboration exists, a potential which will hopefully continue to become stronger as technology continues to advance. Returning to Hutson's study where AI played *Diplomacy* against human players, the humans

"mostly assumed [the AI] was a human" (Hutson 818). The AI used in this study was specifically rewarded for acting like a human, so it is unsurprising that this training was effective enough to fool people. But with the AI acting as much like a human as it can, then that raises the question of whether the AI acting like a human alters how it would play the game, and whether this behavior is reliant on there being a human to observe and react to the AI's behavior. While the AI has such an audience in cases where it is playing multiplayer games, as seen with *Diplomacy* or *DOTA 2*, this raises the question of if the AI would still try its best to act like a human if it had no one to "perform" for. Ultimately, however, the AI still undergoes observation, as the original prompt the AI is given and the outcome the AI produces are both studied by humans.

AI, as it is currently used in a variety of fields today, serves as tools to be used by humans to accomplish specific goals. However, it has been proven that AI is not infallible, as demonstrated by ChatGPT failing to correctly fact-check simple true or false statements. AI's quality of work also experiences a sharp decline when an AI is given more difficult tasks with more nebulous requirements, though this does not seem to have entirely dissuaded humans from prompting the AI to carry these tasks out regardless. Human audiences' dissatisfaction with the quality of the resulting material, as well as the ethical and legal hangups existing surrounding AI-generated words, proves that the world is largely unready and unwilling to allow such works to gain enough traction to inspire developers to continue to prompt AI to create them unless they are particularly stubborn. And, seeing as AI currently has no sentient thought and thus no independent desire to create works; this reduces the number of AI-generated works that would possibly exist. All this proves that taking the potential capabilities of technology and the mindsets surrounding this technology into consideration, humanity as a whole does not have to worry just yet about being replaced by AI in any capacity and if such a thing does come about, it will not, in this study's estimation, happen for decades or more.

Works Cited

Abels, Grace. "Can Chatgpt Fact-Check? We Tested." *Poynter*, PolitiFact, 21 May. 2023, www. poynter.org/fact-checking/2023/chatgpt-ai-replace-fact-checking/. Accessed 10. Nov 2025.

Anyfantis, Alex. "I Tried Creating a Game Using OpenAI." *SUPERJUMP*, SUPERJUMP, 7 Dec. 2023, www.superjumpmagazine.com/i-tried-creating-a-game-using-openai/. Accessed 10 Nov. 2025.

Bansal, Sahil. "Agents in Ai." *GeeksforGeeks*, GeeksforGeeks, 14 Aug. 2025, www. geeksforgeeks.org/artificial-intelligence/agents-artificial-intelligence/. Accessed 10 Nov. 2025.

Bedingfield, Will. "Generative Ai Won't Revolutionize Game Development Just Yet." *Wired*, Conde Nast, 25 Jan. 2023, www.wired.com/story/generative-ai-video-game-development/.

Carpenter, Nicole. "Can Ai Really Make a Video Game?" *Polygon*, Polygon.com, 22 Mar. 2023, www.polygon.com/ai-artificial-intelligence/23650693/chatgpt-generative-ai-video-game-development. Accessed 10 Nov. 2025.

Glover, Ellen. "What Is Artificial Intelligence (AI)?" Edited by Brennan Whitefield, *BuiltIn*, 19 Aug. 2025, builtin.com/artificial-intelligence.

Hernandez, Patricia. "Ai-Generated Games Are Starting to Appear on Steam (and It's Not Going Well)." *Kotaku*, 31 July 2025, kotaku. com/steam-pc-ai-generated-art-midjourney-youtube-valve-1849531585. Accessed 10 Nov. 2025.

Hutson, Matthew. "Ai Learns the Art of Diplomacy | Science | AAAS." *Science*, 22 Nov. 2022. www. science.org/content/article/ai-learns-art-diplomacy-game. Accessed 20 Nov. 2025.

IBM. "Deep Blue." *IBM*, IBM, www.ibm.com/history/deep-blue. Accessed 10 Nov. 2025.

Jaderberg, Max, et al. "Human-Level Performance in 3D Multiplayer Games with Population-Based Reinforcement Learning." *Science*, vol. 364, no. 6443, 2019, pp. 859-865.

Joshi, Amit M., and Maude Lavanchy. "An AI Taught Itself to Play a Video Game – for the First Time, It's Beating Humans." *IMD Business School for Management and Leadership Courses*, 13 Jan. 2025, www.imd.org/research-knowledge/digital/articles/an-ai-taught-itself-to-play-a-video-game-for-the-first-time-its-beating-humans/. Accessed 10 Nov. 2025

Lievano, Gabriel. "Story Driven vs. Gameplay Driven Game Design." *Game Developer*, 27 May 2010, www.gamedeveloper.com/design/story-driven-vs-gameplay-driven-game-design. Accessed Nov. 10, 2025.

Stryker, Cole, and Eda Kavlakoglu. "What Is Artificial Intelligence (AI)?" *IBM*, 2024, www.ibm.com/think/topics/artificial-intelligence. Accessed 10 Nov. 2025

Studio, Ten Pixel. "What Are Story-Mode Games?" *LinkedIn*, 20 July 2023, www.linkedin.com/pulse/what-story-mode-games-ten-pixel-studio. Accessed 10 Nov. 2025

Trust in American Democracy after the January Sixth Capitol Riot

By Casen Lucas

On January 6, 2021, a riot on the United States Capitol disrupted Congress's certification of the presidential election and raised questions surrounding the peaceful transfer of power. These questions are urgent; the event's unprecedented nature created a research gap, as scholars have yet to survey the relationship between the riot and the perceived strength of democratic institutions. "Research Design: Trust in American Democracy After the January 6 Capitol Riot" proposes an observational, cross-sectional survey method to operationalize public perceptions of democratic institutions. After reviewing the available literature in political polarization, digital misinformation, and theories of democracy, the resulting model establishes a quantitative method for gauging public opinion and answering whether the January 6 Capitol riot caused Americans to lose trust in the strength of American democracy.

The 2020 American presidential election was notable for its heightened polarization, causing an impeachment trial, nationwide protests, and a riot on the United States Capitol. In order to understand the implications of this election, it is crucial to understand how the unprecedented Capitol riot affected how Americans perceive the strength of their democracy. By surveying American responses to the riot, researchers can understand the public opinion surrounding American democracy and navigate these opinions in upcoming federal elections. Because the riot took place during certification of the ballot, the transfer of power is involved; how do Americans perceive this? Did the riot cause Americans to lose trust in the strength of American democracy?

Literature Review

When analyzing the prominent literature surrounding the 2020 American presidential election, it is evident that various researchers take different approaches in understanding the implications of the January 6 Capitol riot. To understand the aftermath of the riot, researchers analyze trust in democracy among different groups of Americans. They explain how democracy can be measured, how it has persevered throughout different events in American history, and how riots can impact the public perception of American government.

One of the broadest, most foundational works regarding power and trust in authority is James Coleman's *Foundations of Social Theory*. The book discusses trust in government through the lens of social theory, assessing how trends in social behavior can lead to patterns in political behavior. Coleman provides several historical events that establish a trend in social choices, including Dwight Eisenhower's election, revolts in Lebanon in the 1970s, and civil rights protests at Columbia University. Coleman analyzes these events in detail to understand the decision making of the involved parties and to establish theories about human social and political choices when confidence in authority is low. He finds that, generally, without the presence of a viable alternative, low confidence in authority will not lead to a meaningful, systemic revolt.

Another key work regarding trust in government is William Gamson's *Power and Discontent*. Gamson

describes different ways in which citizens experience dissatisfaction with authority figures, but foundational to his research is his description of what exactly trust is. By defining broad concepts like trust, allegiance, and alienation, Gamson paves the way for future researchers to apply these concepts to issues like the 2020 election. He argues the following: "Trust in the government is a political attitude. The term political attitude usually connotes opinions on specific public issues or, if something more general, a syndrome of attitudes which can be characterized on a left-right dimension" (Gamson, 1968, pp. 39-40). By defining trust in the government as a political attitude, Gamson proves that researchers can understand trust in the government by observing how political attitudes manifest themselves externally.

Likewise, David Jones's "Declining Trust in Congress" is another important piece of literature describing a decline in public confidence in government. To study how trends in confidence vary over time, Jones uses survey data from the General Social Survey which asks respondents about their confidence in each of the three branches of government. When reviewing the trends in surveys, Jones found that since 2007, Democrats have had an overall higher level of trust in Congress; however, both parties have witnessed substantial declines in trust, plummeting from nearly 90% in the 1970s to just around 50% in the 2010s (2015). This demonstrates that, even prior to the Capitol riot, trust in the strength of government was declining among both parties. These findings are important in understanding the aftermath of the Capitol riot, for Jones argues that polarization is a major factor in decreased trust in government.

In *The Bitter End: The 2020 Presidential Campaign and the Challenge to American Democracy*, John Sides, Chris Tausanovitch and Lynn Vavreck outline the polarized culture leading up to the riot. The authors attempt to understand the riot's effect on democracy by understanding how the 2020 presidential election caused polarization, lies, and violence. Their research utilizes witness accounts and personal statements from social media, including President Donald Trump's X account. The writers argue that Trump's social media presence during the riot was a key factor that led to the decreased trust in American democracy, calling it "jarring" and "even more so when the full toll of that day was clear" (Sides et al., 2023). Their research also accounts for the historical events of 2020, analyzing the effect on democracy caused by the year's social justice protests and pandemic-related deaths. They argue that while some Americans expected the tumultuous year to end in a unified nation, the actual outcome was violence and decreased democratic strength. This interest in democracy is directly associated with government institutions and traditions, writing, "Beyond the toll on people and property was the cost to American democracy itself. A hallmark of democracies is the peaceful transfer of power after an election . . . Another hallmark is the willingness of election losers to consent to the outcome, thereby upholding the legitimacy of the system even as they regroup and seek to win next time" (Sides et al., 2023, pp. 3-4). Their findings suggest that violence was a prominent outcome of the riot, especially with multiple injured Capitol police and an increase in protesting across the country. The authors also argue that there was an attack on the peaceful transfer of power, which is bad for democracy and diminishes unity in American politics (Sides et al., 2023, p. 4).

In *American Vibe Check: Based, Mid, or Cringe? Measuring Gen Z's Attitudes and Perceptions About American Democracy*, Bethany Perryman reviews research surrounding mass media, finding that citizens construct their ideas about democracy through their exposure to media messages (Perryman, 2023, p. 7). To expand on this, she gathers survey data from Generation Z students. Among the survey questions are insights about trust, satisfaction, and obligation in government; degree of agreement with mass media headlines containing messages

about American democracy; and demographic information, behavioral aim and civic involvement. Her findings suggest that Generation Z has a complex relationship with American democracy. She finds, "Overall, Gen Z has less trust and feelings of control mutuality with American democracy, but more commitment and feelings of communal relationship" (Perryman, 2023, p. 37).

Like Perryman's research, a book from Sandra Jeppesen et al. researches how mass media impacts perceptions of American democracy. Unlike Perryman's study, though, T*he Capitol Riots: Digital Media, Disinformation, and Democracy Under Attack* is solely focused on the Capitol riot, attempting to understand the events leading up to the riot and analyzing public perceptions of democracy in the aftermath. The research from Jeppesen et al. aims to piece together a timeline of events in January 2021; to do this, they chronologically organize any relevant precursors to the attack on the Capitol, including social media posts and subpoenaed private communications. Then, the researchers do the same organization with events that occurred after the riot, including responses from firsthand witnesses. The process of arranging this information chronologically includes a review of the available literature and news media surrounding the riot. Additionally, they analyze self-surveillant photographs and video footage, and in doing so, they find evidence of a surplus of danger that otherwise would go unnoticed (Jeppesen et al., 2022). Using their analysis of digital media, the researchers also concluded that a "(mis)perception of democracy under attack is what was at stake in the minds of many Trump supporters as they marched on the Capitol on January 6, 2021, in turn putting the very seat of democracy under attack" (Jeppesen et al., 2022, p. 11). This finding is crucial. First, it demonstrates a key motivation of preserving democracy among the rioters. Understanding the rioters' motivation is key in understanding the riot itself, so any analysis of communication inside the Capitol is valuable in gaining insight. Additionally,

it demonstrates that the cost to democracy in the aftermath of the riot is, at least presumably, substantial. By analyzing photo and video evidence, reviewing social media post and released text messages, and studying interviews from Congress after the riot, researchers can gain insight about both the political motives of the rioters and the public perception of Americans.

In "Attitudinal and Emotional Reactions to the Insurrection at the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021," Jennifer Anderson and Kathryn D. Coduto focus on American reactions to the Capitol riot over the course of six months in 2021. To establish a correlation between belief in the 2020 election and disdain toward the Capitol riot, they utilize two online surveys. The first took place days after the riot, and the second took place several months after. In the survey, they ask about trust in the election outcome, attitudes toward rioters, attitudes toward former President Trump, and primary emotional reactions to the riot. In both studies, attitudes toward rioters were overall negative; however, attitudes became more positive in the second survey, suggesting that the public perception of democracy fluctuated after the initial reaction to the riot (Anderson et al., 2022). Unsurprisingly, supporters of Trump were more likely to have a favorable view of the Capitol riot, as were most voters affiliated with the Republican party in general. In contrast, Democrats were more likely to feel angry or disgusted toward the riot. The study also reported respondents' genders, finding that men were significantly more sympathetic to Capitol protestors than women. Along with Biden supporters and Democrat voters in general, women were more likely to feel angry, disgusted, or sad about the riot. This research's interest in psychological responses could prove useful in determining Americans' perceptions of the nation's democratic strength. Since the study already controlled for differences in party affiliation, gender, and support for Trump, one factor that could dictate the fluctuation in public perception over time is mass media.

With the reviewed literature suggesting that mass media has a significant effect on public opinion, research should focus on how social media and news outlets portrayed the Capitol riot and its aftermath. Additionally, public opinion polls should be analyzed to determine which groups of people have an unfavorable view of the riot almost five years later. In addition to public opinion polls on the riot itself, my research should also center on how Americans perceived the strength of their democracy during the riot's fallout.

Hypotheses and Research Question

Given David Jones's finding that overall trust in government is on a decreasing trajectory, and given Anderson and Coduto's research linking the Capitol riot to a variety of emotional responses, I hypothesize that the January 6 riot on the United States Capitol caused Americans to have decreased trust in the strength of their government. The null hypothesis, however, would assume that there is no significant positive correlation between the January 6 Capitol riot and Americans' trust in the strength of their democracy. The January 6 riot on the United States Capitol can be qualified by examining violence in the Capitol and reviewing news footage from January 6, 2021. Similarly, Americans' decreased trust in the strength of their democracy can be operationalized by surveying Americans' political attitudes toward the riot, their trust in the peaceful transfer of power, their confidence in elected officials, and their tendencies to believe conspiracies because of the riot. To define democracy itself, I will study historical trends regarding the peaceful transfer of power. As the concept applies to the Capitol riot and vote certifications, I will research events like inaugurations, traditions, and other vote certifications that are paramount to the transition of power in the executive branch.

Likewise, given Bethany Perryman's finding that Americans construct their ideas about democracy from the mass media they consume, I hypothesize that as Americans spend more time on mainstream

news and social media outlets, they will have decreased faith in the strength of their nation's democracy. This hypothesis could agree with Perryman's conclusion that members of Generation Z already have decreased trust in government. If members of Generation Z consume more media than other generations, then researchers can look for a trend in the amount of time spent consuming media and the amount of skepticism or disappointment toward American democracy. The null hypothesis would suggest that there is no correlation between the amount of media consumed and the amount of faith in American democracy. Mainstream news and social media outlets can be defined as the core group of websites, apps, and television programs offering political coverage or promoting the exchange of thought through written communication. This would include CNN, MSNBC, Fox News, and other large multimedia news corporations; it would also include Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, and X.

When testing these hypotheses, the central research question will be: did the January 6 riot on the United States Capitol cause Americans to lose trust in the strength of American democracy? To answer this question, I will take a quantitative approach using observational, cross-sectional survey research. I will design survey questions to gauge how respondents feel about the strength of democracy in the United States, and I will ask them to report their relationship with popular communication avenues like news and social media outlets.

Research Approach

As part of the quantitative approach to measuring public faith in the strength of American democracy, I will first design survey questions aiming to measure how Americans perceive democracy to be functioning in the status quo. During the literature review, a key finding was William Gamson's definition of trust in government: "Trust in the government is a political attitude. The term political attitude usually connotes opinions on specific public issues or, if something more general, a syndrome of attitudes which can

be characterized on a left-right dimension" (1968). Gamson's research mandates that survey questions about trust in American democracy must have respondents express their opinions on specific public issues. Therefore, questions will aim assess how Americans feel about the presidential election in November 2020; the Capitol riot on January 6, 2021; the transfer of power historically; the transfer of power from the Trump administration to the Biden administration; the certification of votes leading to President Joe Biden's election; and President Biden's inauguration. By asking respondents to describe their emotional responses to a variety of events and traditions over a period of time, survey questions will assess their responses to individual phenomena. This enables researchers to measure how trust in democracy wavered (or sustained) after each event occurred.

Since the research will utilize quantitative research methods, it is crucial that responses to each of the survey questions are able to be quantified and worked with mathematically. Therefore, as respondents describe their emotional responses, they will also quantify their perception of American democracy after each event occurred. To do this, they will rate the strength of democracy from one to five. A response of five would indicate that American democracy was unwavering in that moment; a response of one would indicate that American democracy collapsed in that moment. Democracy is already operationalized in each question by asking respondents about the peaceful transfer of power, the validity of the election, and the ability to certify a new president. When respondents have explained their responses to each event, the numbers they associate with each event will be used to perform statistical analysis that measures how faith in democracy changed with the passage of time from November 2020 to January 2021.

Additionally, respondents will be asked to report, in hours, how much time they typically spend watching the news or viewing social media. They will also be asked to rank which outlets they utilize most frequently. Once this quantitative data is obtained,

it can be compared to respondents' ages to assess whether there is a correlation between age and media engagement. It will also be used to assess whether increased consumption of popular media leads to decreased trust in the strength of American democracy. This data will also be used to perform a statistical analysis looking for causation between the two variables.

The quantitative approach utilizing an observational, cross-sectional survey design is an appropriate way to measure public opinion. By using open-ended survey questions, the research accurately gauges how Americans felt during several pivotal moments of the 2020 election. This enables researchers to understand their reactions to events, biases toward politics, and perceptions of democracy. By asking respondents to also quantify these opinions, though, the research becomes quantitative in nature. Survey responses will be used to perform statistical analysis comparing variables from November until January of 2021; this allows for an increased understanding of changing public perceptions over time, and since the variables will be compared over the same timeframe, they can also be assessed to find causation.

The weaknesses of this approach are the same weaknesses with any observational design; there is always room for misinterpretation of an individual's reality. Though they are able to clarify their thoughts through the open-ended survey, there is always room for researcher's bias when it comes to analyzing the content of written survey responses. Additionally, it is difficult to explain how respondents quantify their opinions. What constitutes a five for one person may very well constitute a three for another person. However, since this research aims to understand public opinion, those differences are the desired outcome. Another important issue with survey-based research designs is phrasing. The way survey questions are worded is crucial to respondents' understanding, so researchers must be intentional in avoiding triggering phrases like "insurrection," "coup," and other incendiary language. Regardless of the proper terminology for the Capitol riot, the goal is to avoid alienating respondents and to obtain an

accurate set of data. This is not practical when the questions' wording frustrates the survey respondents.

Others have certainly utilized a survey-based approach to understanding public perceptions of government; however, this method has not been applied to the aftermath of the Capitol riot specifically.

Conclusion

By using a cross-sectional survey design to measure public opinion, this research will effectively measure naturally occurring responses to the January 6 riot on the United States Capitol. The ranked-choice portion of the survey will enable researchers to perform statistical analysis of the interaction between variables; these variables include responses to the Capitol riot, consumption of mass media, and perceptions of the strength of American democracy. Furthermore, the open-ended portion of the survey will provide valuable context to explain these quantitative results. By studying the consequences of the Capitol riot, this research attempts to understand the origins of politically motivated polarization and explain the rapidly declining trust in government. Additionally, if the hypothesis is proven correct, the Capitol riot could have had implications for the public perception of democracy; if this is the case, it is crucial to understand these implications in order to navigate them in future elections.

References

Anderson, J., & Coduto, K. D. (2022). Attitudinal and emotional reactions to the insurrection at the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021. *American Behavioral Scientist, 68*(7).

Coleman, J. S. (1994). *Foundations of social theory*. Harvard University Press.

Gamson, W. A. (1968). *Power and discontent*. Dorsey Press.

Jeppesen, S., Hoechsmann, M., Ulthiin, I.H., VanDyke, D., & McKee, M. (2022, May 10). *The Capitol riots: Digital media, disinformation, and democracy under attack*. Routledge & CRC Press.

Jones, D. (2015). Declining trust in Congress: Effects of polarization and consequences for democracy. *The Forum, 13*(3), 375-394.

Perryman, B. (2023). *American Vibe Check: Based, mid, or cringe? Measuring Gen Z's attitudes and perceptions about American democracy*. James Madison University.

Sides, J., Tausanovitch, C., & Vavreck, L. (2023). *The bitter end: The 2020 presidential campaign and the challenge to American democracy.* Princeton University Press.

The K-pop Industry and Gender Discrimination Toward Female K-pop Idol

By Veronica Torres

K-pop has become a global phenomenon, but the music genre's catchy songs and memorable choreography is a flawed and exploitative industry toward its female idols. This research sheds light on the discrimination that many female K-pop idols face and aims to answer the question: How do female K-pop idols feel about their treatment within the K-pop industry? In this study, three sample songs were examined: "Tomboy" by (G)-IDLE, "Nxde" by (G)-IDLE, and "I ≠ DOLL" by HUH YUNJIN. Each song was examined rhetorically, identifying the rhetorical situations and appeals of each song. The findings suggest that the members of each group have very strong feelings toward the industry, expressed by appealing to the audiences' emotions (pathos) and morals (ethos) with each song expressing the struggle that the idol has to face.

K-pop, short for Korean pop, is a genre of popular music from South Korea that has become a global phenomenon. Artists like BLACKPINK, BTS, and TWICE have gained global recognition and K-pop has become an instantly recognizable genre that has created its own unique brand identity (Unger, 2015). K-pop takes inspiration from other music genres such as hip-hop, R&B, and electronic dance music. The music is mainly sung in Korean but includes other languages occasionally. K-pop is most known for its catchy songs, flashy music videos, and unique choreography. Behind the curtains of popularity, the music genre has some of the same problems as the western music industry, and that problem is gender discrimination toward women. The majority of idols within the K-pop industry are women (Jonas, 2021). This study focuses on the discrimination female K-pop idols face and how they react to the discrimination. In this study, I used rhetorical analysis to examine three sample K-pop songs in order to identify the rhetorical situations and appeals within each song. This study is important because of the growing discussion of K-pop and gender discrimination within the world. In order to better understand the problem, one must first know what K-pop is.

The growth of K-pop is described as the Korean Wave, also known as Hallyu. Hallyu began in the late '90s and has grown ever since. Hallyu has been categorized by different eras, Hallyu 1.0, Hallyu 2.0, Hallyu 3.0, and Hallyu 4.0 (Boman, 2022). Due to the growing popularity of Korean content, the South Korean government has created a Hallyu department to help support Hallyu expansion (Song, 2020). Due to the music genre's global popularity, K-pop has become one of South Korea's most important cultural exports (Green, 2018). From sold-out world tours to millions of views on YouTube, K-pop has impacted the way people around the world view South Korea.

In 2021, BTS members were the top touring artists worldwide, making $188.51 million (USD) (Touring Data, 2021). In addition, the K-pop girl group BLACKPINK went on a world tour in 2022 called the Born Pink Tour, which made a reported revenue of more than $220 million (USD) (Touring Data, 2023) and got the opportunity to make a documentary for Netflix, which further expanded people's awareness of them around the world. Aside from highly grossing world tours, K-pop has also reached a wide audience online through YouTube. As of 2023, there

are 14 K-pop music videos that have one billion or more views. According to a tracking site called Kworb, six of the 14 most-viewed Korean videos are music videos by BTS, another six of the 14 videos are music videos by BLACKPINK, and the remaining two videos are by PSY, who holds the record for having the most-viewed K-pop music video, "Gangnam Style," with 4.8 billion views on YouTube.

K-pop groups usually consist of several singers, rappers, and dancers. For example, (G)-IDLE a five-member group and has members who all dance and sing, with two of the five members are in charge of rapping. This can be heard in their song "Nxde." In many K-pop groups, each member is assigned a specific role. These roles are main vocalist, sub vocalist, main rapper, sub rapper, main dancer, leader, and visual. Members of K-pop groups can have more than one role. For example, within (G)-IDLE, Soyeon is the leader, main rapper, and sub vocalist.

To form groups, K-pop entertainment companies recruit people to become "trainees," or people audition to be a part of different companies' training programs. Trainees undergo rigorous training for months or years, often from early morning all the way to late at night. On top of training, many trainees must attend school due to many of them not being adults. The training schedule is different for each entertainment company, but most trainees are taught how to perfect their skills in singing, dancing, and rapping. This process is what helps them get ready for their debut. While a trainee is in the training process, the company puts them through monthly or weekly evaluations. These evaluations on dance, vocals, or rapping determine whether or not the trainees can continue training.

Trainees are eventually put into a debut team. However, just because a person becomes a trainee does not mean they are guaranteed a spot to debut. An example of a trainee not getting to debut in a K-pop group is Belift Lab's trainee Ruka. In a documentary made by LE SSERAFIM called "The World is My Oyster," it was revealed that Ruka was a part of LE SSERAFIM's pre-debut group; however, she was cut from the group before the group

debuted. Within this documentary, management team leader Kim Hyeong-eun (2022) states, "Before the debut teams actually debuts, there are cases when members get changed" (05:48).

When a K-pop trainee actually debuts, they are then considered K-pop idols. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, an idol is, "a person who is loved, admired, or respected a lot" (n.d., para. 1). Within the K-pop industry, the term "idol" is used when describing heavily manufactured and trained K-pop artists. The term began to be used by the K-pop industry in 1996 when the K-pop boy group H.O.T debuted (Los Angeles Film School, n.d.). When K-pop groups or solo idols debut, their fanbase is usually given some sort of name. For example, (G)-IDLE's fanbase is called NEVERLAND, and LE SSERAFIM's fanbase is called FEARNOT. Fans that are a part of a fanbase, are devoted to whichever group they "stan." The Meriam Webster dictionary defines stan as, "an extremely or excessively enthusiastic and devoted fan" (n.d., para.1).

Rationale

My study of female music stars in the K-pop industry is important because of the growing discussion of gender discrimination in the industry, which often goes unrecognized by fans. Many people only see the female idols' flashy outfits, their physical attributes in terms of beauty standards, and hear their catchy songs. K-pop fans sometimes fail to see the harsh reality that these K-pop idols face. With this study, I aim to bring light to this situation. Idols are expected to be perfect in the public eye by their fans and by the entertainment companies that manage them; however, they are human just like the rest of us. While backlash exists for all K-pop artists, it is particularly rough for female K-pop idols.

Female K-pop idols are often harshly scrutinized over the smallest things, from reading certain books (Herman, 2018) to dancing "lazily" (Bright, 2023, para. 2). When dating scandals appear within the K-pop industry, it is common for female idols to receive the most backlash. This behavior has been present since the 1990s. Singer Kang Min-youn from the girl group Baby V.O.X was sent box cutters and

letters written in blood by angry H.O.T fans after dating rumors of Kang Min-youn and H.O.T member Moon Hee-joon were released (Dong, 2023). Many fans from all over the world expect female idols to be and act perfect, but they are human too.

With this study, I will go more in-depth into the world that these female idols face. I want to be able to bring awareness to the struggles that female K-pop idols encounter and how they react to these struggles, specifically through their songs lyrics, in hopes that the K-pop industry will change for the better.

Literature Review

The music genre K-pop has become a global phenomenon. K-pop often has memorable lyrics and hooks. K-pop choreography often has signature dance moves that make the song memorable (Liu et al., 2021). K-pop has also found successful ways to promote its content globally like releasing artists' songs on YouTube. Other forms of social media have also played a big role in helping K-pop gain recognition outside of South Korea. International fans have helped K-pop become globally popular.

Evidence from a study by Messerlin and Shin (2017) on the success of K-pop in foreign markets argues that K-pop firms have been successful because they have made the right product selection. Three major factors were examined, including the level of competition and online prices relative to CD prices, which have had indirect effects on K-pop's attractiveness in other countries' music industries (Messerlin & Shin, 2017). The same study also states, "In less than two decades, the Korean music industry has reached a size close to those of large European countries" (Messerlin & Shin, 2017, p. 435).

Despite the popularity that K-pop has, K-pop groups and artists still face challenges when it comes to recognition. A study from 2023 examined why only 44 of the 300 most popular K-pop songs made it on the Billboard Hot 100 despite how popular the songs were on the internet and through album sales (Hwang et al., 2023). An example of this is when BTS failed to receive a Grammy despite their popularity and number of album sales. The study showed that K-pop artists have a greater chance of ending up on the Billboard Hot 100 if they are signed to a global music label, such as Sony Music (Hwang et al., 2023).

Although K-pop has been gaining popularity, there is a dark side to it. The K-pop business is not perfect, and there are often cases of gender discrimination within the industry. Those who are discriminated against within the K-pop industry frequently are female K-pop idols, and often, the harassment takes place on social media.

Social Media and Fans

Social media has played a huge part in the growing popularity of K-pop. Even though social media has brought positive impacts, female K-pop artists are more likely to be exposed to toxic online situations through social media than male performers (Jonas, 2021). Some K-pop fans form parasocial relationships with many of these idols. Parasocial relationships are non-reciprocal emotions that a fan has toward celebrities or influencers (Hoffner & Bond, 2022). When fans form these imagined relationships after watching performers regularly online, they begin to think that they have some sort of ownership of these idols. This is shown in many K-pop dating scandals. An example of this happening is when K-pop artist Suran posted a photo on her Instagram after she collaborated on a song with Suga, a member of BTS. Because of their perceived ownership of Suga, fans of Suga and BTS began to speculate that the two singers were dating and began to bully Suran to the point of her having to apologize for posting the picture to her Instagram.

Another example of a female K-pop idol being exposed to toxic online situations is ex f(x) member Sulli, whose real name was Choi Jin-ri. She was first exposed to harmful online behaviors when she was 19 years old, and it was revealed that she was in a relationship with a musician 14 years her senior. Shortly after the news of their relationship broke out, Sulli was subjected to harsh online abuse. She later began to challenge the societal norm and began to support the no-bra movement in South Korea. This action of hers was faced with sexist

abuse online (Tai, 2020). Sulli (2019) stated on a TV talk show, "My life is actually empty. I feel like I'm lying to everyone by pretending to be happy on the outside" (para. 17). Sadly, in October of 2019, Sulli took her own life.

Like Sulli, an ex-member of Kara named Hara was exposed to toxic online situations in late 2018 (Tai, 2020). Hara had been a target of online hate shortly after it was revealed that she was in an ongoing court battle against her ex-boyfriend Choi Jung-bum. Hara claimed that her ex-boyfriend had threatened to release a sex video that was taken of her without her consent. Although her ex-boyfriend was acquitted and the video was never released, she still faced harsh online criticism (Tai, 2020). In November of 2019, Hara took her life. A sociologist from the University of Seoul stated, "Korean celebrities who take their lives tend to be women, I don't think that's an accident" (Hurt, 2020, para. 20).

Sexism towards women stems from traditional stereotypes and is standing in the way of gender equality (Lin & Rudolf, 2017). K-pop entertainment companies are not the only thing that enforces the stereotypes, as K-pop fans also contribute.. A study from 2017 collected data through a survey from 6,317 K-pop fans from 100 countries to determine the relationship between K-pop consumption and the gender attitude of fans. The result of the study showed that the more money someone spends on K-pop items and activities, the more they believe traditional gender stereotypes (Lin & Rudolf, 2017).

Girl Crush Concept

When discussing gender discrimination in K-pop, it is important that the "girl crush" concept is brought up in discussion. The concept is similar to the phrase "girl power" (Change, 2020). The characteristic of both concepts embodies being "angry," "sexy," and "powerful" (Chang, 2020, para. 19). The girl crush concept helps K-pop idols use their voices and criticize the submissive stereotype women in K-pop have (Chang, 2020). This voice of defiance can be heard in many K-pop girl group songs in the present time. Songs like "Tomboy" by (G)-IDLE bring forward ideas of post-feminism along with the girl crush

concept (Li, 2022). Other songs that show imagery of strong women that defy stereotypes are "Dalla Dalla" by ITZY and "Lion" by (G)-IDLE (Chang, 2020).

Although a message of power might sound positive, the girl crush concept is not always a positive concept. The girl crush concept can be thought of as a "double-edged sword" (Sun et al., 2022, p. 3). Due to the industry wanting to make money, the concept is also viewed as fake and manufactured as a marketing strategy (Sun et al., 2022). The term "sexual entrepreneurship" is also used to describe the girl crush concept (Sun et al., 2022, p. 3). A study by Sun et al. (2022) states, "Fans largely perceived the concept as a (Western) feminist-friendly K-pop trend" (p. 6).

Gender Discrimination

K-pop girl-group concepts are drastically different from boy-group concepts (Jonas, 2021). Girl groups are rarely able to freely express themselves (Jonas, 2021). A study from 2015 shows that three prominent Korean entertainment companies (JYP, SM Entertainment, and YG) often cast future female idols based on a set of personality types (Unger, 2015). Every group has a set of personality types such as the "cute/innocent" one and the "sexy" one (p. 26). These labels being pushed onto these girls cause the continuation of stereotypes. K-pop is a highly sexualized industry (Li, 2022), and according to Lin and Rudolf (2017), "Sexually objectifying female artists may be the most overt way that K-pop reinforces sexist attitudes against women" (p. 6).

With the increasing popularity of K-pop in recent times, the K-pop industry is becoming wealthier, and additional money within the industry means more exploitation and manipulation within K-pop. The K-pop industry has notoriously made money off objectifying female K-pop idols. Female K-pop artists often face the most discrimination in order to "maximize profits" (Jonas, 2021, p. 13). An example of those who gain wealth from exploitation is Korean Music Television Programs. According to Saeji (2013), music television programs contribute to the constant sexual objectification of female idols "through the ways that emcees frame performances and the

ways the camera draws attention to sexualized body parts" (Saeji, 2013, p. 329). Many K-pop girl group dances heavily emphasize the female body. Saeji (2013, p. 350) observed two performances by Sistar 19, one of the performances being on Inkigayo. During the performance on Inkigayo, there were 28 instances when the camera was isolated on chests, thighs, and legs.

K-pop girl groups also seem to have an expiration date imposed on them. They are hypersexualized and infantilized to better suit the male fantasy of thinking women from the ages of 16 to 25 are the most desirable (Jonas, 2021). This expectation results in women's careers ending due to the fantasy and illusion of purity being shattered (Jonas, 2021).

Another way the illusion of purity can be shattered is by a female idol's concept changing. An example of this is when female K-pop idol Park Ji-yoon's concept changed from pure to mature. In 2000, 18-year-old Park came out with a song called "Adult Ceremony" (Turner, 2023). The song included sexually suggestive lyrics. Although the song became popular, negative rumors about her personal life began to spread (Turner, 2022). In a conversation with Interview365, she stated that the rumors made her "not want to live" (Park, 2013).

To summarize, the popularity of K-pop has grown over the years. Despite the genre being popular and having songs that have been on the Billboard charts, the K-pop industry is flawed. Some aspects that have helped the genre become popular have negatively impacted female K-pop idols. Social media have played a huge part in the growth in popularity, but these platforms expose idols to toxic online situations. The unique concepts that are pushed onto these female idols by entertainment companies have solidified traditional gender stereotypes. The K-pop industry has continuously made money from exploiting and objectifying female idols. Female K-pop idols are beginning to speak out against the discrimination through their songs.

Method

To examine female artists' attempts to speak out against harmful stereotypes, I will rhetorically analyze the lyrics from three K-pop songs: "Nxde" by (G)-IDLE, "Tomboy" by (G)-IDLE, and "I [1] DOLL" by HUH YUNJIN. "Nxde" is 2 minutes and 58 seconds long and was released by CUBE Entertainment. "Tomboy" is 2 minutes and 54 seconds long and was also released by CUBE Entertainment. "I [1] DOLL" is 2 minutes and 30 seconds long and was released by Source Music. All three songs were chosen for this study because of their themes of gender and feminism, with underlying themes of speaking out against the K-pop industry in some way. Another reason I chose these specific songs is due to each song's popularity. "Tomboy" peaked at No. 58 on the Billboard Global 200 list and "Nxde" hit No. 50. Although the song "I [1] DOLL" did not reach the Billboard Global 200 list, it has a total of 7.9 million views on YouTube, demonstrating its popularity and reach. All of the songs are in Korean with a little bit of English. For me to understand what the lyrics of the songs mean, I used translations of the lyrics found on the website GENIUS.

Rhetorical Analysis

In the following rhetorical analysis, I will analyze the lyrics of each song by considering the rhetorical situation, including the lyrics' author, audience, setting, and purpose, and then evaluating them for the use of individual rhetorical appeals. I will start with logos and determine if each song has rational modes of thinking, such as, comparison, cause and effect thinking, and exemplification. Next, I will look at pathos to determine if each individual song uses strong imagery, emotional descriptions, and emotionally triggering wording. After pathos, I will look at ethos to determine if the songs' authors demonstrate the use of language or writing styles that connect to particular values.

Rhetorical Situation

"Tomboy" by (G)-IDLE

"Tomboy" was written by (G)-IDLE leader and member Soyeon. This song was written to inform the people listening to the song that the members of the group are not interested in being the perfect

girlfriend. According to a contributor on GENIUS, a lyrics website, this song is about "Independence and breaking the mold" (lqrekt, 2022, para. 1). They are not interested in being the perfect girlfriend and state they're not here to be pretty little dolls for society. The song's lyrics state, "Do you want a blond Barbie doll? It's not here, I'm not a doll." This lyric helps further prove that this song was made to show that they are not perfect and shows that they are sharing an empowering message. In an interview, Soyeon (2022) stated, "I wanted to convey the idea that everyone should be looked at without prejudice" (0:23). She later states in the interview, "I hope you don't get caught up in standards set by others or what others think," which leads me to believe that this song was written for the fans or other people who listen to (G)-IDLE (Soyeon, 2022, 0:39). This song is constrained by its time limit. Due to the song only being about 3 minutes long, there might not have been enough time to fully express the deeper meaning of the song. However, the song also has freedom in its medium. People listen to songs every day, so it has a better chance of reaching people rather than if it were a billboard or a movie. In addition, songs can be easily shared on social media.

"Nxde" by (G)-IDLE

This song was written by Soyeon, Poptime, and Kako. This song was written as a way to speak out against feminine stereotypes. The song takes inspiration from important women in pop culture, specifically Marilyn Monroe, and the way she was constantly sexualized by the public. A contributor on GENIUS states, "This song tells how people think women should be sexier, hotter, etc, just so they can sexualize them" (Gary_Is_Amazing, 2022). The song uses the term "nude" in a double-sided way. It means one's true self in one way, while the other uses it in a provocative way. This song is written in a way that directly addresses those who sexualize them. This is proven in the lyric, "I'm born nude and you're the pervert." This is also shown in the lyrics, "If you were expecting some rated R show, oh, I'm sorry, but that's not what we're showing. For a refund, go that way." Similar to the first song, this song is also constrained by its short time limit.

The song also has a lot of freedom in its medium because it is a song. People listen to songs daily and remember them more.

"I ≠ DOLL" by HUH YUNJIN

This song was written by Huh Yunjin, a member of the K-pop girl group LE SSERAFIM. Yunjin wrote this song to tell the people listening about the struggles of being an idol and how people view idols. According to a contributor on GENIUS, "Lyrically, the song describes the struggles behind idol life and beautifully criticizes the people who hides themselves from the world and considers idols as something compared to a doll" (yuri_lovee, 2023). This statement is proven in the lyrics, "Idol doesn't mean your doll to fuck with." This song was written in a way that addresses the fans and the people criticizing her. In an interview, Yunjin stated:

> I think regardless of fame, gender, age, class, race, etc., the cruelty, superficiality, and contradiction of online hate is something everyone has experienced at least once. Treating people with fairness and kindness has always been crucial to me. And this message that people you see on screen are still in fact people like you has been something I've dreamt of talking about since I was a trainee. (2023, para. 4)

Like the other two songs in the sample, this song is constrained by its time limit. There could have possibly been more information that Yunjin wanted to share, but due to the small amount of time given, she was unable to fully express her feelings. The song has freedom in its medium because songs are easily shareable. People listen to songs every day, and with a big fan base, the song is more likely to reach a wide audience. Songs can also be memorable.

Logos

Of the three sample songs analyzed, "Tomboy" by (G)-IDLE was the only song that demonstrated logos. For example, exemplification is apparent in the song when the lyrics state all the things that make the

members of (G)-IDLE consider themselves tomboys. A few examples of exemplification from the lyrics include:

> Look at my toe, my tattoo is my ex's name
> I got to drink up now, I like it even if you don't.
> . .
>
> I like dancing I love my friends
> Sometimes we swear without cigarettes.
>
> I like to eh on drinking whiskey. . . .
>
> Stuff like love can't make me drop a single tear.
> . . .

All of these reasons are then followed by the repetition of the line: "Yeah, I'm a *beep* tomboy."

Pathos

After analyzing all three sample songs, pathos was determined to be in each song. "Tomboy"- (G)-IDLE. The song uses descriptive words such as tomboy to express that the members of (G)-IDLE are not afraid to speak their mind and can be independent. The song's lyrics also depict imagery and emotional descriptions with the lyrics:

> Stuff like love can't make a single scratch on my body
>
> Rather than having your stinky perfume all over me. . . .
>
> Stuff like love can't make me drop a single tear
>
> Rather than smiling at your pointless words. . . .

"Nxde" - (G)-IDLE. The lyrics describe stories and characters:

> Hello, my name is Yeppi Yeppi
>
> The way I talk is kinda dumb, but I've got a sexy, sexy figure
>
> Well, for a tiara with a diamond

Did you think I'd just laugh as if, laugh as if?

> Twisted Lorelei that don't need no man
>
> A bookworm obsessed with philosophy, a self-made woman
>
> Very flabbergasted by this sassy story
>
> The audience booed and shouted
>
> "You tricked me you're a liar"

The song also uses wording that evokes an emotional response through the lyrics, "I'm born nude, and you're the pervert."

"I ≠ DOLL" - HUH YUNJIN. The lyrics tell a story about the reality of being an idol. Within the song, Yunjin gives examples of what has been said to her in order to evoke emotion, "You gained weight. What are you doing about that weight. She makes money off of her looks." She also uses emotional wording by stating, "When all they see is vanity. They pick apart my body and throw the rest away."

Ethos

"Tomboy" - (G)-IDLE. Feminism is shown throughout the song through the recurring word "tomboy." By using this word, the girls of this group seem to be breaking the norms of K-pop girl groups by not being hyper-feminine. They use examples of how they are not the perfect girls by doing things that are not viewed as feminine such as drinking, cursing, and having tattoos.

"Nxde" - (G)-IDLE. The debate of moral values is shown in the song's first line of lyrics "Why you think 'bout nude? Cause your view's so rude. Think outside the box then you'll like it." These lyrics show that people generally think of the word nude in a sexualized way, similar to how female idols are pictured. The lyrics then say to think of the word nude in a different way, and it will have a different meaning. These lyrics show that the girls of (G)-IDLE do not want to be sexualized; they want to be seen as people and not as objects.

"I ≠ DOLL" - HUH YUNJIN. Yunjin's lyrics speak about moral values and how people treat her as an idol. Similar to the examples used in pathos, the moral values are shown by the lyrics that describe what people tell her. She sings about the questionable values that judgmental "fans" have and then says that she does not care what people think.

Conclusion

K-pop's popularity has grown throughout the years. There are K-pop groups that have become so popular that their songs chart on Billboard. Despite the music genre's popularity, the K-pop industry is filled with negativity. Idols have not only begun to have negative relationships with the industry, but they have also begun to have negative relationships with fans. Some so-called "fans" have created negative and toxic online situations for many idols. Harsh online criticism has even resulted in the suicide of female idols. Concepts like girl crush, which are given to idols to be empowering, have begun to look manufactured and have become damaging to the idols.

Gender discrimination toward female idols is still overlooked to this day. The K-pop industry has continued to make money from exploiting female idols. Female idols are constantly hypersexualized and infantilized to better fit the male gaze. In recent years, female idols have begun to speak out. Female idols like (G)-IDLE and HUH YUNJIN have begun to speak out against gender discrimination through their song lyrics. The lyrics tell the audience that the singers are human, and they are not perfect. The lyrics show that idols are aware of what negative things people say to them. Idols are aware that most people only see them for their physical appearance. Each song's lyrics prove that female idols are tired of being seen in such a provocative and stereotypical way. The results of the study show that these K-pop idols are trying to reach out to their audience using emotions and morals. "Tomboy" shows that the members of (G)-IDLE want to go against the societal norm of what a female idol should be. "Nxde" is a commentary on how the members of (G)-IDLE are constantly being sexualized and how the industry objectifies women. "I ≠ DOLL" reveals the harsh

criticism and comments that people make toward female idols. Each song expresses the need for the industry to change. An idol is supposed to create music and spread happiness to others, but they cannot do that if the conditions that they are under are so toxic.

Gender discrimination toward female idols is still overlooked to this day. The K-pop industry has continued to make money from exploiting female idols. Female idols are constantly hypersexualized and infantilized to better fit the male gaze. In recent years, female idols have begun to speak out. Female idols like (G)-IDLE and HUH YUNJIN have begun to speak out against gender discrimination through their song lyrics. The lyrics tell the audience that the singers are human, and they are not perfect. The lyrics show that idols are aware of what negative things people say to them. Idols are aware that most people only see them for their physical appearance. Each song's lyrics prove that female idols are tired of being seen in such a provocative and stereotypical way. The results of the study show that these K-pop idols are trying to reach out to their audience using emotions and morals. "Tomboy" shows that the members of (G)-IDLE want to go against the societal norm of what a female idol should be. "Nxde" is a commentary on how the members of (G)-IDLE are constantly being sexualized and how the industry objectifies women. "I ≠ DOLL" reveals the harsh criticism and comments that people make toward female idols. Each song expresses the need for the industry to change. An idol is supposed to create music and spread happiness to others, but they cannot do that if the conditions that they are under are so toxic.

References

Benjamin, J. (2022, November 15). (G)I-DLE Open Up About Pressures Ahead of 'Nxde' Release & The Teamwork Guiding Them Today. *Billboard*. https://www.billboard.com/music/pop/g-i-dle-interview-nxde-i-love-album-tour-teamwork-1235158996/"teamwork-1235158996

Boman, B. (2022). Feminist themes in Hallyu 4.0 South Korean TV dramas as a reflection of a changing sociocultural landscape. *Asian*

Journal of Women's Studies, 28(4), 419-437. DOI: 10.1080/12259276.2022.2127622

Bright, K. (2023, July 14). "Feel like I've disappointed my fans" — BLACKPINK's Jennie addresses "lazy" dancing accusations. *Koreaboo.* https://www.koreaboo.com/news/blackpink-jennie-lazy-dance-accusations-disappoint-fans/

Cambridge Dictionary. (n.d.). Idol. Retrieved August 17, 2023, from https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/idol

Chang, J. (2020). New gender perspectives: Soft creator and strong advocator in the new Korean wave era. *Asian Women (Seoul, Korea), 36*(4), 67–84. https://doi.org/10.14431/aw.2020.12.36.4.67

Dong, S. (2023, February 12). K-pop stars and dating. *The Korea Times*. https://koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2023/02/732_345071.html?utm_source=scmp

Gary_Is_Amazing. (2023). (G)I-DLE - Nxde (English Translation): About. *GENIUS.* https://genius.com/Genius-english-translations-gi-dle-nxde-english-translation-lyrics

Green, C. (2018, January 14). What exactly is K-pop, anyway? *JSTOR Daily.* https://daily.jstor.org/what-exactly-is-k-pop-anyway/

(G)-IDLE. (2022). "Tomboy" [Song]. On *I Never Die*. Cube Entertainment.

(G)-IDLE. (2023). "Nxde" [Song]. On *I Love*. Cube Entertainment.

G I-DLE • NEVERLAND International. (2022, August 11). Soyeon talking about TOMBOY, prejudice and beauty! *Facebook.* https://fb.watch/m2nxkPlLBk/

Herman, T. (2018, March 26). Female K-pop stars face criticism for seemingly feminist behavior. *Billboard*. https://www.billboard.com/music/music-news/female-k-pop-stars-face-criticism-feminist-behavior-8257777/

Hoffner, C. A., & Bond, B. J., (2022). Parasocial relationships, social media, & well-being. *Current Opinion in Psychology, 45*(101306). https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2022.101306

HUH YUNJIN. (2023). I ≠ DOLL. Source Music.

Hwang, H., Oh, I., & Lopes, P. (2023). The international strategy for Korean pop music: What makes K-pop listed on Billboard Hot 100? *Asia Pacific Business Review*, 1-20. https://doi.org/10.1080/13602381.2023.2207412

HYBE LABELS. (2022, September 17). LE SSERAFIM Documentary 'The World Is My Oyster' EPISODE 01. *YouTube*. https://youtu.be/mjcJOJkNPRw

Jonas, L. (2021). Crafted for the male gaze: Gender discrimination in the K-pop industry. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 22(7), 2-18. https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol22/iss7/2/

Kworb.net. (2023). Most viewed music videos by Korean artists. https://kworb.net/youtube/topvideos_korean.html

Li, X. (2022). "Yea I'm a f Tomboy": "Girl crush," postfeminism, and the reimagining of K-pop femininity. *Social Semiotics*, 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1080/10350330.2022.2150542

Lin, X., & Rudolf, R. (2017). Does K-pop reinforce gender inequalities? Empirical evidence from a new data set. *Asian Women*, 33(4), 27–54. https://doi.org/10.14431/aw.2017.12.33.4.27

Liu, M., Shin, Y., & Tan, S. (2021, July 14). Why is K-pop so popular? *The Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/arts-entertainment/interactive/2021/kpop-bts-youtube-twitter-blackpink/

The Los Angeles Film School. (n.d.). A brief history of K-pop. https://www.lafilm.edu/blog/a-brief-history-of-kpop/

Lqrekt. (2022). *(*G)I-DLE - TOMBOY (English Translation): About. *GENIUS.* https://genius.com/Genius-english-translations-gi-dle-tomboy-english-translation-Lyrics

Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). stan. In *Merriam-Webster dictionary.* Retrieved August 17, 2023, from https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/stan

Messerlin, P. A., & Shin, W. (2017). The success of K-pop: How big and why so fast? *Asian Journal of Social Science*, 45(4/5), 409–439. http://www.jstor.org/stable/44508094

Moreau, B. (2023, January 19). LE SSERAFIM's Yunjin unveils the actual meaning behind "I ≠ DOLL". *Koreaboo.* https://www.koreaboo.com/news/le-sserafim-yunjin-doll-interview-meaning/

Saeji, C. (2013). Juvenile protection and sexual objectification: Analysis of the performance frame in Korean Music Television Broadcasts. *Acta Koreana*, 16(2), 329–365. https://doi.org/10.18399/acta.2013.16.2.003

Song, S. (2020, July 16). Government's Hallyu department announces plans to support Hallyu expansion. *The Korea Herald*. https://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20200716000681

Sun, Q., Paje', D., & Lee, H. (2022). "Female empowerment is being commercialized": Online reception of girl crush trend among feminist K-pop fans. *Feminist Media Studies*, 1–14. https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2022.2154820

Tai, C. (2020, March 29). Exploding the myths behind K-pop. *The Guardian*. https://www.theguardian.com/global/2020/mar/29/behind-k-pops-perfect-smiles-and-dance-routines-are-tales-of-sexism-and-abuse

Texas A&M University Writing Center. *Rhetorical analysis*. https://writingcenter.tamu.edu/Students/Writing-Speaking-Guides/Alphabetical-List-of-Guides/Academic-Writing/Analysis/Rhetorical-Analysis

Touring Data. (n.d.). 2021 Top touring artists. *Touring Data.* https://touringdata.wordpress.com/2022/04/01/2021-top-touring-artists/

Touring Data. (n.d.). Born Pink Tour (2022). *Touring Data.* https://touringdata.wordpress.com/2022/11/17/blackpink-born-pink-tour/

Turner, J. (2022, December 6). Here's how the famous "Adult Ceremony" song ruined the original singer, Park Jiyoon, and her private life. *Koreaboo.* https://www.koreaboo.com/stories/park-jiyoon-adult-ceremony-ruined-career-minor/

Unger, M. (2015). The aporia of presentation: Deconstructing the genre of K-pop girl group music videos in South Korea. *Journal of Popular Music Studies*, *27*(1), 25–47. https://doi.org/10.1111/jpms.12109

Yuri_lovee. (2023). HUH YUNJIN - I ≠ DOLL (English Translation): About. *GENIUS.* https://genius.com/Genius-english-translations-huh-yunjin-i-doll-english-translation-lyrics

"Digital Learning"
Salvador Reyes
Digital Communication and Media
Junior

Contributor Information

Ray Barber Ray Barber is a recent graduate from West Texas A&M University with a bachelor's degree in Musical Theatre. During his time at WT, he was heavily involved in the theater department. He performed in numerous plays and musicals, captained the improv team, served as an officer in multiple student organizations, and graduated with a 4.0 GPA. He also found opportunities outside of college during his education, performing in *TEXAS! Outdoor Musical* and receiving scholarship opportunities to OpenJar Institute in New York. After his graduation in May of 2025, he received an apprenticeship opportunity with Florida Studio Theatre, where he currently works. Ray wrote this paper for a Musical Theatre History class in an effort to highlight his favorite musical composer and explain the significance of Jason Robert Brown's work.

Cory Bradshaw a freshman at WTAMU majoring in studio art with a focus on ceramics and painting. He plans to graduate May 2029 and aspires to be a high school art teacher. His collage titled "Opportunity of a Lifetime" was selected by the student editors as the runner up for the *Tracks 6* cover art contest. When asked about this artwork, Cory responded: "This piece shows the chaotic beauty of our Texas Panhandle, and the influence that West Texas A&M has on the area. I did not have any extraordinary process; I just like collage and oil pastels a lot. All of it is printed sheets of paper of either an old nature brochure that was then torn and colored with oil pastels or printed sheets of wallpaper."

Aspen Durham is a junior majoring in Digital Communication and Media and minoring in Creative Writing. Beyond her work in academics, Durham is also a community advisor on campus, a nursery worker, and a photographer. She anticipates graduating in May 2027 and hopes to work as a photographer for the Dallas Cowboys. According to Aspen, "I first heard about *Tracks* through an Advanced Design class. We designed the layout of the journal for the latest edition and I was asked to create artwork that resonated with the topic of 'Victorian Poetry'. When I think of Victorian Poetry, I think of writing with a quill and a bottle of ink, where every line is permanent."

Mackenzie Farmer finished her Bachelor of Arts in English at WTAMU in 2024 and is currently pursuing her master's degree in English. She currently works as an English Language teacher at an adult education program in Kansas. After graduating with her master's degree, she plans to continue teaching, likely at a community college. This essay started as an assignment for an English Literature survey course that she expanded for her undergraduate capstone project. For Mackenzie, the addiction reading, out of the many potential readings for "Goblin Market," interested her the most.

Katelyn Fergerson graduated from West Texas A&M University in December of 2024 with a B.A. in English. While attending, she was a member of Sigma Tau Delta. Post graduation, Katelyn has become an expert in taking it one day at a time. She has no concrete plans for the future, and doesn't plan on making any anytime soon. She spends most of her days experiencing crises, bemoaning basic human tasks such as deciding what to eat for dinner, and trying to kick bad habits. Katelyn was drawn to the story of "Goblin Market" from a prior assignment where she explored the foundational ideas she had for her reading of the text, but was unable to properly flesh out within the original assignment due to time constraints. She was incredibly grateful for the opportunity to expand on those ideas for her Capstone project, and remains so today.

Bryce Hutson earned his bachelor's degree in Agricultural Media and Communication with a minor in Animal Science from West Texas A&M University in 2024. During his time at WT, he served as an Ag Ambassador, competed on the National Champion Meat Judging Team, and gained valuable industry experience through internships with organizations such as the American Meat Science Association. He is currently pursuing a master's degree in Agricultural Communications at Texas Tech University, with plans to continue into a doctoral program and ultimately build a career in academia. As a McNair Scholar at WT, Bryce developed the research project "Can eye-tracking glasses measure consumers' buying habits in a grocery store setting?" alongside Dr. Tanner Robertson and Ellis Vidmar. His work explores how emerging technology and consumer science can strengthen communication efforts within the meat industry — particularly how eye-tracking insights can inform more effective marketing strategies for meat products.

Ashley 'Kai' Jenkins is a student of West Texas A&M University, currently working towards her master's degree. She has a passion for stories and games of any kind, and when she's not distracted by something someone else created, she's attempting to create something of her own. Once she has her degree, she would like to either teach or work in the publishing industry, as long as it keeps her close to her family and friends.

Casen Lucas is a West Texas A&M alumnus and a first-year J.D. candidate at Georgetown University Law Center. During his time at WT, he served as a peer mentor for the Attebury Honors Program and as the founding president of the Pre-Law Student Association. He is also an Endowed Opportunity Scholar and a member of the American Constitution Society at Georgetown Law. His essay, "Research Design: Trust in American Democracy After the January 6 Capitol Riot," was originally written for Dr. Justin Moeller's Political Research Methods course at WT. Casen chose a political science major, along with an English minor, to develop analytical skills and apply them to real-world problems in politics, law, and journalism. This research design reflects an interest in the peaceful transfer of power and other democratic safeguards which inspired him to pursue a law degree.

Salvador Reyes is a junior at West Texas A&M University, majoring in Digital Communication and Media, and is originally from Plainview, Texas. He learned about *Tracks* through courses like Advanced Design and was impressed with their work after seeing the level of detail and creativity showcased in past issues. Salvador plans to graduate in December 2026 and hopes to use his degree to pursue a career in the digital sports media field. His artwork was originally created for a class assignment with the goal of hoping it would be used in the next *Tracks* issue. For this piece, he chose to connect it with the essays on artificial intelligence and virtual reality that explore the frontiers of technology, aiming to capture something simple yet visually representative of technology.

Veronica Torres graduated from West Texas A&M University in December of 2024 and received her BA in Digital Communication and Media with summa cum laude distinction. Veronica is a former McNair scholar and is currently a graduate student at WTAMU working towards getting her MA in Communication. She is also the current Broadcast Engineer for the WTAMU Department of Communication and advisor for KWTS 91.1 FM. Veronica grew up in Littlefield, Texas, a small town northwest of Lubbock. She has been fascinated with K-pop since she was 10 years old but has loved music all her life. What started as an interest has flourished into academic curiosity. Veronica hopes to contribute more to the academic world while in graduate school with her knowledge of music and the K-pop industry.
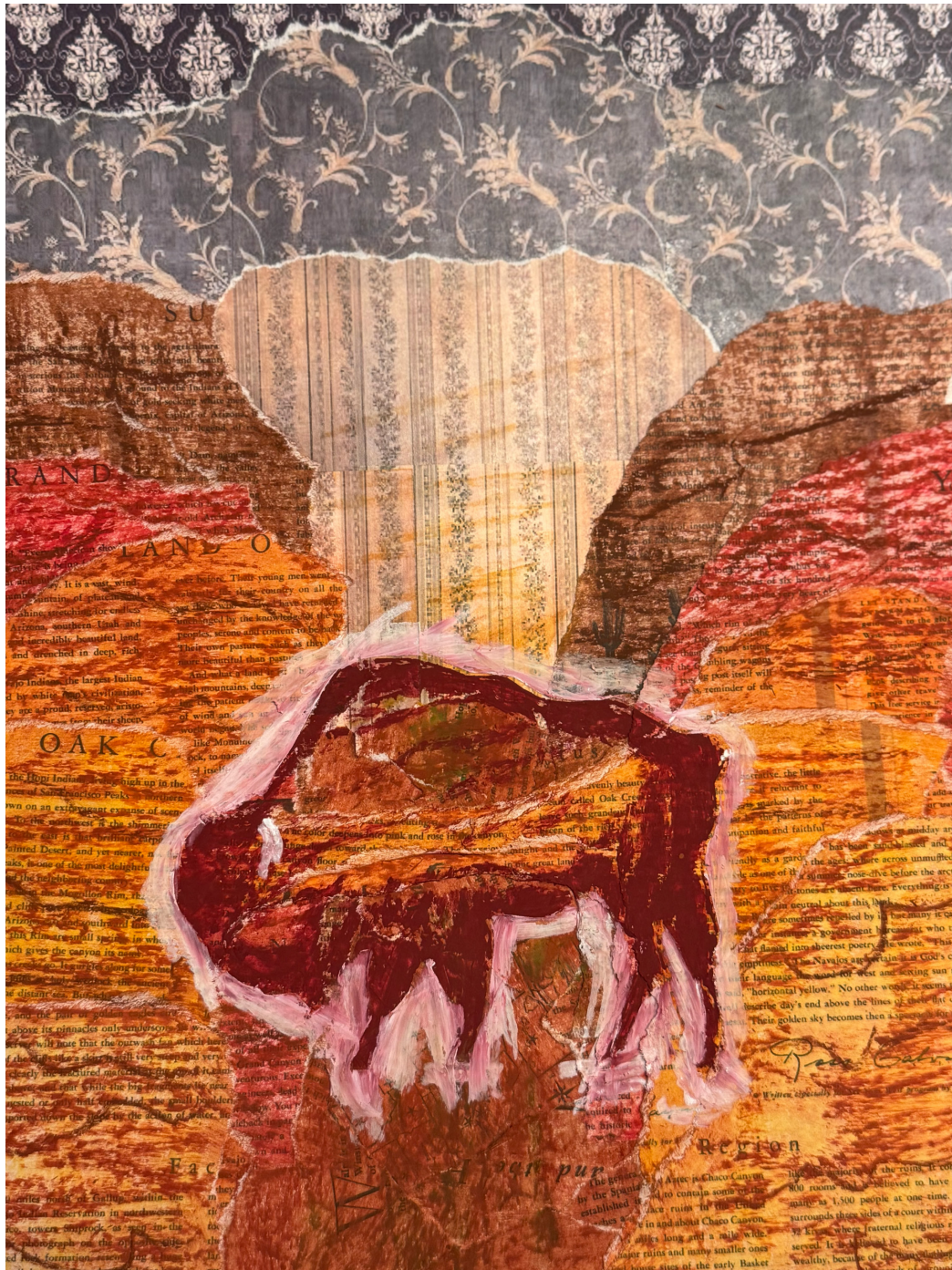
"Opportunity of a Lifetime"
Cory Bradshaw
Studio Art
Freshman

TEXAS PLAINS

TEXAS

WT Department of English, Philosophy and Modern Languages WEST TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY