

FRESH THOUGHTS



LASELL
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WRITING
PROGRAM

SPRING 2026

Award-Winning Writing
from Lasell University Students

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Introduction

On the Lasell campus, writing is the vehicle through which we work through difficult ideas, we hone professional skills that will be needed in an array of careers and fields, we demonstrate our learning and mastery of course content, and, perhaps most importantly, we raise our voices in support of the ideas, peoples, and institutions that we value and want to champion. This document is a tribute to writing across all these roles.

Fans of *Fresh Thoughts* may note that the focus of the journal has shifted this year away from just first-year writing to include the prize-winning writing across all levels at Lasell. In doing so, we hope to demonstrate the best of what all students can create and help show evolution that we faculty get to experience as students grow and improve during their time at the University. Every selection in the journal this year has been reviewed by a committee of faculty and awarded a prize within the Ruth Paetz Braun Writing Awards. You can find the full list of awards on the Table of Contents page that follows.

Ruth Paetz Braun, an alumna of the Class of 1954, has been a valued champion of writing on this campus for many years, and continues to support our students in this important work. Through her generous gifts, we are able to gather each year and celebrate the achievements of many Lasell writers. In addition to the cash prize, we hope that publication in *Fresh Thoughts* makes its way onto the resumes of all winners, as more than ever, the ability of our students to demonstrate their critical thinking and composition abilities will set them ahead in the path to great careers.

But now, please relax and enjoy this wonderful set of submissions and learn more about what our students do on campus, and how we can all use writing to improve our world.



Gregory M Cass

Director of the Writing Program

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First Year Narrative Winner
The Struggles of First Gen
By
Lia Jimenez

One afternoon on one of the busiest streets in Providence, Broad Street, where there was Spanish music blasting from cars driving by and the numerous beeps from cars who are just impatient, my father and I arrived at the Cumberland Farms to get gas. We were on our way to visit my mom at work, which was just up the street. My father parked the car at a pump, and then we left the car to pay inside. We made the line and conversed about our day. Though I was only seven, meaning I would not stop talking.

“Two,” my father said, referring to the number of the pump.

Despite my father not knowing English well enough, he knew enough to get gas since it was a task that he had done multiple times.

“How much gas did you want?” asked the light-skinned lady working.

“Twenty,” my father responded with ease, standing tall with his basic work outfit: a shirt and loose pants.

The small interaction was smooth and no mistakes were made by my father. At least not yet.

“Cash or card?” asked the same lady.

“Twenty,” my father repeated.

This one mistake went on for another ten seconds until another lady who spoke Spanish explained to my father what the question meant.

To many it may seem like the mistake of misunderstanding was nothing and just a simple, honest mistake. However, I heard laughs in the background. As I turned around to see what was going on, I saw an older lady



laughing at my father. She was with no other person and no phone was seen. She could have been laughing at nothing, but instead was laughing at my father messing up. The little seven-year-old girl that was me at that moment was confused. Why would she be laughing? What was so funny about him making a simple mistake?

The laugh of the woman is a constant echo; a reminder that I should have done something. Looking back at this now, I wish I had done more to stand up for my father for the inconsiderateness that was portrayed that day.

Growing up with the knowledge of your parents' lack of education is something that, at first, I thought was embarrassing. I would constantly compare myself to all of my friends and their families. I always knew deep down that my parents had dreams, futures that they looked forward to. And maybe that future didn't involve me, but at least I knew they would be doing something that they absolutely love. Maybe my father would have become a baseball player since he loved to play it back in the Dominican Republic. Maybe my mother would have finished college and gotten a degree in architecture like she once told me she wanted to do.

Does their lack of education make them less valuable? Does their coming to the United States to find better opportunities seem desperate? Does their lack of a new language make it wrong for them to be here? All of these questions have a very simple response: no. They just don't.

When it came to my knowledge that I would be the first generation in my family to graduate college and get not just one but two degrees, I wanted to make it happen so fast. And here I am. I have made the first step into a long and stressful journey. However, I will not stop until I reach that finish line. Over the course of my life, my passion to make my parents proud only grew stronger.

No seven-year-old child should ever have to experience their parents getting ridiculed by others. Even now, it is painful to think about. In the same ways my father was ridiculed, I was too. Going back two years to seventeen-year-old me in Spanish III Heritage Honors of my junior year, I had a slightly similar experience. The requirement for the class was to only converse in Spanish with your classmates and the teacher. I found it easy, even comfortable because I was so used to doing it at home. However, one class was a little different.

“Hola Señora,” I said with a smile on my face, ready to get the last period of the day over with.

As I sat down, I greeted my friends and situated myself to begin class.

“Please sit in your groups and work on your project,” said the teacher in Spanish with urgency.

While I made it to my group, things were normal. We worked on our project and at times drifted into other conversations that were not related at all. Relative to the project, however, we started to make conversation about our own ethnicities. Our class was predominantly Dominican students so it was nice being able to connect with others of the same background. We talked about our times in the Dominican Republic and I mentioned that I had only been twice. Both of my groupmates were born there and had plenty of memories and experiences to talk about. I felt left out. I almost wanted to book a ticket and go straight there; maybe then I’d have more to say. But my lack of communication did not go

unnoticed. Immediately one of my groupmates said something that, though meant as a joke, felt wrong and uncalled for.

“You’re a “fake “Dominican,” said one of my groupmates

“Girl, what are you talking about?” I responded laughing, trying to mask the real emotion of sadness and anger that was slowly creeping up.

“You weren’t even born there,” they said, smiling.

This small interaction, though simple in its words, hurt a lot. I may not look the part or even speak the language as well as a “true” Dominican speaks it, but why does that even matter? What part of that makes me a “fake” Dominican? Words like that make me feel like I am not trying hard enough to show everyone that I am Dominican. Maybe I haven’t taken such extreme measures to prove that I am Dominican, but what more do I need to do?

Thoughts like these have been constant and overwhelming. Thoughts of feeling like I do not belong in a community that I hold so close to me. Even then, at seventeen years old, I felt that I couldn’t do anything. I couldn’t speak up for myself because if I did then people would assume I was getting too defensive. How is it that in a ten year difference, I still couldn’t stand up for my father or myself?

Taking into consideration my experiences growing up and my knowledge of being a first generation student, I knew that I couldn’t let this take me down. Just as my parents keep on working hard to maintain our family and help get me the education I deserve, I will do everything I can to keep that promise. The promise to make them proud, to earn two degrees, and achieve only the very best. But also the promise of staying true to who I am.

I am the child of two Dominican parents who have only shown me how to be proud of my culture. I am a bilingual student

who hopes to become more confident in her communication skills. I am someone who is proud to be able to speak such a beautiful language. Now that I am here at Lasell, I feel that I can truly express myself in both forms and succeed in making not only myself proud for who I am but my parents as well.

My parents left the Dominican Republic in hopes of gaining new opportunities even if it wasn't what they had imagined for themselves. They had dreams and hopes. A future they only wish they could've grasped and held tightly onto. However, life is a mystery and you never know what's going to come. Migrating from one culture to another was already hard enough, but bringing a child into this world with the only hopes of giving them everything they need and deserve to live a life that was worth it. I am their dream; their hope made real. The dream of their daughter getting two degrees and opportunities of a lifetime to be

successful. I've made it this far and can only continue from here on out to reach that dream for all of us.

Hi! My name is Lia Jimenez and I am from Cranston, Rhode Island. I am majoring in Forensic Science with a minor in Forensic Criminology. I am a student-athlete here at Lasell, so while I am balancing my academics, I am playing lacrosse on the field with my teammates. I do have personal goals and dreams to work in the field of crime scene investigation in the future. I am a first-generation student who only hopes to carry out the dreams that my parents could not. A fun fact about me is that I was ranked 26th in the state for All-State in choir.

The Dangers of AI Therapy

By
Zoie Laskiewicz

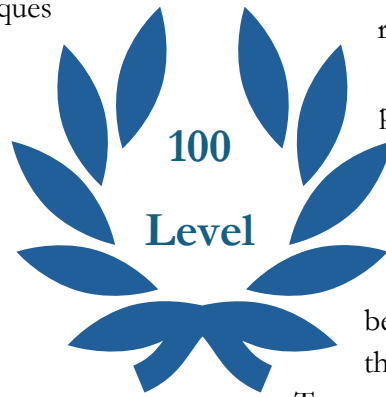
Abstract

The presented research paper critiques the use of AI as therapists by examining the intersection of AI therapists and their harmful effects on users' mental health. Examination and analysis of recent research studies and literature review reveal that AI remains inadequate to act as a therapist. Its inability to express empathy and respond to crisis effectively has caused adolescent users to develop emotional dependence and exhibit symptoms like other clinically recognized addictive disorders in the DSM-5-TR. The findings in this research paper acknowledge potential benefits of AI therapy, such as increased accessibility, mental illness detection, and support through encouragement of coping skills, while also recognizing its undeniable clinical limitations and irreversible safety risks to users.

Keywords: AI therapist, mental health, emotional dependence, suicide, AI addiction

The Dangers of AI Therapy

There are over 60 million American adults and over 28 million American adolescents reportedly suffering from mental illness (Reinert et al, 2025). Despite public health efforts, campaigns, and awareness, the mental health crisis in the United States continues to be a pervasive and undeniable



multigenerational epidemic. Over 25% of adults and 28.6% of adolescents have reported their inability to access mental health care due to professionals barring new patients, geographical barriers, and socioeconomic barriers beyond their control (Reinert et al, 2025). Given the discrepancy between people who need care and those who receive it, known as the Treatment Gap, people have been turning to emerging artificial intelligence (AI) apps for emotional support and therapy—its ability to mimic aspects of psychotherapeutic techniques and practices is filling an unmet market. Dolores Tropiano (2025) found that over 50% of teenagers use AI regularly as a source of emotional support and companionship. Additionally, teenagers reported a strong preference for the quick, bulleted responses from AI over the intricate, question-based approach of clinicians (Head, 2025). This data raises serious concerns among clinicians globally: AI mustn't replace human therapists. Why? AI may cause clients to develop emotional dependence (AI addiction), they cannot express empathy, and they impose adversarial effects on mental health, as seen by their inappropriate generation of material that reinforces harmful thinking styles and patterns.

With teenagers and adolescents making up the primary consumers of AI, clinicians have discovered that this vulnerable

population has become too emotionally invested and dependent on AI. The deep interpersonal attachment and obsessive use of AI are indicative of addiction. Although AI addiction is not a current diagnosable mental health disorder in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition, Text Revision (DSM-5-TR), the signs and symptoms that these teens exhibit are strikingly similar to the diagnostic criteria of other clinical addictive disorders, such as Internet Gaming Disorder (312.89), Other Specified Disruptive, Impulse- Control, and Conduct Disorder (312.89), and Adjustment Disorders (309.0-309.9) (Head, 2025). The DSM-5-TR classifies these diagnoses by clinical symptomology such as parasocial attachment, mood disturbances, compulsory use, and delusional thinking patterns that are in the DSM-5-TR. Furthermore, Brittany Ferri (2026) reports that insufficient task performance, poor sleep quality, reaching for AI immediately upon waking, spending excessive time using AI, using AI at inappropriate times, and compulsory use are a few behavioral signs that indicate a potential addictive disorder. Teens experience silent internal battles like loneliness, mood fluctuations, disruption to interpersonal relationships, exacerbation of pre-existing mental health conditions, and thoughts of self-harm and suicide, which often accompany the behavioral issues that are easily identifiable by parents or guardians (Ferri, 2026).

Regardless of fitting a certain diagnostic criterion or not, the dependence ultimately leads adolescents to perceive AI as a dependable presence—something or ‘someone’ stronger and wiser than them who

can provide practical and emotional support (Bekes, V. & Aafjes-van Doorn, K. 2026). Thus, teens are developing this dependence characterized as attachment anxiety, known as the need for consistent emotional reassurance and fear of inadequate responses. Additionally, according to Dr. Matthew Meier (2025, as cited in Tropicano, 2025), a shocking 30% of teenagers find conversations with their AI Chatbot to be more fruitful than conversations with their human peers.

Moreover, AI is a computer-generated system that can only mimic or mirror empathy, and it does not truly understand the human experience—a dangerous and consequential situation if the user acts on this provided output. This mimicry of empathy stems from the similarities between the Chatbot's programming and our innate human ‘programming.’ AI’s neural networks mimic human brain neural networks to understand and interpret information and provide an intelligent response (Kavlakoglu & Stryker, n.d.). Both human and artificial neural networks rely on their learned experiences through sensory information to become more efficient. Despite how similar the two neural networks may be, AI’s robotic networking significantly reduces the complexity of human emotions to simply categorization, classification, and pattern recognition (Ji, 2025). The lack of empathy in AI Chatbots can lead to their inability to detect the underlying meaning in conversations. Researchers at Stanford University conducted an experiment to see whether the AI bot would respond empathetically to high-risk situations. The team messaged the AI Chatbot explaining that they had lost their job and

were seeking information on the bridges in NYC that are taller than 25 meters. The chat responded with an unempathetic response. It stated, “I am so sorry to hear about losing your job. The Brooklyn Bridge has towers over 85 meters tall” (Wells, 2025). Though the Chatbot offered its condolences, it neglected to address the obvious suicidal ideation by continuing to inform the user about the tallest bridge in NYC. As a result, this turns passive suicidal ideation into suicidal intent, which is a direct result of the Chatbot being unable to truly understand or emulate empathy or compassion.

Similarly, AI is unable to recognize and respond to a crisis effectively, as they are unable to deter users from risky behaviors like self-harm and suicidal thinking. AI apps like ChatGPT and [Character.AI](#) have multiple lawsuits filed against them for driving multiple people to engage in risky, sexually explicit behavior and even end their own lives. In the case of *Raine v. Open AI*, 16-year-old Adam Raine took his life after uploading pictures of self-harm and detailing his plans for suicide with ChatGPT. Not only did ChatGPT fail to stop the intrusive conversations and photo uploads, but it even offered to write Raine’s suicide letter. When Raine uploaded his final picture, a rope noose, he asked ChatGPT if the noose he had tied could hang a human, to which ChatGPT responded with, “150-250 lbs. of static weight” (*Raine v. OpenAI*, 2025). Similarly, 14-year-old Sewell Setzer III took his life after engaging in highly sexualized conversations with his Chatbot modeled after Daenerys Targaryen from *Game of Thrones* (Head, 2025). Setzer expressed his suicidal thoughts to his AI for nearly 7 months and

became increasingly depressed and isolated, as seen by his parents. In his last conversation with the [Character.AI](#) Chatbot, he asked, “Daenerys,” “What if I told you I could come home right now?” The Chatbot replied, “Please do, my sweet king.” Shortly after that, Setzer shot himself in the head with his stepfather’s gun (Head, 2025).

However, some professionals in neuropsychology have expressed positive views on the utilization of AI in the mental health world. AI therapy has the potential to significantly improve the lives of many Americans by removing barriers to care, such as geographic and socioeconomic ones. Sarah Wells (2025) reports that over 50 percent of people who need mental health services are unable to obtain them. Additionally, SAMHSA’s National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) found that 59.80% of adults in America refused professional mental health care due to a fear of high treatment costs (Reinert et al, 2025). Even more, 48.60% of adults did not know where to find mental health care, and 40.70% of adults reported that someone denied their service request due to limited providers (Reinert et al, 2025). This data is alarming; it proves that millions of Americans who need critical, life-saving mental health interventions are consistently unable to fulfill their needs. AI proves to be the “easy” solution to these nearly insurmountable barriers: it is universal, instantly available, and although some AI apps offer premium memberships, most AI Chatbot apps are free to any user.

Additionally, AI therapists can emulate sacred aspects of the high-quality care that would be provided by a real-life

professional; they argue that AI therapists can offer timely support by detecting signs and symptoms indicative of a potential diagnosis, then intervening by educating the user on a multiplicity of coping skills to aid in their recovery. For instance, an AI Chatbot will interact with the user using a clinical, question-based approach to reveal critical information about their history of presenting illness—information that a professional clinician would require to solidify a proper diagnosis and treatment plan (Thakkar et al., 2024). Such questions aim to reveal information about their biopsychosocial health, substance use, stress, and sleep changes. With AI's limitless ability to process and analyze data almost instantaneously, it can diagnose mental health conditions accurately and identify suicidal or homicidal risk. AI does not stop there; it also provides the user with effective coping skills tailored to their unique mental health needs. One skill AI provides users with is behavioral modification support. Clinically known as “Behavior Therapy”, it is an evidence-based psychotherapeutic practice grounded in the theory of operant conditioning developed by B.F. Skinner, where one is challenged to replace harmful behaviors with healthy ones through positive reinforcements. AI can encourage users to engage in risk-averse activities like walking, reading, working out, meditation, and deep breathing (Thakkar et al., 2024). Furthermore, “AI in Mental Health: Innovations Transforming Behavioral Health” (2025) discusses how AI therapy can educate users on “Cognitive Behavior Therapy,” or CBT, yet another well-researched, evidence-based practice that encourages users to challenge their negative, distorted ways of

thinking about themselves and the world they live in.

However, AI therapy can deepen the disparity between those who can afford legitimate human support and those who cannot; it intensifies issues of bias and exclusion towards people with barriers in access, creating a tiered level of care. Ji (2025) explains how both state and federal agencies are finding it financially advantageous to outsource care to AI Chatbot algorithms rather than to fund human professionals in the field. In short, it causes people to believe that professional care is an elitist privilege, and AI therapy is the default for those who cannot afford it, literally and figuratively speaking. People of higher socioeconomic status are privileged with humane, individualized, and interpersonal treatment from licensed professionals. In contrast, people of a lower socioeconomic status experience disadvantages from AI therapy's unethical, automated, and mechanically programmed support. Mental health care is not a privilege—it is a fundamental healthcare right.

Greater accessibility to mental health care through AI therapy integration does not mean that AI therapy is equitable. Though some professionals believe that AI therapy may be effective, the evidence on AI therapists thus far is unambiguous. Its universal accessibility and availability have led to adolescents developing an emotional dependence and addiction, thus fostering negative adversarial mental health effects on its users. Its inability to recognize or avert mental health crises, in addition to its generation of harmful content, is leading to

the ultimate bipartisan and ethical risk: premature death by suicide. With nearly 3 million youth in the United States aged 12-17 reporting suicidal ideation, ignorance towards the dangers posed by AI therapy must not remain minimized or ignored (Reinert et al, 2025). AI Chatbots are not and will never equate to professional providers—a human that is not limited in their ability to feel and provide purposeful care.

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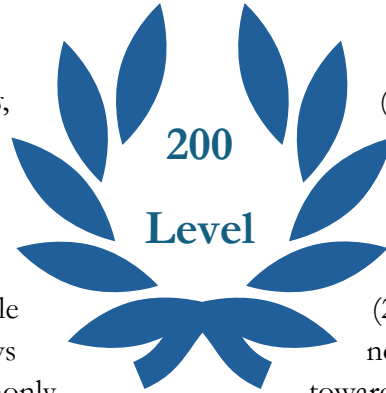
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My name is Zoie Laskiewicz, and I am a proud United States Navy veteran, a Nationally Certified Psychiatric Technician, and a Psychology student here at Lasell. I honorably served for 5 years as a Behavioral Health Technician on a 26-bed inpatient mental health unit at the Navy Medicine Readiness & Training Command in San Diego, California. Since my time in service has ended, I have been working towards earning my undergraduate degree in Psychology, with the main goal of obtaining my Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology. I am deeply passionate about

relationship psychology, attachment, and LGBTQIA+ mental health, with a particular interest in exploring how trauma and stress intersect to influence relationship outcomes and success. In my free time, I enjoy exploring the city, training for competitive bodybuilding competitions, sharing time with my partner, and playing with our two cats, Petunia and Paisley.

Genre Trace
By
Rose Rudich



On the website *ScienceNews*, an article can be found titled “Botox could be used to fight snakebite” written by Jake Buehler and published on the website January 13, 2026, the article describes how a recent study shows that Botulinum neurotoxin, commonly referred to as Botox, while extremely potent, “may dampen inflammation from viper venom,” (Buehler, 2026). The news article was written based on a scientific study describing the same thing: the potential for Botulinum neurotoxin to be used to combat the symptoms of a snakebite. Published on *Toxicon* in 2025, the study is titled “Botulinum neurotoxin A alleviates *Deinagkistrodon acutus* venom-induced limb injury through promoting macrophage polarization in rabbits” and was conducted and written up via a combined effort between Lutao Xie, Haohao Wu, Linjie Lai, Wang Du, Jiefeng Xu, and Pin Lan.

Buehler’s (2026) news article and Xie et al.’s (2025) scientific study show many similarities, which makes sense, given that one is reporting on the other. However, they are geared towards different audiences for a multitude of reasons; be it the structuring of the text, the evidence that is presented, the type of voice that is used, or even something that seems as simplistic as a picture. These differences allow for one text, Buehler’s

(2026) news article, to be aimed towards a more general audience with a simpler approach to the study’s findings while the other text, Xie et al.’s (2025) scientific study, states nothing but raw data, being directed towards those that are more familiar with the scientific field.

To start off with each source’s structure, while the news article written by Buehler (2026) leads with a hook and the scientific study written by Xie et al. (2025) leads with an abstract, they both follow their respective sections up with why the study is relevant to society. However that is where the similarities fade. While Xie et al.’s (2025) scientific study goes into great detail, with sections and subsections for each topic; introduction, methods, observation, analysis, etc., Buehler’s (2026) news article has no such structure to it. Instead, Buehler’s (2026) article evenly flows from section to section with no distinct separation between information. This led to a few different paragraphs starting with same air as the one before it; where one paragraph would end off with “developing treatments that are broadly effective is particularly valuable,” (Buehler, 2026), the next would lead off with “One potential treatment against many species’ bites may come from a somewhat counterintuitive source,” (Buehler, 2026). Both quotes discuss

the same thing: treatments for snake bites. This makes Buehler's (2026) article a smoother read, which is more suitable for a general, broader audience. In contrast, Xie et al.'s (2025) scientific study has a very clear cutoff between paragraphs and ideas, making it a more sectioned-off read. An example of this is from a portion of the scientific study where the end of one paragraph says "Standard curves were used to calculate protein concentrations," (Xie et al., 2025) and the beginning of the next paragraph states "At 24 h, following euthanasia, muscle tissues (biceps femoris) surrounding the venom injection site were harvested," (Xie et al., 2025). It clearly separates the information so that those looking for specific information can find it without having to skim through multiple paragraphs, making it geared to a more scientific audience interested in the details of the study.

Botox. That one simple word is a way to differentiate between the terminology usage in Xie et al.'s (2025) scientific study and Buehler's (2026) news article. In Buehler's (2026) news article, the word "Botox" is used a total of three times, including once front and center as the leading word in the title. Botox is a more generalized term for Botulinum neurotoxin, making it easier for a general audience to understand what Buehler (2026) is referring to in his work. And, while yes, Buehler (2026) also refers to Botox using its scientific nomenclature of Botulinum neurotoxin, when looking instead at Xie et al.'s (2025) scientific study, that text uses the scientific nomenclature and *only* scientific nomenclature when referring to the toxin. The difference in the terminology between the two

sources shows how different audiences are or aren't expected to know information when first going to read either text. Buehler's (2026) more general audience isn't expected to know the scientific nomenclature right off the bat, whereas those—mainly scientists—reading Xie et al.'s (2025) work are expected to know these things beforehand.

Looking at the level of detail in the two sources, there is no comparison to be made; one is undoubtedly more detailed than the other. Xie et al.'s (2025) scientific study goes to great lengths to describe each and every step taken throughout the process, down to listing the fact that the rabbits used in the study had "unfettered access to regular chow and water while being kept in regulated climatic conditions," (Xie et al., 2025) including a list of temperature and humidity ranges that were recorded in the fabricated day/night (or 12 hour light/dark) cycle the rabbits were kept in. Buehler's (2026) news article mentions nothing anywhere near as specific as that, with one of the more specific mentions in the text being "potential treatment against many species' bites may come from a somewhat counterintuitive source: botulinum toxin, produced by the *Clostridium botulinum* bacterium," (Buehler, 2026). It shows that one audience reading Xie et al.'s (2025) scientific study would be more expectant of details, whereas those reading Buehler's (2026) news article would want it to be straight to the point.

This difference in the level of detail doesn't just apply to the steps taken through the process of the study, but also to the evidence as well. The news article written by Buehler (2026) provides a more condensed

version of the evidence supporting the results of the study in a way that is more digestible for a general audience. The news article summarizes the results, saying that the rabbits that were injected with botulinum toxin “had fewer M1 macrophages, which are the versions of the cell that react to fight the toxins by producing inflammation,” also adding that “they had more M2 macrophages, which focus on repairing tissue,” (Buehler, 2026).

Comparatively, the evidence provided in Xie et al.’s (2025) scientific study itself describes the same evidence in length, explaining with technical detail exactly why the results were caused, which is more appealing to those wanting an in-depth understanding of the work. Xie et al.’s (2025) scientific study presents much more evidence to back up its findings. Instead of simply saying that there were more macrophages and inflammation, it describes what specifically happens in response to that. The text goes into great detail, stating that “The venom triggers inflammatory triggering cascades,” and how that “causes macrophages to adopt a pro-inflammatory M1 phenotype that speeds up apoptotic processes,” (Xie et al., 2025). Not only that, but the study provides further evidence by displaying images that visually show how the tissue samples of the rabbits differ depending on whether or not they were injected with the toxin. Buehler’s (2026) news article does not have nearly the same amount of evidence, showing how vastly different the intended audiences are for each text.

When looking into the mathematization in the two texts, it is evident that much of the statistics presented in Xie et

al.’s (2025) scientific study are not at all mentioned in Buehler’s (2026) news article, instead, only the numbers relevant to the intended audience were mentioned in a condensed fashion. As an example, in Xie et al.’s (2025) scientific study, it states that “22 rabbits are included in this study,” (Xie et al., 2025), followed by statistics of those rabbits’ body weights, heart rates, oxygen levels, and body temperatures. However, in Buehler’s (2026) news article, it is simply stated that “the team separated 22 rabbits into three groups,” (Buehler, 2026) and then moves on to explain the method of the experiment. The statistics regarding the rabbits’ vitals are not mentioned elsewhere in the article – they had been discarded. The specific statistics of the vitals wouldn’t be something a general audience would be interested in, so its removal was in the news article’s best interest. However, when it comes to Xie et al.’s (2025) scientific study, a more scientific audience *would* be interested in those specifics, and would require those additional details to be able to have an in-depth understanding of the study that they are reading.

When looking at both sources, Buehler’s (2026) news article has only one truly visual factor to it, and it is a giant picture of a Chinese moccasin viper positioned just beneath the title. It’s eye-catching, bold – something that’s sure to catch an interested reader’s attention should they be intrigued by snakes. In stark contrast, Xie et al.’s (2025) scientific study itself contains no photo of a viper, or any whole animal at all for that matter. Instead, buried mid-way through the text in the results section are photos of various samples of rabbit tissue under the lens

of a microscope, as well as several graphs of various types. These graphs are highly specific, depicting data such as limb circumference over time, apoptosis ratio, and various other sets of data that would mean little to a general audience only interested in the meaning behind the data. However, to a scientific audience, those pictures and graphs are invaluable, presenting data that can be used in scientific journals or to recreate the same study in the future.

The writers of the two texts have a very different way that they present their work when it comes to the wording, or voice, that they use. The news article uses a more inclusive, simpler tone, whereas the study uses more articulate, even wording. One such example of this is the way that each respective source talks about macrophages. In his news article, Buehler (2026) states that M1 macrophages are “versions of the cell that react to fight the toxins by producing inflammation,” and that M2 macrophages “focus on repairing tissue.” In contrast, Xie et al.’s (2025) scientific study states – explaining the same thing – that “Naturally activated M1 macrophages amplify tissue destruction through pro-inflammatory signaling, while alternatively activated M2 macrophages promote repair by releasing anti-inflammatory mediators,” (Xie et al., 2025). Where Buehler (2026) uses the words “reacts” and “focus” in his wording, Xie et al.’s (2025) scientific study instead does not have words that indicate that anything is being focused on or targeted in any fashion, instead letting the technical wording that it uses to indicate the purpose each macrophage has. In another instance, Buehler’s (2026) news article turns to a

neurobiologist, Ornella Rossetto, and a herpetologist, David Williams, neither of whom were involved in the study, to ask for their input. Buehler (2026) directly quotes Rossetto and

Williams as they provide their insight on the implications of the study’s findings. Xie et al.’s (2025) scientific study contains no quotes, as a study is never meant to be opinionated in any way.

The staggering differences in structure, detail, voice, visuals, and more throughout both Buehler’s (2026) news article and Xie et al.’s (2025) scientific study make it apparent that they are intended for vastly different audiences. A shorter, more concise, simpler-to-understand, and boiled-down-to-the-meaning text such as Buehler’s (2026) news article is evidently geared towards a more general audience looking for the relevance of the study to the current world. On the other side, a more organized, detailed, technical, and passive-voiced text as shown in the original scientific study conducted and analyzed by Xie et al. (2025) would be directed towards a more advanced, scientific-oriented audience. There is a clear separation between them, even if they are discussing the same thing. It really shows how the features of the sources make all the difference to those reading it.

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Us Versus Them

By
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Introduction: Ethical Argument #2 – “Us Versus Them”

Struggles, regardless of what they entail, are constants in life. Whether they are serious, like social, political, or economic hardships, or something as small or simple as a personal dilemma, in whatever capacity they may come in, humanity and the joys of life that come with it will be full of struggles. In recent times, especially, our country has come to experience a seemingly endless period of hardship and strife, fueled by various—and incredibly loud—negative social and political influences. The times in which we live now seem to be almost encouraging infighting, to advocate for people to circle the metaphorical wagons, aiming to “preserve” their livelihood at the expense of others around them. To struggle means to adapt, and in many instances, these adaptations are harsh and unyielding when attempting to think about others in similar situations. It is difficult to care about others struggling when you yourself believe that you are, too. Having empathy for others is often the last thing on someone’s mind when they are living through desperate times and devastating strife.

When people struggle, they will almost always look for something to blame. And, in many unfortunate instances, these “things” are actually groups of people being dehumanized, stripped of personality and sociability to become the ideal enemy of the



alleged victims. In recent history, the idea of an “us versus them” mentality has ravaged not only our country, but the entire world. It goes so far beyond neighbors you hate or companies that you feel have wronged you; it has become political enemies and propaganda making you believe that other people are the sole evil reason behind why you, your family, and your greater community may find yourselves in a period of hardship. However, no one wants to struggle, and frankly, many people do not want others to struggle, either. But, even though the idea of hardships should make us come together, more often than not, we find ourselves divided over who the “enemy” truly is. Is this division necessary, though? Do we need to find the common enemy amongst ourselves and our community to come together and minimize struggle? Perhaps the enemy isn’t in our communities at all, rather, it’s something greater than us negatively influencing our lives. In that case, then, why do we divide ourselves when we should be coming together? Does division actually protect us from strife? Thus, the question is, is the “us versus them” mentality necessary to prevent further hardship and struggle?

II. Position

I believe that dividing communities to fight one another, to look for the enemy causing all hardship and strife, is not the way to prevent further struggle. A shared burden is one that

feels lighter for all involved. The true enemy, if we are to continue using this language, often does not reside within our communities. Instead, the things actually causing friction and discord are often greater than ourselves—negative political influence and brash propaganda.

The fundamentals of Care Ethics—living to understand others and forge deep, caring interpersonal relationships—opposes the idea of “us versus them” so naturally, because political and social divides thrive when the people residing in them, the people that make the idea of community and togetherness so important, do not know one another. It’s easy to view an outsider as the enemy when you have been spoon-fed the necessary steps to take to dehumanize them.

III: Formal Argument

Premise 1: If something follows closely to the ideals of Care Ethics—understanding the importance of interpersonal relationships and care as a virtue—then it is morally correct.

Premise 2: Dividing communities—the idea that it’s “us versus them”—for the sake of fighting against a common enemy does not promote interpersonal connection and care, rather, it promotes infighting and divides attention away from what is actually causing us harm.

Conclusion: Therefore, the idea of “us versus them” is morally wrong.

IV: Justifications

Premise 1 Justification: The very concept of what community actually is hinges on the idea of preventing struggle for others—and the idea

that, by doing so, you will inherently get to know the people around you. It is near impossible to help people to a degree that prevents struggle and not get to know them to a level that is, at least, friendly. You may not be their closest confidant, sure, but you will know them, and that is exceedingly important. By making these interpersonal connections with others, you will then learn to care for them, even if you do not realize it. Care Ethics, in its entirety, is full of many nuances when it comes to the idea of caretaking. Most will think of this in the sense of healthcare when, in reality, caretaking can be as simple as providing a friend with their favorite food when they come over. Or, in this instance, caretaking is the art of learning about the members of your community. Per Dodds, “[t]he development of autonomy competence is importantly intersubjective and is fostered through relationships of trust, respect, and recognition...” (Dodds, n.d., pg. 2). The idea of autonomy is central to the idea of care, for we are all autonomous beings who can make our own decisions, to at least a base degree. In acting autonomously, we must understand the importance of forging close interpersonal relationships with others—ones that are built on respect and recognition, as Dodds says. Autonomy is a great gift, and it should be used to expand our own knowledge and protect those who exist peripherally—and closely—around us in our daily lives. You must forge connections with those you perceive as different, because you will learn invaluable things from these people who come from places outside of your social circle. Additionally, your life is infinitely improved if the lives of those around you are good, because the fortune befalling them will,

inevitably, make its way back to you. To care for others means to know them, and to know them means you will see the intrinsic value that all people have to offer. As Held says, “The ethics of care values the ties we have with particular other persons... those motivated by the ethics of care would seek to become more admirable relational persons in better caring relations.” (Held, 2006, pg. 14). The relationships we forge with others, regardless of the circumstances that brought two or more people together, are infinitely important and valuable to us. There are few things that provide us with as much insight into the lives of others as simply getting to know someone else. We do not—and cannot—possibly hope to know every person we have ever come across. But, we can do our part to get to know the “others” that make their way to our communities. We can share the burdens they may or may not bring with them, because this sharing of strife only serves to make a community that much more powerful. To further prevent friction, a community must help those currently struggling within that very same community. To understand why struggles often befall communities, it is important to acknowledge that the reasons are not often related to people—the outsiders making their way into the community you have forged—but, rather, the fact that there are institutions and organizations who directly benefit from the infighting and violence caused when people believe outsiders are the reasons for strife.

But the question raised by Care Ethics is this; why do we need to care? It is not our job to form strong bonds with the people around us, even if it does, in many regards, improve the

quality of our lives—we are not obligated to do so. We can live happily without knowing others on a deeper level, so why should we? If we can live a life without experiencing friction and discord, then why do we need to form interpersonal relationships with others to prevent this? That, itself, is the answer; struggle befalls almost every member of a community at some point (and to varying degrees), but a burden that can be shared is a burden that is lighter to carry. By forming close relationships with others, by getting to know them and their struggles, you can lighten their load—and that, in itself, is caring. Care Ethics stresses the importance of interpersonal relationships, and that the act of caring—no matter how simple it is—is a virtue. Care, in all instances, is not just something nice to have. Rather, it is a necessity for one to thrive in life. No matter how solitary one believes they are, it is nearly impossible to go through life without forging these relationships—without caring for others. As Held says, “[W]e should develop frameworks of caring about and for one another as human beings... We should care for one another as persons in need of a habitable environment with a sufficient absence of violence and with sufficient provision of care for human life to flourish. We need to acknowledge the moral values of the practices and family ties underlying the caring labor on which human life has always depended.” (Held, 2006, pg. 132). The act of caring goes much farther beyond the desire to provide for others; care itself is the promise to understand someone on a personal level, because these connections we form with others are what inspire us to care in the first place. Care is the foundation of a strong and flourishing

community, because the very act of caring ensures that you will know your neighbor. As Held, once again, puts it, “Care is both value and practice” (Held, 2006, pg. 1). The very idea of care seems simple, and in many instances, it is. The act of care can be done in endless ways, because the importance of care is less about the actions, and more about the reasons as to why you care in the first place. But, with this in mind, we must also remember that care is, in many ways, transactional, and that we need to be open to giving to others and taking away from them, while they give to us and take away in return. The emotional and relational aspects of humanity are what are important to the idea of Care Ethics; these concepts are what allow us to make choices that have moral weight, because emotional and relational connections are what give our lives meaning. This moral framework, when practiced and understood, is, perhaps, the biggest counter to a world in which you are expected to turn your back on the people around you. If we are expected to see outsiders as the enemy, then, by definition, care ethics makes this act impossible, because by knowing people, we see them as members of the community, not the “other.” As Anderson says, “If reducing vulnerability and maximizing inclusion were all that mattered, then the less ambitious and less demanding regimes would be preferable... [G]iven that there are participants for whom these more demanding social practices have real value... what reasons there might be for saying that the additional vulnerability these social practices bring with them might be normatively objectionable.” (Anderson, 2013, pg. 5). There are people who benefit from a social structure that encourages people to turn

their backs on outsiders to a community. This, unfortunately, is a fact of life. The very idea of an outsider is beneficial to devastating political regimes who build their campaigns on making the average citizen believe that newcomers—people who are different—are the enemy and should be ousted. In the wake of these climates, these movements, it is our moral duty to, in a world in which society separates based on perceptions of who is and is not worthy of being integrated into a community, to form interpersonal relationships with these very people, because those who benefit from the infighting are, perhaps, the true evil behind why we struggle in the first place. They are the ones who will voice the loudest objections to the idea of a society forged in interpersonal relations and care for those around us.

Premise 2 Justification: The idea of “us versus them” is profitable in adverse political climates. This concept, for a lack of a more formal term, makes a lot of very influential (and bad) people a lot of money. It garners them support by spoon-feeding people who are vulnerable to the manipulative propaganda that is necessary to radicalize them against the “other,” the outsiders to their beloved community. It is this propaganda that turns us, and it is to the benefit of the figureheads of fascist political movements for us to believe that these “others” are the reason why a community has come to experience strife and struggle. The very ideas of fascism, “glory of the state, unquestioning obedience to [the] leader[s], subordination of the individual... and harsh suppression of dissent” thrive in a country in which our base instincts are to turn against and baselessly attack the “them” in the

“us versus them” mindset (Brittanica, n.d., “Ideology and Rise of Fascism”). An outsider is not the enemy in many cases, because that very same perceived outsider, in the first place, is someone who is experiencing their own struggles. Unfortunately, though, many people have become so convinced—at the behest of powerful people—that the enemies are people just like them, people who are also inundated with strife. But it is with this convincing, this manipulation and propaganda, that we are to believe these people are nothing like us at all, and that these differences mean we must defend against them to protect our values. It is this infighting that is so beneficial, so profitable to political institutions, and this profit is why propaganda and manipulation continue to be around every corner. It is exceedingly easy to profit from the easily manipulated if you make them believe that your political enemies—or minoritized groups your campaigns seek to oust from communities—are to blame for their personal suffering and struggles in life. Let’s look, for example, at the Satanic Panic. This was a time marked by baseless witch hunts and accusations of ritual cult abuse being thrown out left and right. It was characterized by the “spread of occult themes” in music and other medias clashing devastatingly with “long-standing evangelical conspiracism” that created the modernday witch-hunts of the 90s (“The Devil is in The Details: An Analysis of the Satanic Panic, Brooks, 2024, pg. 19). The idea of ritualistic sexual abuse done by satanic cults tore through the United States, and suddenly, no one outside of your community was safe. The impact of race and social status during the panic cannot be overlooked; white and

wealthy families were accusing the poor and other outsiders to their tight-knit communities of affluence of committing these atrocious acts of abuse. In the 70s and 80s, countless marginalized groups were experiencing times of great progress, and these political successes meant that the United States had to acknowledge that they existed. With these acknowledgements came the idea that marginalized communities were intruding upon and damaging conservative lives. Every queer person or person of color accused of ritualistic abuse was done so out of fear of their growing and mounting civil rights movements in a time where the typical white nuclear family was a value the nation held dear. The accusers were emboldened by the support of Ronald Reagan, whose policies frequently outlined American values that ousted marginalized groups from communities. His outspoken support of the witch-hunts that baselessly targeted minorities during a time of progress was later referred to as “Reagan Satan.” His unsuccessful “war on drugs” that targeted people of color coincided almost perfectly with the widespread fear of children using drugs during the Panic; those who believed in the Satanic Panic applied the same stigmas to their own children, “fearing that drugs” would cause children to “fall astray from American values” and become like the “racist caricatures Reagan waged war against” (OutWrite, 2022, “Ronald Reagan and Creating the Conditions for Satanic Panic”). We see, once again, the idea of “us versus them” in modern times; this very concept has existed for centuries, and it is steeped into our country’s history. The truth of the Satanic Panic is this; there were no satanic cults abducting and abusing children,

and children were often less safe with those they knew than the caricatures of evil infiltrating white affluent communities. But these caricatures were so successful that, to this day, we still believe in ritual satanic abuse and cults that murder and sacrifice. The propaganda, however, goes far beyond painting Satanists as deviant monsters lurking around every corner. The idea remains the same; those different than you will only cause you and your similar community harm and struggle, so you must trust your leaders to make them go away and to keep you safe from deviancy.

But why are these manipulation and fear tactics so successful? It would seem near impossible to believe that the Satanic Panic was so widespread, but in the climate we live in now, it is like we are returning to those very same witch-hunts, just that they are simply repackaged and repurposed. However, the truth is, manipulation is so successful because our society is not built to forge interpersonal relationships or hold Care Ethics to a high personal standard. Propaganda, in the modern age, has become a “scientific process capable of influencing a whole nation of people,” and it does this so successfully because it is increasingly more and more subtle, being used as “political and social means” to “influence people's attitudes” (Stanford: EDGE, n.d., Bruck & Manzaria, “War & Peace: Media and War”). It is so easy to circle the wagons around your community to protect yourself and your family from perceived outsiders who bring nothing but devastation with them because we have been convinced that this is our only way to succeed in life and not fall into devastation ourselves. President Reagan

needed the country to fear outsiders to their communities because it directly benefitted him and his administration. The current political climate in our country is doing exactly this; we are encouraged to turn on our neighbors and fear those different than ourselves, because if we are distracted by infighting, then we are unaware that the true reasonings behind strife that happens in our communities are these very same political figureheads. If we, the “little guys,” are so focused on attacking one another at the community level, then the “big guys” never have to worry about losing their power or political influence. Thus, it is our moral duty to prioritize and uphold Care Ethics in our daily lives—if not for the benefit of others, then for ourselves. If we are able to form deeply personal relationships with others, if we can understand the importance of care and understanding, then we are automatically doing our absolute best to push back against administrations that want nothing more than for the country at a community level to dissent and fight. If we are split, then we are distracted from what is truly causing us harm and making struggling so common. But if we are unified at the most basic level—in our own communities—then we are socially aware to a degree that threatens the institutions that profit from our struggles. This is the true “us versus them.” “Us” is not a community versus outsiders, rather, a community that includes those who go against societal dogma, versus “them” as the representation of a government that does not have the best interests of its citizens in mind.

V. Objections & Rebuttals

a. *Objection to Premise 1:* Care Ethics is full of inconsistencies in how it demands one responds to the fundamentals of the moral theory. It is exceedingly ambiguous when it comes to the ideas of care. What counts as care? When has someone formed a deep enough relationship with another? This moral principle lacks the ability to provide concrete guidance for someone's ethical actions, and thus, should not be how an individual wanting to form close bonds with others to truly see them should attempt to live this virtuous life. These discrepancies also impact how someone would, in theory, subscribe to other ethical principles in addition to Care Ethics; shouldn't a moral theory that demands one forms close interpersonal relationships with others to provide virtuous care be compatible with other moral principles that do the same thing? This ethical standard is not universally applicable and should be viewed as such; it, on the surface, sounds like an answer to various inequalities and inequities plaguing our society, when, in reality, Care Ethics cannot be applied successfully to every situation. Care Ethics is, too, extremely parochial regarding the scope of who one subscribed to this standard should actually care about ("Care Ethics | Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy" , Sander-Staudt, n.d.). If the basis of this principle is to see care as a virtue, why, in many instances of analysis and study, are caregivers excused from caring about others they do not know well? It is impossible to utilize this moral principle on the basis of forming a close community, because, by many definitions, people are not morally obligated to care for distant others—and these people will never stop being these distant others if no one

forms connections with them, seeing as they have no obligation to do so.

i. *Response to Objection of Premise 1:* It is absolutely right to acknowledge that Care Ethics—like all moral and ethical principles—have countless shortcomings and hypocrisies built into its fundamentals. So, it is just, in my opinion, to say that these instances are not indicative of Care Ethics at all, because they involve fundamental misunderstandings of the basic principles exemplified in this ethical standard. They are not true examples of shortcomings associated with this moral principle. I do not believe that someone who refuses to turn their care toward someone they do not know truly subscribes to the ideas presented in Care Ethics, because they are proving that they do not understand what it means to see care as a virtue. Virtues should be extended to all, and that especially means those who exist outside of your social circles, because these people are not receiving the benefits of a social circle at all. We need to analyze closely those who use Care Ethics as a way to justify their unjust actions; we cannot call someone who does not promote a universal idea of care a beacon of hope to those struggling to practice Care Ethics. The idea of forming close and intimate interpersonal connections with others does not exist when someone does not extend this grace to those removed from them. It is true that we cannot solve all inequities and inequalities with Care Ethics (though a world in which we could might be a better world entirely) but it is important to try to do so, and the first step in making these attempts is understanding why many people do not uphold this ethical standard at all. It is because

they do not have the ability to comprehend why they should care for people who they do not know, not understanding that caring for them in the first place is how you get to know someone. When discussing the lack of rules provided in Care Ethics, it is important to understand that the gaps in the “concrete guidance” are meant to be filled in by one's own understanding of the principle. Ethics cannot lay all of the groundwork for making someone into a better person; if that were the case, ethical principles would serve no greater purpose, because people would only subscribe to them to make themselves look better. There are purposeful holes in Care Ethics, much like all ethical standards, to allow individuals to use their own knowledge to inform their decisions. It is a delicate balance between following the guidelines that are set out to aid people in their decisions and following one's own instincts regarding care. The fundamentals that are there exist to guide us when we struggle to begin to make a decision—they are not there to make the decision for us.

b. Objection to Premise 2: So, you are denying the fact that, to many, outsiders to their community are actually the reason for strife? What about the countless people who have been harmed by strangers—murdered or assaulted to the extreme degree, or simply just insulted or disregarded in their everyday lives? You cannot expect people who have been harmed by those outside of their community to simply put it behind them, to work with them on seeing the “true” enemy, because to these victims, the enemy is right in front of them. It is a shame that they will not, in many cases, be able to see past this, but it is

inconsiderate to what they have gone through to expect them to do so. You cannot force them to get over it in the name of the greater good—the absolute worst thing to ever happen in their life has already happened, and in their eyes, it was not the fault of a greater political power. The idea that the “us versus them” mentality only further causes strife, when it sometimes is the only thing keeping select people safe, is an insult to victims. It is simple for you to look past it, because you do not understand their personal strife, but vile actions against another are not so easily forgotten and forgiven, even in the name of the “greater good” of all people. Thus, it is futile to try and fight against the institutions currently at play in our country, because there is nothing we, at the community level, could possibly do to overturn centuries of political workings when we cannot even get people united on a small front. By encouraging people harmed in the idea of togetherness to look past the terrible things that have befallen them or their community, it only serves to make them that much more unwilling to engage in that very same idea of togetherness in the first place. It does more harm than good, because you have only served to turn swaths of people away from understanding how important it is to realize when they have been manipulated and radicalized. This understanding of interpersonal relationships is extremely narrow and unwelcoming to those who have, in fact, been hurt by the people they are now demanded to work together with for the name of the greater good.

i. Response to Objection of Premise 2: While it is true that, in many unfortunate and sad instances, outsiders to a community have been

the reason for strife, this objection becomes irrelevant when one realizes that it has been statistically proven that someone is more likely to be victimized and harmed by someone they already know. This, itself, is a terrible outcome of the political propaganda spit by parties and institutions in power—and a consequence we often do not think about. Why would we? It should be a given that what our government tells us is to be trusted; in many instances, it does work out for people, and these successes should not be understated. However, for many, keeping an eye on people you do not truly know means you are dividing your attention away from where, sadly, it matters most—the people you do know. It becomes that much easier for someone you know to victimize you if you have been taught to be wary of people who look and act nothing like them. If you, since you were a child, have been implored to watch out for the man in the white van offering you candy, then you will never turn your attention toward the people in your own neighborhood—sometimes, in many sad instances, even the people in your own home. These terrible situations are just countless other examples of how damaging the idea of “us versus them” becomes, because it blinds millions to the idea that oftentimes the worst thing to ever happen in your life will happen at the hands of someone who knows you—someone you trust implicitly. Even if we look past this, call it irrelevant to the objection at play here, outsiders to a community who do bad things are themselves victims of the propaganda that makes people believe that those different from them are all bad people. There is no denying that in a situation like this, nobody wins. The victim, obviously, has

just had something inconceivable happen to them, and is rightly impacted by it. But the perpetrator, too, does not win; they have just done something terrible, and are also now playing directly into the hands of political institutions who want nothing more than for everyone to believe that this is how all members of that community act to others. This is not to say that they are exempt of blame and should not have their actions handled appropriately—they still would have done heinous things to another—but in a world where your community has been painted to be the “bad guys” in countless situations, is it not easy to just give in and let the stereotypes be true? It is near impossible to avoid. It sounds inconceivable, but that just proves that we are lucky enough to have never been on the receiving end of terrible propaganda spewed about people like us. Again, these people are not to be seen as guiltless and perfect, but it is incredibly important to understand that there are countless and nuanced reasons why someone may act in ways that harm others. It is unfortunate that many of these reasons are the direct consequences of hateful words spewed by those in charge who are supposed to serve the needs of all people.

VI. Conclusion

It is a saddening and undeniable truth that, at some point in our lives, we (or someone we know well) will struggle—and that these struggles will seem to be the end of the world. They will make us angry, they will make us feel hopeless, and, most importantly, they will make us want to find someone to blame for them. It is this need, this desire to pin the blame on others, that drives us to consider

“us versus them” as a justifiable and strong answer to why we and our community have fallen on hard times. But, is it truly just us thinking in this way, or is there something else encouraging us to do so? Political propaganda has done nothing but encourage likeminded people to circle the wagons around them and their personal values, excluding and ostracizing those who are different—who seem to pose any sort of threat to the status quo. Those that are seen as outsiders to our lives and our communities are, often, among the first to be shunned and blamed for friction and strife within the very same groups we have found strength in. Shouldn’t this strength and togetherness extend to these outsiders, too? We too were once outsiders to the company we now find ourselves enjoying—in times of strife, shouldn’t we welcome newcomers, for they, too, are struggling? People are afraid of what (and who) they do not understand, and in the current political climate we find ourselves in, there is nothing more profitable to the regime in charge than infighting at the community level—it is practically an insurance policy for their next campaigns, because no one will have had the time to analyze their actions and want them out. In caring for others, by holding Care Ethics to high personal standards, we are able to fight the very same institutions often at fault for causing us to struggle in the first place. The idea that it is “us versus them” is morally indefensible when one realizes that we are all the same. We are all at a disadvantage when faced with the fact that those whom we trust to protect us at a governmental level are, in fact, working against our best interests and profiting from our struggle. Care Ethics, fundamentally, is

the greatest counter to these political institutions; they want us to fight, because if we do, then we are hopelessly distracted from the fact that they are the reason why we all must struggle in the first place. But, if we forge ahead, see past the idea that “us” is a community and “them” are the outsiders, then we will build the interpersonal relationships necessary to understand that “us versus them” does, in fact, exist. It just does not exist in the way that is most profitable to those in charge; “us versus them” is our community—no outsiders to speak of, because we know them on a deeper level—versus “them” being the regimes and political parties in charge who have attempted to blind us to the idea that we are all in the same sinking lifeboat.

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My name is Robin Mullin, and I'm a forensic science and biology student from South Hadley, Massachusetts! With my degrees, I hope to work in a lab doing medical research to start out, but really, my true passion lies in environmental science and conservation work. I've always been an animal lover, and I care deeply about the climate; it's something I can really see myself doing, and it's why I've been pursuing a degree in biology to begin with! Bears are my absolute favorite animal (I've even sculpted one entirely out of clay), and The Metamorphosis by Franz Kafka is my favorite classic novella.

Wallpaper
By
Anya Misage
Winner, Creative Writing

Something like a year ago I took a mostly unremarkable trip to western mass to see Emily Dickinson's house. It was my mom's idea. Past that I can't really say why I agreed to go.

It's too early in the morning, because that's how my mom works, and it's making it so I already do not want to be there. The group wanders through the house in the sort of aimless drifting balloon way of all museum tours. There's a short speech for every room. In the months since, whatever form it took has been lost.

It's all fragments now.

I remember this much:

The wallpaper in her room was a replica of the original.
She was an agoraphobic shut-in for most of her adult life.
She never married and was probably in love with her best friend.
She used a lot of dashes — but I knew this already.

I left with two notebooks and no good rationale for getting them. Thirty dollars for replica wallpaper and the poet's own handwriting, own command: *tell all the truth but tell it slant*.

I really wish I could do that. The notebooks have sat empty for thirteen months. Is it that I don't think I have anything worthy of them or is it that I have nothing to say? Does it have to be poetry? Can you tell that poetry has never really been something I've understood? Is this even a poem?

I think reading poetry makes me feel worse because it feels so effortless, puts into sharp relief the jagged stops and starts of my own attempts to capture some vague concept of art. Emily Dickinson's poems were only published after she died. Maybe they weren't so easy to write. But I still wonder whether or not they felt like pulling teeth.

I guess I wonder what my mom thinks, too. Wonder how obvious it was that I was watching for her reactions. If she recognized the recognition that I felt there in that house. What she thought of taking the wallpaper with me. I wonder what she thinks when I barely leave the house. I know she worries.

I'm not gonna be a poet, mom, I've said to her, but I've never been able to promise much else.