# The "Brothers" Project

The current study is a follow up to *What count as literacy for 2JS' century youth: Two case studies of adolescent boys and their use of storytelling to engage in writing practice* (Araujo & Araujo, 2021).

In general, we found that the writing activities James engaged out of school were things he "cared about" and therefore these writings became "easy" or as Csikszentmihalyi (1990) calls it, *effortless* in the characteristic flow experience. School writings, on the other hand were

"assigned" with little input from students and often provided a satisfactory reason response but lacked style and effective use of commentary or elaboration.

Anthony's out of school writing was central to self. Altogether, his writing represented an ability to choose a narrow topic, use stylistic effects to convey meaning, and can gather and organize information about a topic skillfully.

Our attempt with this current study is to continue to understand their writing trajectories two years later as one is now a senior in high school preparing essays responses for college applications and the other a junior at a tier 1 university in the southwest and a beat writer for the school newspaper.

# Goals of the Current Project

The goal of this project is to explore the actions, reactions, and transactions of two young men as they engage in powerful writing to prepare them for college entrance or a career in journalism. The question guiding this inquiry will be:

1. What writing principles, processes and practices do a twelfth-grade mainstream student and a junior university student engage in as they write for college, industry, and life.

# Fit in Writing Research

This future paper fits within the adolescent and young adult literacy grouping. With respect to methodological perspectives is an instrumental case study (Stake, 2000) as we are looking for insight into a single issue of writing preparedness for adolescent young men. The focus of the study is to understand the writing practices of two mixed-race brothers who are negotiating the writing expectations for university entrance and professional life. We plan to use this study to provide an explanation as to what practices young male adults employ as they are in the midst of entering post-secondary education.

The audience that will connect to this work include researchers who are looking into post-secondary preparation, writing development of adolescents, self-efficacy, and the influence of writing for a profession on writing development.

# Key Writing Theorists

Charles Bazerman, Sociocultural theories of writing, and other models of writing Richard Beach, Writing development

Steve Graham, Theories, writing research and instruction in US schools John Hayes & Linda Flower, Writing and its theoretical models

George Hillocks Jr., Writing as a reflective practice, argumentative writing Charles MacArthur, Writing and its instruction

The brothers project: The writing trajectories of two young men as they prepare for college, career, and life

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*Keywords:* adolescent and adult writing, college entry essay responses, informational writing, writing for life, post-secondary writing

# Introduction

The writing practices of high school adolescent learners is far different than those of university undergraduate students. In 2022, high school seniors are facing the reality of composing stories and essays that require a skillset few masters during their high school years, while university junior students are at their beginning stages of developing writing practices that prepare them for their professional careers and life. In this paper, the authors will focus on an adolescent and young adult who are in different school settings (high school and university) and hold different world views about the purpose of writing. One sees writing as a tool to "see the world" while the other thinks of writing as a key to professional success and a way to meet people. The findings of our case studies, aim to understand more about how writing integrates in their life and how their engagement with this learning tool creates avenues of self-exploration and challenging perspectives and views.

# How Writing is Learned and Done

The development of writing skills happens over time as people engage in situations that require them to problem solve (Bazerman, 2016). These skills are sometimes dependent on the

situations writers engage in, the genres in which they write, and their ability to fully engage with the topic at hand. As people engage in these meaningful situations, their trajectories will depend on their connection to the topic, the context they were in, and their writing abilities at that point in time.

As writers move from high school settings to university their writing will require

refinement with respect to genre, voice, the development of a claim, and effectiveness in which they present their thinking on the evidence from whatever source materials they use. Engaging in varied writing situations (as Bazerman puts it) in and outside of school provides writers the attunement they will need when they find themselves problem solving to write for specific genres like university entrance essays.

Hillocks (2002) reminded us, too, that ''writing is the production of meaning. Writing is

thinking," not simply grammar, punctuation, or sentence structure. Still, twenty years after his seminal work relating to writing assessments high school curriculum still focuses on the passing of end of course exams. Teaching and learning, at its best, will still not fully prepare students for future writing situations including writing university entrance exam essays and therefore more qualitative investigations are needed to understand what writers they as compose for college, career, and life.

# High School Writing and College Preparedness

In 2006, The Alliance for Excellent Education reported that more than 7000 students dropped out of high school every day because they lacked basic reading and writing skills to experience success in school. Today, the graduation rate stands at its highest at nearly 84.6%, yet nearly 70% of those students entering two-year institutions require writing remediation. The disconnect between graduation rate and college writing remediation is a cause for alarm as there

appears to be a difference between what high school writing implies and how that equals to success in college-level English composition and other writing intensive undergraduate courses. Therefore, it is necessary to understand further (in real time) the writing practices and processes students are engaging in at the time of university application and then again once they are during their professional careers.

What type of writing instruction prepares high school students for writing college admission application essays that will improve their chances of being admitted to a university of their choice? In a small-scale study described by Aukerman and Beach (2018), 41 high school seniors indicated varying perceptions of how to write a college application essay and of their own writing efficacy. Aukerman and Beach ascertained that high school students will benefit from support to help them understand how to conceptualize the task of writing the essay, who the audience is, and their writing strengths. Suggestions for teachers included providing first-draft feedback with appreciation of writing strengths, role playing the audience, brainstorming traits and/or abilities perceived as helpful for college success, framing an argument to indicate how their traits and/or abilities will ensure college success, opportunities to have face-to-face dialogues with local college admissions personnel, and analyzing examples of colleges.

Like the Aukerman and Beach (2018) study, our current study will pose questions to James about his perceptions of the college admissions application essays regarding the task in general, the audience reading the essays, the purpose of the essays, and his self-efficacy as a writer. Starting Summer 2022 and into the beginning of his senior year of high school, James has been writing co11ege admissions application. His first drafts have indicated a need for additional support to guide him through conceptualization of the task, the audience, and the argument that he would be a successful college student.

# Authentic Writing Experiences

Why should and how do teachers provide authentic writing experiences for students?

Wargo (2020) conceptualizes authentic writing on a spectrum from latent authenticity to functional authenticity. Latent authentic writing assignments offer students the opportunity to engage in writing that is like real world contexts, but are written primarily for the teacher, whereas functional authentic writing affords students the opportunity to engage in writing that has a real-world purpose and is completed for a real audience outside of the context of school. Wargo (2020) provides examples and describes how teachers can learn to recognize opportunities to add functional authentic writing components to assignments when possible and reasonable.

As Anthony embarks on his junior year of college, he brings with him multiple authentic

writing experiences across the spectrum of latent to functional as described by Wargo (2020). Anthony has written many papers for an audience of one- his teacher - and for an audience of several - teacher and peers-and he has also written for an audience of many as a news reporter for his university's student newspaper. Anthony has written for academic genres and everyday genres in the domains of school, home, and his workplace, all the while building the foundation of self-identification as a writer.

# Inquiry Question

The findings of the project will be in the form of case studies since this methodology aligns with the purpose of this research as we attempt to uncover what is happening to the writing of James and Anthony. To understand their writing trajectories the following question guides this study:

1. What writing principles, processes and practices do a twelfth-grade mainstream student and a junior university student engage in as they write for college, industry, and life?

# Overview of the Methodology

**Methodology**

Case study (Dyson & Geneshi, 2005; Yin, 1994) is appropriate for the purposes of studying the practices these two adolescent young men because this study requires "an intensive, holistic approach of a single (or multiple) entity, phenomenon, or social unit (Merriam, 1988, p. 16). This descriptive non-experimental design (Creswell, 1994; Merriam, 1988) provides researchers like us a way to better understand the complexities of adolescent and adult literacy. Stake (2000) suggests that we are attempting to employ an *instrumental* case study design as we are looking into insight about one single issue.

# Setting

The writing sessions will take place in a suburban middle-class community in the Dallas­ Fort Worth area, and at a university apartment complex in Waco, Texas.

# Participants

# Table 1 provides a overview of the characteristics of the two participants in this study.

# *Table 1 Participant Characteristics*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| *Name* | *Gender* | *Native**Language* | *Grade**Level* | *Major* | *English AP Exam* | *HS Grade Point Average* | *University**Grade**Point Average* |
| *James* | *Male* | *English* | *High School Senior* | *High School**Degree* | *Passed* | *3.71* | *N/A* |
| *Anthony* | *Male* | *English* | *Undergraduate**Junior* | *Journalism* | *Did not Pass* | *3.03* | *3.1* |

**James: Portraiture of a High School Senior**

James is a seventeen-year-old mixed-race male. He is the youngest of two. At school he excels in school and sports. At home he plays video games and works at a local sports complex where he manages the kitchen. Although, he earns high marks in English and literature classes he considers himself an average writer. Anthony is a twenty-year old mixed-race male. He is the oldest of two. At the university, he is a B student who often struggles to finish his course writing assignments. Interestingly however, the writing assignments for his news beat with the newspaper are often early or on time.

(More writing here relating to James)

**Anthony: Portraiture of a University Junior**

 Anthony is a twenty-year-old junior who has become immersed in his journalism major. As previously written, he is a gamer who spends most of his free time socializing on online platforms, including real time game discussions, multi-player games, and an occasional social gathering. At the university, Anthony spent his freshman year taking courses in an online format due to the COVID 19 pandemic. In high school, he enjoyed writing fantasy and fiction stories. During senior year in high school, he became disengaged and often bored because he says his teachers focused on test preparation for students who needed to pass the end of the course exams required by the state of Texas.

 At the university, Anthony says that writing for the school newspaper made him a better writer as he was expected to write to articles a week. He spoke about how writing for the newspaper made him a better interviewer, grew in the capacity of drafting and asking questions, learned to develop and support claims, connect the claims to commentary, write findings, and connect the paper to a central idea or message.

(More writing here relating to Anthony)

# Types of Documentation

The three types of data that we will collect to document the study are: (1) pre-entry interviews. (2) during writing interviews. and (3) writing artifacts. The researchers will do participant interviews during the fall 2022 and spring 2023.

**Participant Interviews.** Semi structured participant interviews will be conducted periodically during the summer and fall semesters both by phone and through Zoom. The purpose of these interviews will be to discuss using a question and response technique James• and Anthony's experiences with respect to their writing, then the plan is to ask for follow up questions that arise during the one-on-one conversations.

**Writing Artifacts.** Writing artifacts will be collected of university final essays submissions for James and course and newspaper clippings for Anthony. In the findings section, the major focus will be to analyze at least three papers for each of the participants. James' papers will be in the form of narrative essays addressing props for the Texas Common Application and/or university specific prompts. Anthony's papers will relate to course submission for junior level journalism courses.

# Data Collection

The types of data that will be collected during this study are observational notes, draft and finished writing artifacts, newspaper clippings. and feedback from editors and teachers.

**Data Analysis**

Data analysis will occur during fall 2022 and spring 2023 semesters. We will analyze the

documents using the N-Vivo qualitative software. We plan to read the writing submissions. score the responses using the six traits (or similar) writing instrument We also plan to read the feedback given by the teachers. and editors to gain rich understand of how others see their writing expertise. After multiple readings. inputting the data set into N-Vivo. and meeting

the two participants for member checking the researchers will generate codes, and themes that align with the research questions.

# Findings

In this section, the researchers will discuss the themes that emerge from the writing artifacts, and one on one interviews with the two participants.

**Themes**

*Learning to Support Claims through Evidence and Sources*

-present James and Anthony work samples (see appendices) with a focus on ideas, *voice, argument development, interpretation of evidence, word choice, and organization.*

*Writing for High School did not Prepare James nor Anthony for College Writing*

-present expectations from one-on-one interviews and a focus group.

*Writing Feedback is the Difference That Makes the Difference*

-present peer written feedback and how it helped to improve Anthony’s writing.

*Building a Writer’s Perspective: From Satisfactory to Compelling*

**-**present evidence from interviews. Present evidence from writing through tone and style.

*Writing to Understand the World*

-present narrative from one-on-one interviews to connect writing practice to building a world view.

**Findings (continued)**

The researchers will also provide strengths and needs for both James and Anthony as it relates to their narrative and informational writing samples.

The researchers will also discuss the persistence of problems that exists because of the different writing expectations between school, work, and home.

The researchers will provide evidence and commentary relating to age-appropriate writing stamina, building control of conventions, punctuation, and style.

# Discussions and Implications

#  Teaching and Learning

Although this study focuses on the writing practices for James and Anthony that happen outside of the school curriculum, their writing events (situations) will be interconnected to their in-school experiences. Therefore, in this section the authors will attempt to include suggestions for high school teachers, and university professors who teach the composition Freshman and Sophomore courses.

**Applications to Secondary Teacher Education and University Faculty Professional Development**

Although content area teachers hold credentials in their field of study (i.e., English Education), very few hold extensive practical experience relating to providing feedback beyond the form and function of language (cite). *Present findings from two research studies here.*

# Implications for Future Writing Research

In this section the authors will discuss what researchers can do to inform the field about what works for young adult males. In our review of the literature to date, we have not found many peer reviewed publications that address this special population.

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Appendix A-Anthony’s Creative Writing Sample

**Event Horizon**

Paul was sinking. Submerging himself further and further into the comfort of his leather refuge, his mind cleansed of any semblance of thought as he grazed through an endless catalogue of cable channels. Each click of the remote echoed throughout the living room in a mind-numbing rhythm, in duet with the pattering of rain upon its windows. If this is what it means to be sober, then sobriety can go to hell.

He looked up at the ceiling and groaned. Only 5 days since Emilia’s life was stolen from her. And since that dreaded day, it was as if the world began to rot at the foundations. He never deserved her presence in his life. After all, she never would have died had it not been for him.

“What the *hell*?” Emilia’s last words bounced around his head, ears ringing with each thud on the inside of his skull. Her shock was understandable, a bullet in the abdomen isn’t something one expects on a night out. She was only a senior in college, after all. But a gnawing feeling always crept into Paul’s head, a tugging notion that it must have meant something more. Was it a spurned condemnation of the shooter? Or was it disappointment at her own boyfriend’s betrayal?

Paul reached over the gap between the couch and its accompanying coffee table, grasping for something to turn his mind toward. His fingers clasped around a translucent orange container. Absent of mind, he began to flick at its cap, his nail scraping across the lips of its clinically white surface. He thought back on his internal declaration. Of course, this was what sobriety is like. It was never going to be easy, and how foolish to expect otherwise. But why, then, did he still feel such self-pity?

The cap fell, hitting the tile floor with a noise that cut through the air like a windmill. He must have twisted it off in his trance. But as he reached down to retrieve the distraction, his eyes widened, and the fugue shattered. His hands began to tremble, fighting to expel the terror from his body. But it was no use. In his desire to escape routine, he grabbed the one thing tethering him back to his worst vice. And now it lay empty on the ground, taunting him with the absence of its contents. Opioids. God damned pills.

“I threw those out. I swear, I threw them out,” Paul’s mind raced as he dug through his memories to make sense of how a singular bottle could have escaped his cleansing. But it didn’t matter how. It was right there, staring him down, begging him to indulge in its familiarity.

He shook his head and picked up the bottle, fingers still cold and mouth dry. In a single motion, he lifted the lid of the kitchen trash can and threw the object of his ire into its depths. Propping himself up on the mouth of the container, he collected himself and caught his breath. He had to go somewhere else. Anywhere else. He walked toward the front door of his abode, throwing a winter coat over his shoulders and leaving through the frame into the cold Jersey night.

He looked back at his house as he strode down the driveway, a deep pit in his stomach. It stunk of unfulfilled dreams and false promises. Of his own failures. He stepped into his car and shrunk into its seat. It didn’t matter where he went. If it was far away from the house, he would go there. He dragged the car into reverse and left, not looking back.

Paul drove through the winter storm, snowflakes flying past the windshield and sticking upon it in equal measure. He had no destination in mind, but continued forward, directing the steering wheel as naturally as one bends their fingers. As he forged ahead, his mind danced around, entertaining an infinite stream of ideas on where he could head next. A small grin fell upon his face as he considered the possibilities. He could visit Time’s Square across the river, meet new people, see the winter decorations. If even for a night he could take his mind off that house, it would be worth the trouble. But darkness seeped into these thoughts. He couldn’t tell what exactly it was, but a thick, black ink stained his thoughts with doubt. Were small, tiny capsules all that could keep him sane? He ground his teeth beneath his lips, his frustration aimless but potent.

Nearing a red light at a busy intersection, Paul took the lead in the leftmost lane. He tapped his thumb on the cool plastic of the steering wheel, matching the rhythm of the tune quietly emanating from the radio. Tap, tap, tap. He would hum to the tune, were his mind not clouded by that thick, black ink.

The light was still red. How long can a light be red for? The cars in the rightmost lane slowed to a halt as the green light for the central lanes turned orange, and then red. His eyes widened, and hands went cold. Pills, he could get more. The opportunity stared him in the face. Tap, tap, tap. If there was any time, it was now. All he had to do was take the jump. Tap, tap, tap. Cars on the perpendicular lanes began their march, taking flight as their wheels propelled them toward the other end of the intersection. The tapping stopped. Paul shut his eyes and sunk his full weight onto the accelerator. As darkness took over his vision, silence filled his ears and the ink subsided.

Paul's eyes shot open. He was on the couch again, back in the comfort of his own home. Outside, he heard the distant scream of ambulance sirens and the tweeting of songbirds. The lights were on, and there was someone rustling in the kitchen. An aroma of ground coffee beans floated through the air, warming his nostrils with a cozy, familiar sensation.  But this moment of euphoria was short-lived, as an all-too-familiar sick feeling coursed through his body. Paul sighed as he looked over to see an orange bottle holding red pills sitting on the coffee table. Almost empty. Without thinking, he extended his arm to grasp at the container. Light footsteps grew nearer from across the tile.

“What the hell, Paulie?” A voice reverberated from above him as cool, thin fingers coiled around his wrist from behind the sofa. He sluggishly raised his head to see frowning face meeting eyes with him. Emilia.

“I thought you threw that shit out a week ago.”

Paul wiped his eyes and sighed. “Listen, Emil, this is the last batch, I swear. I haven’t spoken to him since our last deal.”

“It’s always the ‘last time’ with you.” Emilia’s fingers loosened and she raised her palm to her head. “Listen, I just want to have a nice dinner tomorrow. But if you’re going to be out of your mind, I don’t know how the hell we’re going to make it work.”

The fogginess flushed from Paul’s head and he flicked his body upward, placing his hand on Emilia’s from where it rested on the head of the couch. “Hey, hey, babe. Relax. I promise, I’ll be good. I’ll throw out the rest.”

Whether he was looking at an expression of sadness or frustration, Paul didn’t know, but he recognized at that moment that Emilia hated what she saw. He hated it too.

Emilia lifted her hand from under Paul’s and strode toward the front door. She fastened her purse over her shoulder with one arm and turned the doorknob with the other and walked out without a word. As the door was pulled shut, Paul noticed that the wailing ambulance had ceased its cries. Finally.

He extended his arm once again to cusp his hands around the crystalline container and shook it in his hands, scanning the cargo with clear eyes. Then, in no show of grace, he downed the remaining capsules in one swallow. Like hell he was going to waste a perfectly good product. Satisfied, he laid his head back down and dozed back off into heavy slumber. But the darkness that came this time was not restful.

Consciousness flicked on like a light. The New York streets were dimly lit, the sun just beginning to crest on the horizon. The street was slick with rainwater after a day of gentle showers. It was all as he remembered it being on that fateful day, but it felt... different. He was smaller. Lighter. Long hair draped around his neck and the warm touch of an arm wrapped around his shoulders. Its grip was long and slender, but reassuring. He finally looked up to see the source of this comfort.

Paul met eyes with the figure walking beside him. It *was* him. A clear, perfect recreation of himself. But the apparition had an expression on its face that was unfamiliar to him. It was joyous and loving. It had a genuine warmth to it that Paul had forgotten he could feel. And it was in this moment of introspection that he realized when and where he was. His consciousness was not in his own body, but Emilia’s. And the evening, ever ingrained in his memory, was exactly as he remembered it, as they walked down the black streets of New York. Paul’s — or rather, Emilia’s — body seemed to compulsively shiver at the realization.

“Your allergies acting up?” The reflection’s face changed from jubilant to concerned.

“Yeah, must be the rain from earlier.” Paul felt Emilia's mouth open to speak, but the words that escaped his mouth were not his. They were Emilia’s.

“Better get you home then!” The reflection lowered its arms to Emilia’s knees and swept her off her feet. A bellyful of laughter escaped from her mouth as she registered the sudden movement, her nose now flushed with red from a combination of cold weather and compulsive giggling. The reflection entered a brisk jog with Emilia in hand, the two giggling and sneaking looks at each other along the way.

Through Emilia’s eyes, Paul saw his past self with an unfamiliar aura. Not only was his vision tied to hers, but intangible sensations flooded into his consciousness as well. Feelings of love, empathy, and ambition — a welcoming warmth. But entangled within this comfort was an amalgam of darker, colder jagged edges. Disappointment. Regret. A tight pain wrapped so tight around one’s heart that it might just burst. And yet these gnawing feelings were being repressed, hidden somewhere that no one would be able to find them. Until now.

“Were you really holding these feelings in the whole time?” The reflection said as it broke its stride. Its confident demeanor was shattered, its speech devolving into a sputtering mess. The memory was warping. “Emilia, if I had known, I never would have—”

“Oh, please,” she said in response as she dropped to her feet from his now-trembling hands. The redness on her nose had spread across her face as tears began to well in her eyes. “Don’t pretend you couldn’t see how much your fucking addiction tore me down. And of course, it was that oh-so-irresistible craving of yours that killed me in the end.”

“I wasn’t in my right mind, but I wasn’t trying to rope you into it! I just—” The reflection was now on its back foot as Emilia claimed the ground between them.

“Don’t you start with that! I tried to get you to seek help at every turn, you just didn’t take advantage of a single damn opportunity.”

While Paul viewed the altercation from Emilia’s perspective, he could feel every bite of her venomous words as they lashed at the reflection’s skin. But in truth, none of these revelations surprised him at all. He knew she was suffering in silence, but he was simply too cowardly to confront it.

“I’m sorry. I’m so, so sorry.” The reflection dropped to its knees; the front of its pants now dampened by residual rainwater. It crushed its eyelids together, fighting back tears.

“‘Sorry’ won’t start my heartbeat again, and it won’t undo your addiction or the hurt it caused.” Emilia wiped the tears from her cheeks and straightened her posture. She now towered over the kneeling apparition, barely lowering her head to gaze down.  “I’m not sure you can ever make things right, really. You chose to steal those pills, and I paid the price for it.”

The reflection tensed its hands into fists, seeming to mimic exactly what Paul was feeling in his consciousness. That’s right. She was killed directly because of him. Because he *needed* one more dose. Because he just *had* to steal from his dealers, when he knew exactly how they treated thieves. Because there was *no other way*, right?

“You won’t be able to tie things up nicely, it’s definitely too late for that.” She let her body loosen and sighed. “But you need to move forward and get help. There’s no point in having two casualties come from this mess.”

The reflection’s body went limp. Paul’s consciousness seemed to fade in and out as his vision went black. When he opened his eyes, he saw Emilia’s face looking down at him. He was back in his own body.

“Take control of your life for once,” she said, her eyes now filled with a fire that seemed to make the water around them turn to vapor. “Enough with the excuses. Enough with depending on others to make up for your shortcomings. If I’m going to die either way, then I’m going to make damn sure you don’t.”

Paul pushed himself up from his knees and began his advance toward his fiancée. “But you’re here now. Just come with me.”

As he took a second step forward, a tugging sensation enveloped his body and held him in place. By some force of nature, Paul found himself entirely unable to move. Voices began to echo in the distance, undecipherable but clearly filled with urgency.

“We both know that’s not how this works, Paulie.” Her expression softened with a frown now creeping between the corners of her lips. She gestured down to her stomach, where blood now flowed from an open wound. “Anyways, I’m out of time. What happens next is up to you.”

His hand was unable to even reach her before the world went black.

“He’s waking up!” An exasperated voice broke through the silence. As Paul came to his senses, he felt the sharp pain of a crushed bone beneath his left arm. The rustling of medical equipment and blaring of sirens registered in his ears as he began to take stock of the ambulance room around him. “Hey, bud. I’m just going to need you to hold on and stay awake, alright?”

The words of the paramedic reached his ears but not his mind. In his mind still rumbled the soft, coaxing voice of Emilia, seeming to beckon him back to his slumber. But something deeper stirred within his instincts, pushing him to keep his eyes open. The parting lines from his fiancée still resonated intensely beneath his desire to rest, a battle that raged inside his body between the two opposing sides.

“Oh, what the *hell*?” The exclamation blurted out of his mouth unconsciously in a mixture of frustration and exhaustion. Frustration at his own weakness, exhausted by the thought that he would have to continue living on further. Paul gripped his right hand into a fist and held onto consciousness as tightly as he could for the entire drive over.

A pained expression shot across Paul’s face as his boots penetrated the surface of a rain puddle from the night before. His toes curled in disgust as the leather around them moistened. Of course, this *would* happen first thing in the morning. But he was reinvigorated with a new sense of optimism. Today was the first day of many days on the road to recovery. He put on a slight, pained smile as he looked up at the sign on the building in front of him: “Recovery Centers of America.”

It had only been a week since he was discharged from the hospital with a broken arm and ribs. The discomfort was unbearable, and moreover, the cravings were even worse. But what he saw in his conscience the week before made such problems seem trivial. Instead of focusing on the wounds he couldn’t heal himself, he would focus on the wound in his mentality. The wound that had inflicted so much harm and pain on himself and others.

As he looked down at his outstretched hand, Paul’s chest tightened, and he let out a strained breath. A small, simple, silver ring rested in a coil around his finger. The object shined bright as a representation of the debt he owed to Emilia for showing him the path he was about to commit himself to.

Perhaps whatever he saw that night was some delusion concocted by his brain in a moment of intense stress. Maybe it was something more. But regardless of the explanation, it was the drive he needed to recover.

A chime rang out from the front desk as Paul entered through the front door of the clinic. The receptionist at the counter looked up at him through the smudged glass and smiled. After a moment’s hesitation, he smiled back. He wasn’t sinking anymore. He was swimming upward.

Appendix B-Anthony’s Journalism Ethics Writing Sample

The pursuit of publishing accurate information in a timely manner is a constant in the field of journalism. However, in some cases, journalists are forced to question whether a piece of information should be published at all. One such case is in the field of violent crime, where the identification and publicization of perpetrators is highly divisive among audiences. This is for three reasons: the potential for copycat crime, the shifting of focus away from victims, and the glorification of the perpetrators. In this paper, I will address these three main concerns and whether they have legitimacy in the media space. To do so, I will cite online resources as well as the knowledge of Lauren Leatherby, a graphics editor for the *New York Times*.

One recent case of a call to action regarding the cessation of perpetrator identification took place after the 2012 Aurora, Colorado movie theater shooting. In the shooting, 24-year-old James Holmes entered a midnight showing of *The Dark Knight Rises* and opened fire, killing 12 people and injuring over 70 others (*History*). Holmes was arrested without harm after turning himself in with no resistance (*History*). Following the massacre, Tom and Caren Teves, the parents of shooting victim Alex Teves, founded the No Notoriety movement. The movement's stated objective is “to reduce rampage acts of mass violence due to media-inspired fame” (No Notoriety). Furthermore, Jordan Ghawi, the brother of shooting victim Jessica Ghawi, said in a *CBS News* interview that he “[doesn't] want the media to be saturated with the shooter's name.” Being the loved ones of shooting victims, the Teves and Ghawi families provide an important perspective on the considerations that need to be made to avoid causing further distress to the victims of violent crimes. It also displays a high-profile mass shooting that opened discussion regarding the identification of mass shooters and establishes a baseline for why media consumers are beginning to push back against such identification.

There are also proponents of the “No Notoriety” protocol among journalists and reporters. The most prominent journalist involved in this is Anderson Cooper, who, in response to the Umpqua Community College shooting by 26-year-old Christopher Harper-Mercer, opted to refrain from mentioning the name of the perpetrator. The day after the slayings, Cooper said, "The local sheriff says he will not and will not say the shooter’s name. Neither will we. We’re neither naming him nor showing his photo even as we learned more about who he was, including the fact that he was enrolled in the class where he opened fire” (*CNN*). As a high-profile reporter, Cooper represents a shift in mindset among the decision-makers in journalism. By refusing to use his platform to name the shooter, Cooper made a statement that other reporters should follow suit.

Taking the above examples into account, it is made clear that there is a trend in the media toward the avoidance of naming mass shooters. But what do other accomplished journalists think? Harvard Kennedy School graduate and *New York Times* graphics editor Lauren Leatherby seems to think that naming mass shooters will continue to fall out of style. “When dealing with violent crimes, we tend to pay more attention to victims than with non-violent crimes. With victims involved, there must be a lot of care around how you present their stories,” Leatherby said. “When getting their stories, you want it to be in a way that is healthy to them and can help them through the investigation or in gaining an understanding of why things happened, while remaining compassionate to their circumstances.” Taking these variables into account, journalists are expected to gather information from victims in a way that is not only effective but respectful to the trauma that they may be experiencing. This creates a tricky tightrope that journalists are asked to walk, where they must find the sweet spot between information gathering and sensitivity. If they are too sensitive, they may not gather the information they need to accurately

report a crime. If they are too aggressive, they may cause the victims further harm or lose access to valuable information by making the victims uncomfortable. Therefore, the ability to find this balance is an essential ability for journalists to have.

Speaking on copycat crimes and mimicry, Leatherby said, “A couple decades ago, it was much more common to name the perpetrator and put their face on the front page, stating exactly how many people they killed and why they did it. But research has shown very clearly that perpetrators tend to mimic one another, and that the more notoriety perpetrators get, the more others try to imitate them.” One recent example of such mimicry can be found with Alek Minassian, the suspect in a 2018 Toronto van attack where 10 people were killed. In the transcript of a police interview, Minassian claimed to correspond with 22-year-old Elliot Rodger, a man who killed six people in a shooting in Isla Vista, CA before turning the gun on himself (Toronto Police). Minassian also expressed sentiments echoed by Rodger before he carried out his shooting, establishing a clear link or inspiration for Minassian’s later crimes. While copycat crime is a legitimate concern, Leatherby said, “There is still value in discussing the person’s motivations or the background they come from, but the approach you will see now is going to focus a lot more on the victims of the crime. You may see what inspired the attack, but even then, it is only for journalistic purposes of helping readers understand why [the crime] may have happened.”

Another common dilemma journalists face when dealing with perpetrators is the existence of a manifesto. Examples of these manifestos in previous crimes include the manifestos of Sandy Hook shooter Adam Lanza or Elliot Rodger. “The policy is to not name anything from the manifesto or glorify that view. Its existence can be acknowledged for the sake of public awareness, but the person will not be highlighted at all to avoid glorification,” Leatherby said.

On top of avoiding the glorification of the perpetrator themselves, reporting on a perpetrator’s manifesto runs the risk of publicizing and glorifying dangerous or hateful ideologies that are commonplace in mass shooters. In the Buffalo shooting this year orchestrated by 18-year-old suspect Payton Gendron, the perpetrator allegedly wrote a manifesto which included hateful rhetoric like the “great replacement” theory, which is the notion that white Americans are being replaced by nonwhite Americans through an instrumental process (*NBC News*). The risk with publicizing these manifestos is in exposing potentially vulnerable audiences to hateful ideas.

Through this, audience members may be radicalized and participate in copycat crime, thereby perpetuating a vicious cycle of violence. As Leatherby said, the goal in reporting violent crime is to “minimize [glorification] in a way that will not inspire future attacks.”

As with all cases of crime, journalists must also be wary of reporting on violent crimes where there is not yet a convicted perpetrator. “In stories where things are unknown, you need to speak to victims to get to the bottom of what happened and why it went wrong, as well as how it can be prevented from happening again,” Leatherby said. While reporting on crimes with convicted perpetrators is important, the use of journalism as a tool of investigation is equally important. Victims of crime can be just as helpful as any other form of hard evidence in this case, and journalists must use the same deft and compassion when interacting with these individuals to avoid inflicting harm or missing out on key information. On top of these scenarios, there are also scenarios where a suspect has been identified but not yet convicted. In these cases, journalists are required to use language such as “suspect” and “alleged” to cover their bases from legal repercussions. This allows journalists reporting on these suspects to have plausible deniability if ever confronted with defamation lawsuits, which all media companies will avoid out of their best interest. Even if it is “incredibly clear” that the suspect is guilty in the mind of the public,

Leatherby said, “they are still the suspect until they are convicted in court. That is not up to journalists to legally decide.” In the field of journalism, one should never attempt to be a judge, jury, or executioner.

While journalists have an obligation to be sensitive to victims, they also have a responsibility to deliver on their obligation to general audiences that seek to know the facts of a case. At the core of journalism is the expectation to use media responsibly, but also the ability to satisfy the desires of consumers. Journalism, as a business, still exists to serve their target audience first and foremost. Therefore, as there is notable demand for information regarding the background of mass shooters, journalists must make their own judgments about which part of their audience to serve. This is where the ethical dilemma of the situation comes into play.

When taking into consideration every ethical stakeholder in the decision to identify a perpetrator in a mass killing or violent crime, there is no situation where every member of all audiences will be satisfied with the outcome. However, there are ways to mitigate the fallout inherent in such a dilemma. Adam Lankford in his article “Don’t Name Them, Don’t Show Them, But Report Everything Else: A Pragmatic Proposal for Denying Mass Killers the Attention They Seek and Deterring Future Offenders” recommended a “carrot and stick” approach. Lankford said that organizations identifying mass shooters “should face public censure unless and until they change their ways,” where criticism toward these organizations is more “pointed,” where organizations are criticized on an individual name basis (Lankford et al., 2018). This has been shown to work, with one example being when *Rolling Stone* faced public backlash after glamorizing one of the Boston bombers in a cover photo (Lankford et al., 2018). Although Lankford’s proposal works using public discourse or “the court of public opinion.” This is the most effective methodology because it incentivizes media organizations to avoid identification

while still technically not violating their right to freedom of speech and expression. It allows media organizations to make their own decisions around identification based on public reception rather than being forced to decide based on suppressive laws.

In concluding this paper, it is imperative to look back on how the identification of violent perpetrators has been shown to affect all parties involved through the exacerbation of copycat crime, the harm caused toward victims, and the glorification of perpetrators or hateful rhetoric.

Therefore, while journalists have the obligation to divulge truthful and essential information, there is no sufficient grounding for the argument that the identification of violent perpetrators to the general public is necessary outside of morbid curiosity. While it is up to the whims of each individual freelance journalist or media organization to handle, prevailing opinion seems to gravitate towards the side of not identifying violent perpetrators. What the future holds for the handling of violent perpetrators cannot be definitively known, but trends indicate a downtrend in identification.

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Appendix C- James’ College Essay Writing Sample

**You’ve got a ticket in your hand – Where will you go? What will you do? What will happen when you get there?**

 I am fascinated by and admire ancient settings for their architecture, history, important figures, and much more. Learning about ancient societies and ideology have always grabbed my interest from their old age and abstract styles. One place that stands out to me above all others is the country of Greece because of its ancient setting and the history that it holds. If I have one ticket in my hand to go anywhere and do anything in the world, I will go to Greece and explore and learn as much as possible about its intriguing history.

Out of all places, I will choose to visit Greece because it is unlike any other country on the globe. Ever since learning about the ancient Greek city states such as Sparta, my interest has peaked to visit the country. Greece was also home to some of the most iconic wars in history such as the Battle of Thermopylae and the Peloponnesian War, further highlighting its already special past. Within these ancient societies, wonderous buildings were created through ancient architecture, some of which still hold today. Having only seen pictures of wonders such as the Parthenon, this ticket will allow my eyes to be graced by them in person.

 The first thing I will do when arriving in Greece would be to visit the country’s capital, Athens. The main activity I will want to do within the city would be to explore the Acropolis, an ancient citadel above the city, home to phenomenal structures such as the Parthenon. This place grabs my interest because of its compelling ancient architecture, which is so outlandish in the modern day. I will explore the different structures atop the outscape, capturing photographs of the unforgettable moment, and learn about the history of the structures and the historical figures that played a role in the creation and usage of them.

 Another activity I would do in Greece would be to visit the Acropolis Museum. There I would learn about the age of architecture, such as the construction of the Parthenon starting as early as 447 BC. Another thing I would enjoy learning about would be the ancient Greek philosophers that created ideas used in modern everyday life. A great example of this is Pythagoras, the man who is credited with forming the base idea of the Pythagorean theorem, now a monumental equation within mathematics. Learning more about Greek philosophers will most definitely further inspire me to create ideas and follow my own judgment as they did in ancient Greece.

Ultimately, with one ticket to go anywhere in my hand, Greece will undoubtedly be my first choice simply because of its unique architecture and rich history. When there, I will immerse myself in the culture and history, learning of the great philosophers that brought about ideas used in everyday life. Enhancing my knowledge on these distinct figures will inspire me to create and innovate more than ever before, just as they did. In summary, I would love to visit the captivating country of Greece and become enthralled by the many wonders that it holds.

Appendix D- James’ Essay B Writing Sample

**Tell us your story. What unique opportunities or challenges have you experienced throughout your high school career that have shaped who you are today?**

The journey of high school is filled with many different opportunities and experiences that work together to form people’s identities. In my time as a high school student, I have lived through many experiences that have different circumstances, but all share the same purpose. They formed my character and mentality into what they are today and play a key role in who I will become in the future.

It started when I was a freshman, learning the rules of high school and navigating my way around the campus. Meeting new people and witnessing interesting events also let me know what to do and what not to do. When I reflect on my experience as a freshman, I realize the impact it had, learning to stay out of trouble, keep on top of my classwork, and focus on academic and athletic achievement rather than other activities that could distract me from being consistent and efficient. During my freshman year, I also learned the importance of maturity, not just within myself, but others as well.  Surrounding myself with people who would uplift me and keep me on track showed to be significantly more meaningful than I previously would’ve thought. An example of this would be the friends I made through the school’s soccer program, practicing with me after school, until the sun was long gone, working on our technical abilities, as well as maintaining good fitness.

Advancing onwards, the latter part of my high school years has allowed me to improve on many important skills, one of them being time management. During junior year, my AP Language class held up its reputation by proving to be challenging and rather time-consuming. Because of the surplus of homework that I was given during the course, balancing my time in and out of class to make sure I got my work done prior to the deadline was detrimental. This allowed me to improve my time management skills to get the work done in a timely manner and know when I could or shouldn’t take a break.

Another skill I learned and improved on during high school was that of leadership. I grew this skill through a couple of different routes, one of which was high school soccer. During the soccer season, I had to keep the spirits high within our team and keep the focus to a maximum, as that was my job as captain. During games, especially the more difficult games where our team was falling behind, it was important that I continue to coach the squad and guide us back on track, no matter what was displayed on the scoreboard. The responsibility came with its challenges. I had to do my best to keep calm during tough situations and after a loss, which can prove to be surprisingly difficult in the heat of the moment. These experiences helped me immensely in growing my ability to lead others properly, keeping a cool head in any circumstance, and guiding them in the correct direction.

Reflecting on this journey, I now realize that high school has had a considerable impact on my growth and has helped form me into who I am today. At the moment I didn’t realize how important certain events were, but looking back, I am truly thankful for each and every experience and the fact that they allowed me to grow into the person I am today. High school may be a bumpy ride at times, but nonetheless, it clearly can work wonders in changing people like me without them even knowing it.