

Netflix made them reality stars; now team from "Cheer" wonders what's next

By Los Angeles Times, adapted by Newsela staff on 04.08.20

Word Count 1,001

Level 1050L



Image 1. Oprah Winfrey (left) speaks with the cast of Netflix's "Cheer" (from left) Monica Aldama, Jerry Harris, Gabi Butler, Lexi Brumback, TT Barker and Dillon Brandt during Oprah's 2020 Vision: Your Life in Focus Tour at American Airlines Center in Dallas, Texas, February 15, 2020. Photo: Omar Vega/Getty Images

A few years ago, Greg Whiteley was in Scooba, Mississippi. He was filming "Last Chance U," a moving and inspiring documentary produced for Netflix that follows junior college football players trying to qualify for a four-year school. During filming, Whiteley noticed the cheerleaders on the sideline, decided to check out a cheerleading practice and was immediately struck by how intense it was.

He soon had the idea to follow a team as members prepared to compete at the national championships. After a little research, Whiteley realized the Navarro squad — which had then won the championship 13 times — would make an ideal subject.

Huge Hit

"The moment we began filming," he said, "all of us felt like we had something special." The result was "Cheer," a six-part reality TV series that has become a huge hit on Netflix, while turning team

members into young celebrities.

An experienced documentary filmmaker, Whiteley trusted his instincts when it came to selecting which team members to follow in "Cheer." "In the first few days, there's going to be a handful of people that are going to jump out at you," he said.

The team leader is Monica Aldama, who has a Master's Degree in Business Administration from the University of Texas. She mentioned to Whiteley that team member Morgan Simianer had had "a rough upbringing," but initially he knew almost nothing about his chosen subjects beyond that.

"It turns out they weren't just interesting in terms of how they performed on the mat," Whiteley said. "They were also really amazing people off the mat."

Appeals To Athletes Who Have Been Through Hardship

Whiteley has ideas about why elite cheerleading seems to appeal to athletes who've been through such personal hardship. The sport is so demanding, both mentally and physically, that it draws "people that maybe feel they've really got nothing to lose."

Team member La'Darius Marshall, whose brothers beat him for being gay, backs up that theory. He calls cheerleading "a safe haven for people that are hurt."

"I never got that love and that nurturing," said the 21-year-old, who was taken in by a family friend while his mother was incarcerated. "The only way I knew that I had purpose is by how much I touched everybody when I cheered. They're like, 'Oh my gosh, the way you perform.' That is like someone saying that they love me, that I am doing something that is making them happy." It has even helped Marshall repair his relationship with his brother Antonio, who we see in the series crying while he watches La'Darius compete: "I finally felt like he saw me," Marshall said. "I finally felt like I was not invisible."



Jerry Harris, age 20, is the team's bighearted underdog. He has become a fan favorite because of his relentless optimism and morale-boosting "mat talk" — the high-pitched, mile-a-minute pep talks he gives his teammates from the sidelines.

The New Yorker magazine described him as "a human sunbeam." Harris, though, is more reserved than his upbeat cheering persona suggests, saying, "I just think of myself as someone who is very positive."

Harris and Marshall have become close friends who crack each other up constantly, and Marshall, the chattier of the two, described Harris as "my personal role model. I love you, Jerry. You are more than a sunbeam, baby child."

He continues: "Jerry balances me with the love and the heart and the compassion. I balance him with that confidence, that tough love. We're like the yin and yang. I'm like that dark and he gives me some of that light..."

Their odd-couple friendship is briefly tested in "Cheer" when Aldama, weary of Marshall's attitude, temporarily gives Harris his spot on the mat.

But Marshall speaks glowingly of his coach. "She treats everyone as if they are her child and she would do anything for us and that's where that loyalty comes from."

Tough As Nails — But Loving

Aldama, though, can be tough as nails when it comes to making decisions about what's best for her team. And she stays stone-faced, even when her athletes get injured — which they do, frequently.

But she's also a compassionate and nonjudgmental mentor. She supports team member Lexi Brumback through a personal crisis involving private photos posted online. And even though she describes herself as conservative, Aldama talks in "Cheer" about defending her male cheerleaders, many of whom are gay, in a long conversation with her pastor.

"I want to make sure they feel loved no matter what," she said. "I will have their backs no matter what."

The enthusiastic embrace of the series has taken its subjects by surprise. "I thought people would want to go out there and try to find something to hate, but I've gotten so much positivity," said Brumback.

Given the microscope her charges are now under, Aldama senses she may need to step into the Mama Bear role even more often. "We're learning as we go. I'm trying to protect them as much as I can and give them the best advice possible. It's been such a whirlwind."

The series ends with the question of "what's next" unanswered. Few of the "Cheer" kids — and even some of their coaches — seem certain about what to do outside the sport that is their sanctuary. Even though Brumback, Marshall and Harris all left Navarro at the end of "Cheer," they have all returned — perhaps they're back to film Season 2?

Netflix declined to say whether a second season was in the works, and Whiteley is also evasive about the possibility of another go-around. For now, as always, Aldama's eyes are on the prize.

"We're trying to catch our breath and keep our head above water at the moment," she says, "and maybe try to find time to practice."

Quiz

- 1 According to the article, the sport of cheerleading often appeals to athletes who have experienced hardship. Which paragraph BEST supports this idea?
- (A) The team leader is Monica Aldama, who has a master's degree in business administration from the University of Texas. She mentioned to Whiteley that team member Morgan Simianer had had "a rough upbringing," but initially he knew almost nothing about his chosen subjects beyond that.
 - (B) Whiteley has ideas about why elite cheerleading seems to appeal to athletes who've been through such personal hardship. The sport is so demanding, both mentally and physically, that it draws "people that maybe feel they've really got nothing to lose."
 - (C) Team member La'Darius Marshall, whose brothers beat him for being gay, backs up that theory. He calls cheerleading "a safe haven for people that are hurt."
 - (D) Aldama, though, can be tough as nails when it comes to making decisions about what's best for her team. And she stays stone-faced, even when her athletes get injured — which they do, frequently.
- 2 Which option would Greg Whiteley MOST likely AGREE with?
- Option 1: A successful sports documentary relies on a successful subject.*
- Option 2: Cheerleading is the most challenging sport.*
- Which sentence from the article BEST supports your response?
- (A) Option 1: After a little research, Whiteley realized the Navarro squad — which had then won the championship 13 times — would make an ideal subject.
 - (B) Option 1: "In the first few days, there's going to be a handful of people that are going to jump out at you," he said.
 - (C) Option 2: During filming, Whiteley noticed the cheerleaders on the sideline, decided to check out a cheerleading practice and was immediately struck by how intense it was.
 - (D) Option 2: The sport is so demanding, both mentally and physically, that it draws "people that maybe feel they've really got nothing to lose."
- 3 How is La'Darius Marshall different from Jerry Harris?
- (A) Marshall is compassionate, and Harris is insensitive.
 - (B) Marshall is bright, and Harris is gloomy.
 - (C) Marshall is confident, and Harris is optimistic.
 - (D) Marshall is a human sunbeam, and Harris is chatty.
- 4 Which of the following people quoted in the article would be MOST likely to AGREE with the idea that coaches need to balance tough love with unconditional support?
- (A) Greg Whiteley
 - (B) Monica Aldama
 - (C) La'Darius Marshall
 - (D) Jerry Harris

For high school seniors, coronavirus brings a sad ending and unexpected lessons

By Joe Heim, Washington Post on 04.06.20

Word Count **1,452**

Level **MAX**



Annalisa D'Aguilar, age 18, is a senior at Fiorello H. LaGuardia High School of Music & Art and Performing Arts in New York City. Photo: Aisha D'Aguilar

In mid-March, on what turned out to be the last day of school, Annalisa D'Aguilar walked the hallways of her performing arts high school in Manhattan, New York. The subway had been mostly empty on the way to school that morning. Many of her fellow students had stopped showing up as fears of the novel coronavirus swept New York City, the hardest-hit area of the country so far. On that day, the school's typically packed halls were empty.

"It just felt insane to walk around and have no one there," D'Aguilar said in a phone interview from her Brooklyn home. "My friend said it felt like we were in a war. The next day they canceled school for everyone."

D'Aguilar is a senior at Fiorello H. LaGuardia High School of Music & Art and Performing Arts. She's a drama major and had spent most of the year working on two productions that were set to stage in March and April. She'd learned her lines, hit her marks, knew every scene. Tickets were already sold.

One play included a choreographed dance to an instrumental version of the Lorde song "Royals." When she listened to the song on the weekend of March 27, she began to cry.

"I recognize that although these are all big things to me, it's small in comparison to what's going on in the world," she said.

Like many of the approximately 3.7 million high school seniors across the country, D'Aguilar has had the last stretch of school pulled out from under her by an invisible and unforgiving menace. Grades and final projects float in limbo. Close friendships have been socially distanced. And as the coronavirus cancels spring, it is leaving in its wake entire rites of passage of the ultimate year of America's K-12 schooling.

Prom dresses hang in closets maybe never to be worn. Senior trips have been canceled. Senior pranks abandoned. And at many schools, the graduation ceremony, high school's final triumphant act, is in jeopardy.

Students said they understand why the decisions have been made. Sacrifices are being asked of everyone, and making exceptions for them, they know, would only risk more damage. They're already seeing the cost up close. During the weekend of March 27, D'Aguilar learned her great-aunt tested positive for the coronavirus.

"It's easy to be really mad about something like this, but the only thing we can do to get rid of coronavirus is to give up some of these things," said 18-year-old Piper MacIntyre, a senior at Garfield High School in Seattle, Washington. "It's sad, but I don't feel cheated. It just feels unlucky."

In a sense, national trauma has accompanied members of this senior class all their lives. Most were born in the dark and often frightening year following the September 11, 2001 attacks. They were fifth-graders when a gunman killed 26, including 20 children, at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut. They were sophomores when another gunman killed 17 at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. The country has been at war externally since the members of this senior class were born and has been increasingly riven internally as they have come of age.

So perhaps seniors in this class have learned the hard way to be prepared for whatever is thrown at them.

"Everything is not promised to you," said Mia Jones, 18, a senior at KIPP DC College Preparatory, a charter school in Washington, D.C. "Things can be ripped from you at any minute. So you need to cherish everything."

Jones bought her prom dress last month but hasn't had it tailored. She's not sure she'll need to. She thinks the senior brunch at Union Market will be canceled, too. Few schools have said graduation ceremonies will be canceled, but many seniors are realizing it's a distinct possibility.

"That is what everybody has been working for all of our high school career," Jones said in a phone interview. "I would want that to stay the most. Even though it's just walking across the stage, it's a big deal. College isn't the path for all of us, and this is the last time we'll all be together."

At Lawton High School in Lawton, Oklahoma, Zac Shell and his friends have joked that they'll have to pick up their diplomas at a drive-through ceremony. But humor doesn't always work.

"We joke and try and make each other feel better, but I've had friends who have cried because they're so upset," Shell said. "It's just all happened so quick. We're confused and dazed. For the rest of my life I'll remember this."

Shell said he asked a senior girl to the prom one day and school was canceled the next.

"We were just, like, well it was cute while it lasted," Shell said, chuckling.

For senior athletes, the shutdown of school brought with it the realization that their final spring season was over mostly before it started.

Joey Graham, a senior lacrosse player at the private Landon School in Bethesda, Maryland, said missing his final season at the school he has attended since fourth grade was crushing.

"I've always looked forward to being a senior, and a pretty large chunk of the year is being lost," he said. "And it's pretty heartbreaking."

But Graham, 18, took solace from an email his lacrosse coach sent to the players soon after the spring season was canceled, citing the team motto: "Be in control, be grateful and compete."

"He said, 'You guys need to carry these lessons with you no matter what you're doing. Be in control. Be grateful. Compete to keep your family safe and the older generation safe,'" Graham recalled. "It's a cool life lesson that through hard times you can get through by following those words."

Across the country, at Edison High School in Stockton, California, senior Dmetrio Cavens-Summers, a track athlete and football star, is also mourning the loss of spring sports. But he, too, has tried to keep everything in perspective.

Cavens-Summers lives with his brother and his mother. When his mother developed a cough a couple of weeks ago, he immediately thought the worst. "I'm not going to lie, I was scared," Cavens-Summers said. His mother recovered, but he continues to consume news about the coronavirus and post updates from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on his Instagram account, trying to counter the wild rumors he has seen posted by others in his age group.

If prom and graduation are canceled, Cavens-Summers said, he'll roll with that. His focus now is trying to keep his wits about him.

"The world's going crazy. No one was prepared for this, but the best thing it has taught me is to be calm and be humble," he said. "I'm just keeping my mind focused on what I need to do and to stay calm for my teammates and my family."

While the disruption to these seminal high school events has been widespread, many seniors already recognize the historic sweep of this pandemic and how it will alter the world in ways big and small.

Seniors not planning on going to college will now enter a job market that has been devastated by the virus. Just weeks ago, the economy seemed to be humming along and help wanted signs were everywhere. That changed overnight.

There's uncertainty, too, for students planning to continue their education. Colleges and universities have been battered financially as well. Some seniors worry that their college career will be delayed. Others are waiting to hear if the financial aid they expected to receive is still going to come through.

Emma Dabelko, a senior at Athens High School in Athens, Ohio, is still deciding where to attend college this fall. But she knows what she wants to study — international development and global health — and is energized about next school year even as she mourns the loss of this one.

"Losing out on this American tradition and everything that comes along with that is really difficult," said Dabelko, 18. "It's definitely not always fun to be the people who have to live through a historical event like this, but it does happen. So in a way it's amazing to think about because this going to be such a major event that people will be taught about it and look back on it for a long time."

She said the pandemic could deliver lessons that might not have emerged in the classroom.

"It can be a learning moment for a lot of people to think about who we value and what we value in our everyday life," she said. "I know I'm going to value some of the small things that I hadn't before."

Quiz

- 1 Which paragraph from the article BEST supports the conclusion that seniors are applying things they learned in school to get them through the pandemic?
- (A) "That is what everybody has been working for all of our high school career," Jones said in a phone interview. "I would want that to stay the most. Even though it's just walking across the stage, it's a big deal. College isn't the path for all of us, and this is the last time we'll all be together."
 - (B) "We joke and try and make each other feel better, but I've had friends who have cried because they're so upset," Shell said. "It's just all happened so quick. We're confused and dazed. For the rest of my life I'll remember this."
 - (C) "He said, 'You guys need to carry these lessons with you no matter what you're doing. Be in control. Be grateful. Compete to keep your family safe and the older generation safe,'" Graham recalled. "It's a cool life lesson that through hard times you can get through by following those words."
 - (D) "The world's going crazy. No one was prepared for this, but the best thing it has taught me is to be calm and be humble," he said. "I'm just keeping my mind focused on what I need to do and to stay calm for my teammates and my family."
- 2 Select the sentence from the article that suggests it might be difficult for graduating seniors to find work.
- (A) Seniors not planning on going to college will now enter a job market that has been devastated by the virus.
 - (B) Just weeks ago, the economy seemed to be humming along and help-wanted signs were everywhere.
 - (C) There's uncertainty, too, for students planning to continue their education.
 - (D) Some seniors worry that their college career will be delayed.
- 3 What is MOST likely the reason the author included traumatic national events that have happened during the lives of high school seniors?
- (A) to demonstrate that other major events have failed to stop seniors from enjoying the prom and graduation
 - (B) to illustrate why many seniors were expecting some kind of disruption to this year's events and celebrations
 - (C) to suggest that those events might have given seniors the perspective they will need to get through the pandemic
 - (D) to elaborate on the school closures that seniors have experienced throughout their educations
- 4 Which answer choice accurately characterizes Annalisa D'Aguilar's reaction to the cancellation of school and senior events?
- (A) D'Aguilar is shocked that schools in New York City closed, but she says it is probably for the best after students stopped showing up.
 - (B) D'Aguilar is devastated to miss two plays that she prepared for, but she tries to remember these are small problems in the big picture.
 - (C) D'Aguilar says it would be easy to get angry and feel cheated by these events, but others should remember that it is just bad luck.
 - (D) D'Aguilar says the experience has been difficult, but it is also exciting to live through a historical event and learn what to value in life.

Human connection bolsters immune system; that's why it's important to be kind

By Sarah Kaplan, Washington Post on 04.09.20

Word Count **1,344**

Level **MAX**



Studies have revealed that human connection can ease pain and reduce physical symptoms of stress. People who feel supported by their social networks are more likely to live longer. Photo: Helena Lopes on Unsplash

Don't go to work. Don't see your friends. Don't visit your grandmother in the nursing home. Don't bring food to your sister who works at a hospital. Don't hold your wife's hand while she gives birth. Don't play together. Don't pray together. Don't hug.

Of the many cruelties of the coronavirus pandemic, this is one of the hardest to accept: In a time when all we want is to be close to the people we care about, closeness is the one thing we can't have.

Six feet has never felt farther away.

Psychologists are worried about the long-term effects of our new, socially distant reality. Decades of research has shown that loneliness and isolation are associated with high blood pressure, chronic inflammation, weakened immune systems and a host of other health issues.

But there is also hope in the data. Studies have revealed that human connection — something as simple as getting an offer of help from a stranger or looking at a picture of someone you love — can ease pain and reduce physical symptoms of stress. People who feel supported by their social networks are more likely to live longer. One experiment even found that people with many social ties are less susceptible to the common cold.

For everyone quarantined in solitude, aching and afraid for far-flung family and friends, this science can provide some solace. A supportive phone call, an empathetic ear, an expression of love — these things can bolster the immune system on a molecular level. Whether you are the recipient or the giver, kindness is good for your health.

"There are powerful protective effects that we shouldn't ignore," said Julianne Holt-Lunstad, a professor of psychology and neuroscience at Brigham Young University. "And the extent to which we cannot only be open to receiving support from others ... but be a source of support to them, can potentially help us all get through this."

Without a vaccine or an antiviral that can work against COVID-19, the disease caused by the novel coronavirus, social distancing is one of the most powerful tools to combat it. Reducing interactions between infected and healthy people slows the spread of the virus, buying hospitals and public health officials time to treat the influx of sick people.

But a global pandemic is a tough time to be alone.

Humans are a social species, said Naomi Eisenberger, a neuroscientist at the University of California at Los Angeles. Our brains and bodies have evolved to count on the closeness of others. Surrounded by family and friends, we feel safe from predators and secure that we will be cared for if we're hurt.

But when we are on our own, or even when we just feel friendless, our bodies gear up for danger. Our nervous systems produce norepinephrine, a hormone associated with the "fight or flight" response. Inflammation — the way the immune system heals wounds and fights off bacterial infections — goes into overdrive. (Ironically, our anti-viral response is suppressed when we're lonely. Apparently our bodies think they don't need to worry about viruses when we're not around other people.)

That response may have been adaptive for our distant ancestors, who needed it to avoid death by a saber-toothed cat. But modern humans face more abstract threats, ones we cannot easily fight or flee. Loneliness leaves people in a state of constant, unhealthy unease — their blood pressure elevated, blood sugar levels high. If this state persists for too long, it can contribute to chronic health conditions such as diabetes, atherosclerosis and heart disease.

In a survey of 70 studies involving more than 1 million people from around the world, Holt-Lunstad found that people who lived alone were 32 percent more likely to die over a given period. People who reported feeling lonely were 26 percent more likely to die, and people who experienced social isolation — defined as few or infrequent contacts with other people — were 29 percent more likely to die. Even when the researchers adjusted for age, outside health conditions, nationality, gender, smoking habits and a host of other traits, this trend persisted.

In a separate analysis of 148 studies involving more than 300,000 people, Holt-Lunstad found that people who were more socially connected were 50 percent less likely to die over a given

period. The correlation was even stronger than the one revealed by the isolation studies.

Alienation may hurt us, but kinship is a still more powerful balm.

One of the most important things kindness can do is ease our reaction to stress. In one experiment at Bert N. Uchino's lab at the University of Utah, dozens of undergraduate students were brought into an empty room, seated in a chair and told they had been accused of shoplifting. They had three minutes to formulate their responses.

Their hearts began to race. Their blood pressure spiked. Stress hormones flooded their systems.

But in some instances, before leaving the room, the experimenter would tell the student: "If you need me for any reason or if you have any questions, don't hesitate to ask me. I appreciate your participation in this experiment, and I'd like to be helpful to you should you need any help."

In those cases, the students' hearts didn't beat quite so fast. Their stress responses were much less extreme.

"These data suggest that simply having potential access to support is sufficient to foster adaptation to stress," Uchino and his colleagues wrote.

Other research shows that looking at a picture of a loved one can make pain feel less intense. When people with strong support networks are asked to do complex mental math, their blood pressure stays lower and there is less of a stress-related chemical in their saliva. Simply thinking about a supportive person can activate a part of the brain called the ventromedial prefrontal cortex, which is associated with overcoming fear.

Scientists call this the "buffering effect." The sense of security that people get from their friends and family allows them to meet stressful situations with a "calmer physiology," Eisenberger said.

This, in turn, can lead to a stronger immune system. Many of the hormones involved in stress — cortisol, which stimulates the production of sugar; epinephrine and norepinephrine, which increase heart rate and elevate blood pressure — hinder immune cells' ability to function.

This may be a consequence of how stress evolved, according to Uchino. "The idea is that anxiety and stress co-opted the immune system to deal with threats that are external," he said.

It's hard to prove an evolutionary theory, but the implications are undeniable: "Anything that psychologically affects us also affects our immune system," Uchino said.

"For a long time, immunologists and social scientists didn't really talk to each other," he added, "And now we have to."

All of the researchers expressed concern about the effect of a period of prolonged isolation on people around the globe. What will the mental health impact be on people with few social ties? How will people in unhappy or abusive relationships fare when forced to stay at home? Will avoiding people and mistrusting strangers become a habit that persists once the pandemic is over, affecting our interactions for years to come?

"We're living in a very different and worrisome time," Uchino said. "Not just at the biomedical level but at the psychosocial level as well."

This makes it all the more important for people to maintain their ties to one another, Holt-Lunstad said. Call and text and talk over Web video. Wave to neighbors. Sing from the balcony like an Italian tenor.

And do something kind for someone else, researchers say. Studies have shown that "prosocial behavior," such as volunteering, curbs physical symptoms of stress. Remember that the coronavirus quarantine is a collective act of altruism — a sacrifice for the health of strangers as well as loved ones.

We shouldn't even think of what we're doing as social distancing, Holt-Lunstad said. She prefers the term "physical distancing." It's a reminder that the virus may have forced us apart, she said, but it doesn't have to make us alone.

Quiz

1 Read the following sentence from the article.

For everyone quarantined in solitude, aching and afraid for far-flung family and friends, this science can provide some solace.

Which paragraph from the article helps to explain what the word "solace" is referring to?

- (A) Don't go to work. Don't see your friends. Don't visit your grandmother in the nursing home. Don't bring food to your sister who works at a hospital. Don't hold your wife's hand while she gives birth. Don't play together. Don't pray together. Don't hug.
- (B) Of the many cruelties of the coronavirus pandemic, this is one of the hardest to accept: In a time when all we want is to be close to the people we care about, closeness is the one thing we can't have.
- (C) Psychologists are worried about the long-term effects of our new, socially distant reality. Decades of research has shown that loneliness and isolation are associated with high blood pressure, chronic inflammation, weakened immune systems and a host of other health issues.
- (D) But there is also hope in the data. Studies have revealed that human connection — something as simple as getting an offer of help from a stranger or looking at a picture of someone you love — can ease pain and reduce physical symptoms of stress. People who feel supported by their social networks are more likely to live longer. One experiment even found that people with many social ties are less susceptible to the common cold.

2 Read the following sentence from the article.

"These data suggest that simply having potential access to support is sufficient to foster adaptation to stress," Uchino and his colleagues wrote.

What does Bert N. Uchino use the word "foster" to mean?

- (A) adopt
- (B) protect
- (C) educate
- (D) stimulate

3 Which answer choice BEST explains why the author wrote this article?

- (A) The author describes scientific research revealing the effects of social distancing to explain the value of maintaining connections to combat stress.
- (B) The author explains what scientists have done to connect with their own families to provide ideas about what readers can do while social distancing.
- (C) The author highlights researchers' concerns to suggest that avoiding and mistrusting others will remain a habit long after the pandemic is over.
- (D) The author argues that people value their social and family connections to persuade readers to follow social distancing rules during the pandemic.

Read the following paragraph from the article.

Other research shows that looking at a picture of a loved one can make pain feel less intense. When people with strong support networks are asked to do complex mental math, their blood pressure stays lower and there is less of a stress-related chemical in their saliva. Simply thinking about a supportive person can activate a part of the brain called the ventromedial prefrontal cortex, which is associated with overcoming fear.

How does this paragraph support the author's position?

- (A) It provides additional evidence about the connection between a person's mental or emotional state and the body's physical response to stress.
- (B) It demonstrates that there are ways for people to stay connected with others even when they must participate in difficult problem solving.
- (C) It appeals to the reader's emotions to show that some people are better suited for living for extended periods away from their family and friends.
- (D) It elaborates on the scientific reasons why researchers need to do more studies on the ventromedial prefrontal cortex of isolated individuals.

Opinion: Put this Serena Williams quote on all the motivational posters

By Heidi Stevens, Orlando Sentinel on 07.19.19

Word Count **730**

Level **MAX**



Serena Williams arrives at the Oscars on February 24, 2019, at the Dolby Theatre in Los Angeles, California. Photo by: Jordan Strauss/Invision/AP

Whom do I contact about getting a whole bunch of motivational posters made?

I found a quote, it's from Serena Williams (no surprise) and I want it to hang in every high school classroom. And college classroom. And workplace break room. Maybe folks will want to hang it in their kitchens, too.

Williams wrote a first-person essay for the August issue of Harper's Bazaar (on newsstands July 23), in which she talks about pushing back against injustice when she sees it, about trying to change the world for her daughter, about that controversial U.S. Open match last year against Naomi Osaka.

That's the match where Williams was issued three violations — the first for coach signaling, which Williams denies, the second for smashing her racket in frustration, and the third for calling the umpire a thief and demanding an apology.

The scene launched 1,000 debates about equity in tennis. Many analysts and former players thought the umpire was unfairly harsh, that male players get away with much worse. (I agreed, and wrote as much at the time.)

"In the end," Williams writes in Harper's Bazaar, "my opponent simply played better than me that day and ended up winning her first Grand Slam title. I could not have been happier for her."

Williams reveals in the essay, though, that she struggled to recover from the loss and the surrounding controversy. She sought therapy and she stopped playing tennis.

"This debacle ruined something that should have been amazing and historic," she writes. "Not only was a game taken from me but a defining, triumphant moment was taken from another player, something she should remember as one of the happiest memories in her long and successful career. My heart broke. I started to think again, 'What could I have done better? Was I wrong to stand up? Why is it that when women get passionate, they're labeled emotional, crazy, and irrational, but when men do they're seen as passionate and strong?'"

She wrote an apology to Osaka. "I would love the chance to live that moment over again. I am, was, and will always be happy for you and supportive of you. I would never, ever want the light to shine away from another female, specifically another black female athlete. I can't wait for your future, and believe me I will always be watching as a big fan!"

Osaka replied and Williams quotes her as writing, "People can misunderstand anger for strength because they can't differentiate between the two. No one has stood up for themselves the way you have and you need to continue trailblazing."

She is. On July 11 Williams was back in the semifinals of Wimbledon after beating American Alison Riske on July 9. Williams has won Wimbledon seven times. An eighth win during the final on July 13 would tie Margaret Court's record for most career Grand Slam women's singles titles, with 24. Williams lost to Simona Halep during the July 13 match in London, England.

So, that motivational quote.

When Williams is describing the controversy at last year's U.S. Open, she writes about how it felt to receive those controversial violations.

"I felt defeated and disrespected by a sport that I love," she writes, "one that I had dedicated my life to and that my family truly changed, not because we were welcomed, but because we wouldn't stop winning."

"Not because we were welcomed, but because we wouldn't stop winning."

Put it on all the posters.

Rarely are the places and the minds that need changing going to greet that change with open arms. Rarely is that change going to be universally embraced.

Rarely is a group who has held a lion's share of the power, occupied most of the seats at most of the tables, made the decisions, made the money, made the rules going to welcome the folks who want a shot, who deserve a shot. Whose presence and ideas and talent would improve the world, if only they were given a shot.

Keep going, that Williams quote says. If they won't listen to your words, convince them with your winning.

It doesn't let workplaces and classrooms and sports organizations and arts organizations and families and individual humans off the hook. We all need to do that hard work of examining our biases and shrinking our blind spots and diversifying our spaces and mentoring our trailblazers.

Quiz

- 1 Why was the U.S. Open match between Serena Williams and Naomi Osaka controversial?
- (A) because many people questioned whether female athletes and male athletes are held to different conduct standards
 - (B) because many people believed that Serena Williams was the better player and that Naomi Osaka won the match unfairly
 - (C) because many people have debated whether Serena Williams is still able to continue to play at the same level of athleticism
 - (D) because the fight between Serena Williams and Naomi Osaka has created a giant rift in the world of tennis
- 2 According to the article, why did Serena Williams address Naomi Osaka and the U.S. Open match in her essay for Harper's Bazaar?
- (A) She wanted Osaka to understand that she has no hard feelings toward her even though Osaka won the game by default.
 - (B) She wanted Osaka to understand that she has no hard feelings toward her but that it will be difficult to play against her again.
 - (C) She wanted to apologize to Osaka for how the events unfolded because she didn't want it to diminish Osaka's win.
 - (D) She wanted to apologize to Osaka for reacting angrily and explain that she now realizes it was wrong to speak against the umpire.
- 3 How does the author develop her own perspective in the article?
- (A) by taking on an infuriated tone when discussing how Serena Williams reacted to the penalties she received
 - (B) by taking on an objective tone when discussing Serena Williams' many contributions to the game of tennis
 - (C) by taking on a casual tone when discussing the events surrounding the contentious U.S. Open match
 - (D) by taking on an impassioned tone when discussing the meaning she got out of Serena Williams' quote
- 4 Based on the article, what is the MOST likely reason the author includes the perspective of Naomi Osaka?
- (A) to show that she was supportive of Serena Williams and admires the work she has done
 - (B) to show that she was hurt by how Serena Williams reacted to the game but forgives her
 - (C) to demonstrate that she also agreed that Serena Williams should have won the match
 - (D) to demonstrate that it will be impossible to repair the damage caused to their relationship

How to deal with stress-eating for comfort in a time of anxiety

By Washington Post, adapted by Newsela staff on 04.01.20

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Snacks and drinks with higher nutritional value are displayed during a news conference on school food nutrition in Washington, D.C. Photo: Alex Wong/Getty Images

You're mostly stuck inside, you're home from school and the coronavirus pandemic is making the future seem less certain every day. The coronavirus is a flu-like illness that first arose in China. The virus has now infected people around the globe. Like 27 percent of Americans, you might seek comfort in a familiar place: the refrigerator.

Food can be one of the easiest and fastest ways to make ourselves feel better in stressful times. Experts say enjoying our food is a good thing. However, emotionally eating lots of food with little nutritional value can weaken our immune systems. Emotional eating can also worsen our moods. Right now, it is especially important to stay positive and protect our bodies.

Eva Selhub is a doctor who specializes in stress, resilience and mind-body medicine. Selhub says that if we want to feel better in the current situation, we need to think about how to fuel our bodies in ways that alleviate stress.

Why do my eating habits matter right now?

Selhub says that people may feel guilty or shameful for eating highly processed foods with a lot of sugar. Eating these foods can also cause inflammation in the body that increases fatigue, anxiety and depression. Selhub added that our bodies have various ways of connecting our stomachs to our brains. In this way, eating nutritious foods can help control our moods.

How can I tell if I'm eating because of emotion and not because of hunger?

Eating as a result of stress tends to be an automatic instinct, such as putting your hand into a bag of potato chips without thinking about it, said Deanna Minich. Minich is a nutritionist with the American Nutrition Association. By contrast, physical hunger lasts longer. Hunger can also be resolved with a variety of foods, rather than just with less nutritious foods.

How can I prevent or limit emotional eating in this uncertain time?

Food makes us feel better by releasing two chemicals called dopamine and serotonin in our brains. The release of these chemicals creates feelings of pleasure. However, Selhub says the effect wears off quickly. To stop emotional eating, she suggested doing a gut-check before you reach for a snack. Ask yourself, "Am I about to eat because I'm physically hungry, or because I feel stressed or sad?"

If it is because you are stressed or sad, Selhub said you should consider turning to other sources of comfort. Breathing exercises, physical exercise, hobbies, time in nature and other activities can all help relieve stress or sadness. Your daily routine may be different these days. However, Selhub said that you should still try to stick to your normal eating schedule of two or three meals a day.

Selhub recommended making eating into a ritual. "Make it a ritual of nurturing — that you're nurturing yourself, that you're fueling yourself," Selhub said.

If you want extra help for staying on track or managing your weight, Selhub suggests finding or making an online support group.

What if anxiety has the opposite effect on me and I struggle to eat enough?

Although many people eat extra when they feel anxious, you may have trouble eating at all. Stress can put your body into an elevated state as if you were facing an immediate danger. The feeling is similar to how early humans may have felt when being chased by a lion, Selhub said.

To digest food properly, we need a relaxed digestive system, Minich said. Warm teas can help your body loosen up, while protein shakes and electrolyte packets provide energy.

At the very least, Minich said you should drink a lot of water to stay hydrated. To really return to regular eating patterns, she said it's important to address the stress that is causing your eating patterns to change. Movement or doing a simple meditation are two ways to address stress.

What should I be trying to eat during this public-health crisis?

Making good food choices starts when you are choosing what to bring home from the grocery store, Minich said. Buy fresh, colorful foods as much as possible, Minich said.

If buying fresh produce and meat is not possible, Minich says frozen foods are usually more nutritious than canned food. Frozen food has not been altered much and usually, has little interaction with the plastic it is stored in, she said. Canned food, on the other hand, touches its

metal container and the substance used to seal it. Canned food is also usually stored in liquid with a lot of salt or sugar.

Minich also suggested using spices to reduce inflammation caused by stress. She recommends eating foods with vitamin C to strengthen your immune system. Now is a good time to share recipes with friends and family, she said. Make sure you're also paying attention to other aspects of your health, such as moving your body and getting enough sleep.

Ultimately, Minich said eating well improves our sense of well-being, increases our curiosity and makes us happier.

"And I think this is the time that we need more well-being and happiness," she said.

Quiz

- 1 According to the article, why does Eva Selhub want people to do a gut-check?
- (A) to help people understand dopamine and serotonin
 - (B) to help people avoid their emotional-eating impulses
 - (C) to give people a way to improve their immune systems
 - (D) to give people a sense of comfort in stressful times
- 2 How do spices affect people who are stressed?
- (A) They can cause people to feel more anxious and stressed.
 - (B) They can help people to sleep better when they are stressed.
 - (C) They can weaken the immune systems in stressed people.
 - (D) They can lower the swelling that stressed people experience.
- 3 The author claims that stress-eating can have negative effects on people's well-being.
Which selection from the article provides the MOST sufficient evidence to support the claim?
- (A) The coronavirus is a flu-like illness that first arose in China. The virus has now infected people around the globe. Like 27 percent of Americans, you might seek comfort in a familiar place: the refrigerator.
 - (B) Eva Selhub is a doctor who specializes in stress, resilience and mind-body medicine. Selhub says that if we want to feel better in the current situation, we need to think about how to fuel our bodies in ways that alleviate stress.
 - (C) Selhub says that people may feel guilty or shameful for eating highly processed foods with a lot of sugar. Eating these foods can also cause inflammation in the body that increases fatigue, anxiety and depression.
 - (D) Eating as a result of stress tends to be an automatic instinct, such as putting your hand into a bag of potato chips without thinking about it, said Deanna Minich. Minich is a nutritionist with the American Nutrition Association.
- 4 The author argues that making healthy choices can help reduce stress.
Is there enough strong evidence to support this claim?
- (A) Yes; the author uses expert opinions and examples to support the claim.
 - (B) Yes; the author uses statistics and anecdotal evidence to support the claim.
 - (C) No; the author only explains how unhealthy choices make stress worse.
 - (D) No; the author provides many pieces of evidence that contradict the statement.