

Kathryn Clark

Mr. Rutherford

Oxford Scholars

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Optimism in a (post?) Pandemic World

The human race will never view society and human interaction the same after the events that began in December of 2019. With countries fully shut down, economies falling into recessions, and limited scientific understanding of the virus, the Covid-19 pandemic caused drastic shifts in many ways. Now, the question of where we are headed as a society is as equally valid as it is difficult to answer. Many would like to say we are headed back to normalcy, but the concept of normality has shifted for most individuals after these unprecedented events.

Specifically, in America and especially in California - which took a relatively conservative approach in terms of public health and wellness in the nation- the shift in the community is easy to notice. Particularly, education has taken a large hit amidst these trying times. Most young children have grown up through two years of indoor, computer-driven education. This technology-heavy education has been a disadvantage to many children and teens, but it has also been filled with new and important advancements in learning.

Alongside the challenges of Covid-19 came the changes to everyday life and student education. Many children lost over a year of spelling, math, and other core areas of education, leading to delays in their overall growth and advancement. This trial relates to the serious troubles children currently face in interacting and maturing due to their time stuck inside. As kids enter kindergarten with no socialization and youth go through puberty fully cut off from their peers, there is a valid concern for future generations. My soon-to-be sister-in-law, Savannah, is a

teacher and talks to me often about her difficulties in teaching fifth graders who missed two years of socialization and holistic education. With their literacy ranging from first to tenth-grade levels, she could easily see the disadvantages of online education and differences in learning. In my own experience, the traditional milestones and social growth of high school have been harder to encounter.

The challenges to proficiency, well-being, and equality within education have been amplified by the pandemic. Despite being apart, many of us had the technology to help continue our education, and this allowed our classwork to advance both in terms of actual material advancements and accessibility. Now that we are back in person, we have the technology to help students learn faster and bounce back from the difficulties they have faced, allowing them to work smarter, not harder. Circling back to Savannah's personal experience, these fifth-grade children have faced unimaginable challenges yet optimism can be shown simply by the fact that they are working and fighting to make progress.

These events lead me to believe that we should be optimistic about life and the future post-Covid-19. This pandemic led to countless tragic deaths, and many people will deal with the lasting physical and emotional effects of this disease for years to come. However, our response as a society to this pandemic has created new opportunities and ways of thinking globally. It has also given most people a more compassionate look at one another and their communities. People separated from one another for months and living in fear for their health may now smile, mask free, at a stranger. This simple act gives many a sense of freedom and overwhelming joy. The scientific breakthroughs that Covid-19 has borne in terms of fast-paced scientific research and preventive medicine are impressive. At the same time, this progress brought to light the inadequacies of our American healthcare system. The Covid-19 pandemic has pushed us to

improve our system and make medicine more accessible, while also amplifying the problems of inequality and the importance of understanding intersectionality in every aspect of life. With eyes on the healthcare system, those in public health policy, healthcare providers, and other healthcare officials can use this support to mend a damaged system.

It would be false to say that the way we live our daily lives, especially in the education and medical realms, will ever be back to a pre-pandemic normal. Yet, the main emphasis of optimism is that we can cope and handle the pressures and difficulties we currently face, with an expectation of a better future. Through these trials and tribulations, people have become more empathetic and aware, and although we will never actually be a “post” pandemic, we can grow into a new state of normality. As Ambrose Bierce states, “Optimism – the doctrine or belief that everything is beautiful, including what is ugly.” We must maintain sanguinity through this human crisis and continue to reconnect with the community and compassion that surrounds us.