

WILL YOU OR WON'T YOU READ THIS SPREAD?

INTRO

BY VANGUARD CO-EDITORS

Binaries are attractive in the hypothetical sense: It's easy and comforting to put people into explicit categories as we see fit. To yearn for understanding is a healthy part of human nature, but the creation of binaries entails a false simplification of complex ideas.

We don't want to acknowledge that an infinite number of categories could exist, each of which we are incapable of fully understanding. This is especially true when we feel comfortable classifying ourselves in one of the binaries, leaving us convinced that two groups are the whole story.

What's unique about binaries is that we see them everywhere, but they don't exist everywhere. In fact, there are very few — if any — that actually do exist. They are social constructs, making real only their causes and effects. Our framing of politics, social issues, and identity as being binary has really strong effects, both on individuals and on society. That's what this spread is about: the binaries we see and the implications of our seeing them.

THE GREY

BY SARA MILLS '18

There are a million questions that cannot be answered with a simple yes or no. Answers are often ambiguous — or grey. To view the world through a black and white scope is to live in a kind of extremism — one in which the world is divided between good and evil, right and wrong, and yes and no. However, oppositional thought does not represent reality. The problem with rationalizing everything as either black or white is that the world is nuanced — and grey.

Gender and sexuality have emerged as the primary binary social constructs, and while many people may not think of it, we use a person's gender to associate them with certain traits. We are a society of labels. Our society strives to neatly categorize people into specific terms, and sexual identities or a certain gender, instead of allowing ambiguity or difference from the norm.

Across psychology, the category of sex, male or female, is widely used to determine gender, and "femininity" and "masculinity." The difference between the sex and gender distinction is that sex is biological while gender is sociocultural. What this definition does not include, however, is the grey space, the non-binaries. The University of California, Los Angeles estimates that in the United States there are 1.4 million people who identify as a different gender, as of 2017, whereas, at the turn of the millennium in a 2000 census, only 150,000 people identified as non-binary. An increasing number of people are identifying non-binary in terms of gender identity (how they perceive themselves) while gender expression (how you present yourself to the world) is not as exponential. While people are realizing that gender cannot operate as a yes or no and find themselves on the gender spectrum, they are afraid of the implications it may have. According to *Behind the Binary* magazine in the UK, only 94 percent of those who are non-binary identify as such, and 41 percent of those who identified had attempted suicide at one point. Increasingly, people are figuring out how restrictive gender binaries and societal gender norms are. And, in the era of President Donald Trump, judgement is, in many ways, on the rise. After opposing Barack Obama's

guidelines on transgender students, Trump sparked a nationwide injunction that has kept transgender students from using school bathrooms. Seemingly, some of the progression society has made in terms of tolerance and acceptance has been completely undone. However, as transphobia is on the rise, the grey space of gender does not shrink. Instead, those who are non-binary will not feel safe to identify.

In the same regard, there has been increasing homophobia from Trump's cabinet members, such as Mike Pence, who has had a history of anti-gay positions; Betsy DeVos, whose family's foundation has given millions of dollars to groups working against LGBT equality; Tony Perkins; Ken Blackwell; Will DeVos; Mike Pompeo; and so many others. Only 63 percent of people, according to the National Survey of Sexual Health, say that a homosexual lifestyle is morally right. Even in advancements and setbacks of the debate of gay versus straight, people often leave out the bigger picture. An increasing number of millennials have identified as a sexuality different from gay, straight, or bisexual. Over the last few years, people have become increasingly aware of 23 sexual identities and counting, including pansexual, polysexual, demisexual, asexual, skoliosexual, and more. Millennials are said to be the gayest generation, with over nine million people in the LGBT community and counting. Yet, people are still afraid to come out. Of those who come out, those in the grey area feel quicker to be judged, as if their sexuality will be discredited.

There is the simple reality that everyone is different, and yet, we are so quick to view people in black and white. It's the same thing that creates every fear complex and reinstates the idea that there is an "us" and "them." Once we allow ourselves to see beyond the black and white lines of societal norms, to see complexity, nuance, different points of view and theologies, and multiple truths, we will be able to see the grey. And once we see the grey, we will be able to see the color of life and the full spectrum of existence.

ANNA LIEB '20

LEFT WING

RIGHT WING

Today, the political party binary is seen by many as an impediment to the functionality of government. With the particularly heated debate over the most recent election and a spike in extreme political views on both sides of the political spectrum, it's becoming increasingly difficult not to take more aggressive political stances. The number of self-identified moderates in the U.S. has fallen from 49 percent to 39 percent since 2004, according to the Pew Research Center. Many blame this increased polarization for problems in our government, and they have a point: polarization contributes to a gridlocked congress, antagonization of the other side, and deteriorating communication between parties.

However, the common perception that polarization is nothing but harmful to the government is false. Although the current extreme polarization in government has many drawbacks, it is important to recognize that the binary in government can have many benefits when balanced correctly. Today, the government is not balanced. But an ideal equilibrium can be achieved when both sides recognize the other opinion while still remaining adamant about their own — so long as the rivalry doesn't deteriorate into an outright war.

In a perfect society, the two-party system encourages informed voters — if there were numerous parties, citizens would not work to stay informed on all of the different parties' ideologies. With the polarized system, the two parties have clearly-defined stances on major issues, which simplifies the voters' choice. When voters choose between two sides, the parties are also held accountable for their actions. Each party must be very careful to go through with its promises; if not, the party would lose

supporters and receive more opposition from the other party. In this way, the two-party system regulates the government by making sure politicians comply with the citizens.

Also, more polarized elections bolster civic participation and activism. For example, voter turnout rates in both the 2008 and 2016 presidential elections were higher than those in the 2012 election. The 2008 election marked the election of the first black president, while the 2016 election was full of controversy over both candidates. This election has also sparked many protests throughout the country; the most notable being the recent worldwide Women's March. In U.S. history, the divisive 1960 presidential race between Richard Nixon and John F. Kennedy had the highest voter turnout rates in the past 100 years.

Similarly, the gridlock in Congress also has its benefits. Difficulty in passing legislation ensures that all of the laws that do pass are agreed upon by a majority from both sides. Once a consensus is reached in such a rigorous system, it is obvious that the decision or law is the right option. Although the current amount of division is harmful to our government's function, more controlled polarization can lead to the beneficial practice of selective bipartisanship, ensuring that both sides come together to pass only the best legislation.

Overall, we ought to acknowledge the good that can come out of an ideally-polarized government. Although we often feel the negative impacts of polarization, we also forget the drawbacks to having a government that is less structured or split into many smaller parties. We must not only acknowledge the bad aspects of our government, but also understand how to shape our polarized system into a healthier one.



graphic: Melody Tang

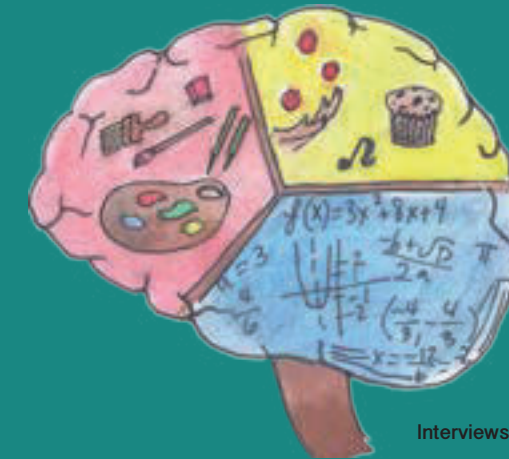


graphic: John Liang



graphic: John Liang

BINARIES?



Interviews: Vanguard co-editors

LAUREN LIU '20

EXTROVERT

INTROVERT

Categorizing ourselves is perhaps one of humanity's favorite pastimes. We enjoy scrolling through personality quizzes, giving ourselves constricting labels, and reading about traits we are supposed to have. "Introvert" and "extrovert" are two of the most ubiquitous labels.

People commonly assume that an introvert must be nerdy and aloof, while an extrovert is the quintessential and unfiltered "life-of-the-party." Yet many misunderstand the real definition of introversion and extroversion coined by psychologist Carl Jung in 1920.

The simple difference between introverts and extroverts is their reaction to and stimulation from social interaction. Whereas introverts tend to feel the need to recharge after the excitement from a party, extroverts are fueled by it. This simplistic definition reveals nothing about leadership potential, creativity, social status, popularity, or success.

Introversion and extroversion are only the extreme black and white of personality types. The spectrum of grays is endless — a whole range of possibilities. The lesser known, yet more common "category" of person is the ambivert. Ambiverts are people who fall in the middle of the introvert and extrovert spectrum.

No one completely fits the binary of introversion or extroversion. Even Jung said that "there is no such thing as a pure introvert or extrovert. Such a person would be in the lunatic asylum."

The fact is, we are ever-changing human beings, not machines programmed to fit completely into a single group. People tend to lean more towards one end of the spectrum, but we ought not define ourselves and others by such categorizations.

Aside from being inaccurate due to human subjectivity and individuality, this "binary" can be harmful. When people are deemed the archetypal "introvert" or "extrovert," others' expectations of them change. People thought to be inherently social or antisocial have a hard time acting outside of the category into which they've been placed, regardless of the healthiness and normalness of this behavior.

Complete introversion and unequivocal extroversion are myths — every human is a varying degree of ambivert.

AN INTERVIEW WITH AN ENGLISH TEACHER: MR. JOHN SULLIVAN



photo: Aaron Wu

What is a false dilemma?
A false dilemma is an informal fallacy of logic in which one party offers to the other party a limited number of choices in order to force the second party to choose one of the... two and thus make some kind of point.

What makes a false dilemma a fallacy?
It's a fallacy because it presumes that there are x number of choices, when in fact there are more than the number proposed by the person who's talking.

Have you seen any of these fallacies in real life? Yeah... you can see them all the time... A good example of a kind of logical fallacy that might come up in the world right now would be the current administration saying, "We can either confront North Korea by bombing their nuclear facilities, or we can show cowardice and run away." That's a logical fallacy: there are alternatives between running away and a bombing campaign.



graphic: Caroline Tan

AN INTERVIEW WITH AN HISTORY TEACHER: MR. KIAN BARRY

FULL CREDIT

NO CREDIT

Where do you see binaries in grading?
We see binaries in forms of the written section of the AP exam ... [There are] three different writing sections. One is the short answer, where each question has three parts — a, b, and c — and you either entirely answer the question or you do not answer [it at all], so you receive either a one or a zero. The same goes for the DBQ, or the document-based question, and the long essay question, where there is a six-point and seven-point rubric. It doesn't allow for any gray area: either you do the whole thing, or none of it. For example, one of the sections [requires you to] utilize six documents, and whether you utilize five or you utilize zero, you get a zero. But if you utilize six correctly, you get a one. So, it is strictly binary; all of the writing sections are exactly like that. You either do all of one thing, or none of it. There's no in-between.

What effect do you think that has?
I'm still able to provide written feedback in my classroom. On a rubric I can say, "You got a zero on this because you didn't fill all of these things, but these were the ways [you] were successful, and these were the ways [you] were unsuccessful." So, there [are] means for growth. On the actual exam, it means you don't get feedback, and you do receive a grade that is not necessarily representative of how well you wrote your essay, or how good it was. It's a means of being able to grade a lot very quickly ... I would argue [that it's not] the best way, ultimately, to grade writing or the success of an argument. But it is a way to make [the grades] consistent, I suppose, though that consistency isn't necessarily good.



photo: Angel Musyimi

Do you see the letter grade scale (especially in humanities classes) having similar issues?
I don't think that a letter grade or a number grade is representative, of course, of all of what a student does. Now, practically, when a teacher has 110 — 120 students, I'm not sure that there's a solution to that. I think a better response would be a conference or a written example of what's happening. But, we live in a civilization focused on [grades] ... And I don't want to discount judgments of any kind — certainly there is value [in that]. I think that students probably place more value on what their grade is than their teacher does in respect to how they view their learning. I don't necessarily say that because this person got an "A" and this student got a "B+," [that] the student who got an "A" learned more or necessarily even portrayed [a greater understanding] to me. But they fit the model that we used for grading.

Do you see student work falling in the gray area a lot?
Yes. For example, in the long essay, there's a part that says, "explain the causes and effects [of an event]"... If there are two causes and two effects, oftentimes students will provide sufficient reasoning for three of them or two of them — which is great, and I'm glad they're producing that — but for the fourth one, they either don't attempt to [explain], or their reasoning is flawed or misplaced in time. So, they receive a zero even though they certainly didn't do zero work, and it wasn't the same as if they wrote nothing, which is what the grade really reflects...

Do you see this often in grading? Do you think it goes beyond AP exams?
I'm sure it does ... If I were not connected to the [AP] exam in any way, I would have more freedom to provide a different grading model. However, I still do utilize a different grading model; I just also indicate what I think you would get from an AP standpoint. So, it doesn't necessarily restrict how I would provide feedback; it's just something that I'm aware of while grading and that I want to make students aware of. Because I care about the AP exam to the extent that they do — which is oftentimes significant — so some people could use [binary grading] more concretely than I do, and it certainly can come up ... Multiple choice [is a common example].

EVERETT SHEN '18

"I-SHAPED" INDIVIDUAL

"T-SHAPED" INDIVIDUAL

If you're anything like me, you have little idea of what you're going to do for college. It boggles my mind when I hear that some of my friends have already decided to become doctors. But the dilemma goes beyond having too much to choose from, or on the flip side, having no idea what your interests are. For me, it's the decision of becoming either a specialist or a generalist.

We share our world with "I"-shaped individuals, who have profound mastery of a specific skillset symbolized by the depth of the letter "I," and "T"-shaped individuals, who are predisposed to connect and utilize different types of knowledge, hence the horizontal line in "T" that spans the surface. It's a concept popularized by a global design company's chief executive, Tim Brown, and has extreme significance in terms of who we want to be. It lurks everywhere, and if you're conscious of its existence, it's hard not to frame your entire life around it.

We're constantly pressuring ourselves to make the choice that'll let us get the most out of life. With that in mind, here's a quick question: who would you rather be? The pianist who's spent his entire career honing his skill, or the cosmopolitan journalist who's experienced all walks of life? Both are certainly enviable. The cultural elite in classical China were generalists — people who comprehended literature, calligraphy, painting, music, and politics. Modern Western culture promotes specialists. We tend to respect and look up to members of society who have poured years into perfecting their craft, such as doctors, engineers, and musicians. Additionally, we're financially encouraged to specialize: bachelor's degree holders earn an extra \$50,000 a year.

Ultimately, we're a blend of the two, but whether or not you consciously strike that balance makes all the difference, which is why I say my conflict is having too few choices instead of too many. To me, becoming a biologist, physicist, and chemist are functionally the same. They all entail years of study, reasoning, and lots of problem-solving, which aren't bad at all when I imagine them. I'd acquire the satisfaction of living a life dedicated to exploration and the pride of mastery. On the other hand, it also means I'll never know what it feels like to do anything else. That may be a problem that's difficult to relate to because true generalists no longer exist in our society. But think about it this way: if I'm going to become a specialist, I want to become the best in my field, and that means dedicating all of my time to that field. Y'all saw Whiplash. The dude wasn't going to become the best drummer in the world by expanding his tastes.

Of course, in reality, the experiences of majoring in biology, chemistry, and physics are going to be completely different. My choices are highly restricted by the fact that I haven't had enough time to try out everything that I might be interested in.

It's impossible to say. And that's why it's important not to let the dread of not knowing stop you from doing something just because you don't see a sign that it's going to be the best thing that's ever happened to you. Too many expectations in life can be just as harmful as having none — which is why you should take this article with a grain of salt. Don't frame your life as a race to maximize happiness or else you'll get none. As Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds." People should see their choices as a path to diverse opportunities and not as something that hems them in.