# DELIBERATIONS

*A Journal of First-Year Writing at Duke University • Fall 2015*

THOMPSON WRITING PROGRAM

*"We are very pleased to present these fine examples of student work from Duke's Academic Writing classes. You will see that our Academic Writing courses permit a wide range of work by students in a variety of disciplines. This work is both creative and scholarly, and thus introduces first-year students to the kind of rigorous and innovative thinking that distinguishes an academic community such as Duke."*

*Kristen Neuschel, Director*
*Thompson Writing Program*

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*The "Yelling Scholar" has been selected to represent the scholarly writing of Duke first-year students, and henceforth will be the cover image for Deliberations. The gargoyle, "Yelling Scholar," was named by a Duke photographer and sits atop Kilgo, a residence hall on Duke's West Campus. The "Yelling Scholar" serves as a visual reminder for scholars to express and share their scholarship with others.*


**Thompson Writing Program**
***Deliberations:***
***A Journal of First-Year Writing at Duke University***





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**writingprogram@duke.edu**




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**Sheryl Welte Emch**

Sheryl is an instructor of First-Year Writing in the Thompson Writing Program at Duke University. She earned her Master's degree in Higher Education and Student Affairs from The University of Vermont, and her Ph.D. in Educational Psychology from Michigan State University. Her research and teaching focuses on coming of age, specifically how social and cultural factors influence college students' epistemological and personal development. She loves working with and learning from first-year college students.

# Foreword

True to the name of the journal, *Deliberations*, this collection of outstanding essays, written by first-year students in Writing 101-- Duke's one-semester, first-year course in academic writing-- are indeed deliberations. That is, each essay was written, and rewritten, with careful and reflective consideration. The process of generating ideas, exploring and reflecting on their significance, writing and revising and editing, was without a doubt an extremely deliberate process, done consciously, thoughtfully, slowly, (sometimes joyfully and sometimes painfully), with the utmost concern for the process and the product. In other words, these essays are deliberations of the highest quality, and have the potential to touch many lives.

I have been teaching first-year writing at Duke for nearly a decade (and loving every minute of it!), so I am no stranger to the fascinating and vast array of topics being offered to introduce first-year students to university level writing. All Writing 101 classes share the goals of helping students to engage with the work of others, articulate a position, situate their writing within specific contexts, and transfer their writing knowledge beyond Writing 101. That said, each instructor, inspired by their academic discipline and personal interests, puts these goals into practice in different ways, creating very distinct classes with an array of unique final papers and projects.

These papers and projects foster the development of strategies for generating, supporting, and sharing their ideas within a community of scholars. While all Writing 101 students are encouraged to write as though they are writing for a broad audience, for most students their immediate community is comprised of 11 other first-year students and the professor. For students whose work is published in *Deliberations* (or elsewhere), however, their community expands infinitely. Their work is no longer being read just by their classmates, their professor, or anyone else with whom they decide to share their work. These students have chosen, and been chosen, to share their work with the entire Duke community and beyond. They have put their ideas out for public consumption, as well as public scrutiny, deliberately and bravely expanding their audience and community of scholars. This is no simple task, but rather an act of strength and courage, an ability and willingness to engage openly and honestly about their own and others' ideas.

Our editorial board, consisting of an extraordinary group of Writing 101 instructors, Duke librarians, and previously published *Deliberations*' student authors, selected eight remarkable essays that reflect the diversity of academic disciplines of the TWP faculty, and in turn, the impressive range of beliefs about and approaches to academic writing. Each of the published essays touched, inspired, moved, provoked, and/or resonated with several readers in some way.

This issue of *Deliberations* opens with Helen Yu's thoughtful and thought-provoking essay, *Interpreting Banksy: An Analysis of Artist-Audience Relationships through Graffiti.* Helen introduces us to Banksy, one of the most notorious graffiti artists in the contemporary art world. While his works often sell for enormous sums, they sometimes get painted over without another thought. These contradicting attitudes (and actions) towards his work highlight graffiti's precarious role in the art world, inviting us to analyze the boundaries of what we value to be art, and perhaps pushing us to consider the voices excluded from this conversation. Helen's voice comes through as she poses complex questions: Should graffiti be painted over or left alone? Should companies be able to use graffiti to sell merchandise? And what are the implications of these different actions/choices? The answers to these questions are unclear; however, thinking critically about them allow us to better appreciate the prevalent, uncontainable quality of human expression.

Ryan Kashtan's timely essay, *Private Incarceration: Trading Freedom for Profit,* explores his stance on and the implications of the privatization of America's prison system, which has increased drastically over the past two decades. More specifically, Ryan discusses how private prisons, while hailed as a means of cutting costs, may actually lead to in an increase in incarceration. Ryan, as objectively as possible, provides his readers with the information needed to form their own perspectives about this important issue. At the same time, Ryan's essay does an excellent job of pushing us to think deeply about a complicated problem in our country, the epidemic of over-incarceration in the United States, and reflect carefully on our beliefs about individual and collective rights and liberties.

The volume continues with Karen Young's essay, *Black Athletics and White Identity: The Reciprocal Process of Identification*, which focuses on exploring and better understanding the relationship between black and white identities, especially by analyzing images in today's sports media. Her work, informed by scholarly literature about race, identity, and sports media in the social sciences and humanities, looks at how Black Americans have historically been restricted to sectors that require physical talent as opposed to intellectual skills, and the consequences of this restrictive categorization. Also, Karen's writing builds upon Toni Morrison's *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness & the Literary Imagination* to discover the inherent connection between black and white. Given the challenges of discussing and writing about race, Karen's authentic and accessible exploration provides an important springboard for helping herself and others to discuss and write about race in ways that are more open, honest, and personally meaningful.

In their well-written and motivating essay, *Addressing Food Insecurity in Low-Income Durham Communities,* Sara Snyder, Angela Chen, and Sam Furlong analyze current research on food security and food deserts to help us better recognize and understand food insecurity locally. The group complemented their academic research on food security and food deserts with an experiential component in which they attempted to purchase food in a Durham food desert. This allowed the group to acquire a first-hand sense of the food issues present in the Durham community, thus informing their recommendations for solutions in relevant and meaningful ways. The philanthropic focus of this essay reveals some important information about who the authors are, as well as how they want to make a difference in the world.

The following three essays, each in its own unique way, use personal relationships and stories to help us deepen our understanding of serious and pressing issues.

Rachel Yang, in her essay, *The Mentoring Narrative: Recovering from Breast Cancer Treatment,* explores a breast cancer survivor's encounter with biomedicine, one which involved a treatment regimen that may have cured her body of cancer but failed to address other issues, such as disrupted temporality, cancer stigma, and body image. Although meant to cure the body of disease, biomedical treatments, which have become increasingly more aggressive, can have damaging effects on a patient's self-image. Throughout the paper, Rachel discusses how biomedicine, and not the disease itself, is the cause of much of the stigma associated with breast cancer. At the same time, Rachel shares the story of a woman who uses her experience to mentor and reassure others that these damaging effects can be overcome, thus demonstrating the therapeutic power of sharing and listening to an illness story.

What began as a personal narrative about her family resulted in Eliane Shinder's meaningful and informative essay, *From Generation to Generation: A Chronology of Depression,* about the relationship between gender and mental health. Eliane's research reveals that gender inequality impacts mental health disparity from generation to generation. She discusses how there are significant stressors associated with being a housewife, including little or no recognition, no remuneration, monotony of chores, and an inability to resign. Finally, she proposes that we need to abandon rigid standards and traditional conceptions of gender roles to effect real change in the future. Inspired by a desire to better understand her family, Eliane uses her personal story to help us learn about the complicated and challenging disease of depression facing millions of woman and families.

Natalie Shammas' essay, *Stepping Away From the Stage: Rebuilding My Identity After Experiencing a Turning "Pointe" with Ballet*, is a personal and academic case study that describes and analyzes the most pivotal moment of Natalie's life—her loss of passion for ballet. Drawing from research on identity development in adolescents, identity development in young ballet dancers, and burnout in athletes, Natalie explores, and tries to make sense of, why she lost her passion for ballet—something that she identified herself with for years, as well as how she has struggled to find her identity without it. Just as her transition process away from ballet was long and challenging, she has come to realize and accept that discovering her current self will not be a swift process either. Analyzing her personal story with academic sources not only helps Natalie further her understanding of her own coming of age, but also gives others insight into their experiences finding and losing their passion and sense of self.

The final essay, *Brittany: A Trans Person & A Politician Dance*, by Jesse Rencurrell-Pollack, pushes our conception of academic writing in important and, possibly for some, controversial ways. Jesse, committed to capturing the truth of many trans people, writes a creative and fictional story, based heavily on actual anecdotal evidence, to help people come to know, intellectually and emotionally, the devastating repercussions of transphobia. The lines between personal and academic become blurred, perhaps invisible, as Jesse chooses not to use academic sources throughout the text. Instead, Jesse deliberately keeps the focus on the fictional characters and story, based on actual anecdotal evidence, who embody the oppression and marginalization that trans people in this country endure, mainly by people who lack understanding about what being trans means or why it is important that we embrace trans and gender non-conforming identities. This results in considerable emotional--and sometimes deadly--trauma for trans people. Jesse shows the power and destruction of ignorance and fear of the unknown, how personal viewpoints can transform into laws that harm others.

Individually and collectively, these essays have definitely pushed my thinking, my emotions, and my teaching, informing my ideas about their various topics, as well as about writing, revising, and collaborating. Each author possesses a distinct voice that comes across loudly and honestly, identifying and sharing with others what the authors think is important, and why, and thus, who they are and/or want to be. By reading these essays you will become part of an ongoing conversation about important and diverse ideas, about how to communicate those ideas in compelling and engaging ways, and ultimately, about how to find and make meaning. I hope that you, too, will be touched or provoked by, resonate or empathize with, and perhaps even be moved to take action as a result of reading the following essays. I invite you to experience these essays both personally and academically, or however you see these two dimensions intertwine.

Cheers! *Sheryl*

**Helen Yu**

I consider myself to be a pretty weird person, so when I was registering for Writing 101 classes, *Making the Familiar Strange* stood out to me. The class taught me new concepts while sharpening my writing and revision skills. I expanded my knowledge of contemporary literature and art, and debated the importance of status in my own consumption of media. Most importantly, the class, taught by Professor Spohrer, gave me the opportunity to grapple with confusion. Whereas before I often ignored things that confused me, I began to realize that confusion is fascinating. The things that confuse us, the strange things, are the very ones that exemplify our own limits of understanding. By pushing those limits, we have the chance to encounter the unknown and grow. I learned how to deconstruct my perception of abnormality – and by effect, normality.

Once I began to de-normalize my understanding of literature in class, this modified perception leaked into other aspects of my life. It was during a conversation with my friends over lunch at Marketplace when I was first inspired to write about this topic. My friends and I were talking about the subjectivity of aesthetics, when our discussion turned to graffiti. Graffiti is problematic: Is it art or not? Who decides when graffiti is good enough to be considered art? Would painting over small scrawls on signposts be more justified than painting over a large, colorful mural on a building?

I had the opportunity to bring my thoughts into class and explore the issue from a more academic perspective. I used to think academic papers needed to be objective, but Professor Spohrer helped me realize that if art is subjective, then writing is as well. I became less timid with putting my voice into my papers and imbuing my writing with personality. It was a challenge balancing logical structure with creativity, but I received a lot of great guidance. I would like to thank my writing teacher, Professor Spohrer and my editor, Professor Emch, for helping me while always encouraging me to pursue my own ideas and style; my family for their endless support; and my friends, including Andrea and Jeainny, for filling my life with inspiration.

# Making the Familiar Strange:

## An Analysis of Artist-Audience Relationships through Graffiti

Helen Yu
Writing 101: Making the Familiar Strange
Professor: Lauren Spohrer

Last October, BBC News reported that a local council in the UK had painted over one of Banksy's street art murals. The mural depicts a group of birds protesting a different looking bird's right to live among them. Someone had found this mural "offensive" and "racist", and filed a complaint ("Banksy Anti-immigration Birds"). Yet, at the time, the local council had not known that they were covering up one of Banksy's works. Only after Banksy posted a photograph of the mural on his website did the local council express regret, saying "we would obviously welcome an appropriate Banksy original on any of our seafronts and would be delighted if he returned in the future."


*Anti-immigration Birds mural painted by Banksy in Clacton-on-Sea, 2014*
*Creative Commons, Flickr: https://www.flickr.com/photos/dullhunk/15337611468 • Banksy.co.uk*

The mural's removal demonstrates how graffiti street art is vulnerable to resistance in ways that more legitimate art is not. While museums heavily guard their artwork by installing security cameras, motion detectors, and alarm systems (Wax), graffiti is often categorized as vandalism and subsequently painted over or removed. With its historical roots in a countercultural movement, spray-paint street art does not receive the same kind of recognition and security that other mediums such as oil painting, photography, or sculpture, do. Despite growing acceptance of street art in recent times, the removal of Banksy's mural exemplifies how institutions continue to see this medium as one that is not entitled to attention.

What society considers as *art* legitimizes certain creative styles at the cost of ignoring others, placing the power of judgment differently on artists and their audience. Literary theorist Eagleton considers art to be a "value-judgment" rooted in a society's spatial and temporally specific dominant ideology (13). Works that fall into this category posit certain forms of creative expression as superior to others, and through its exclusivity, grant themselves prestige. *Art* also restricts public exposure of *good* artwork to an elite group of expressive voices. More specifically, the concept of art often emphasizes the role of the artist. In response, another literary theorist,

Roland Barthes, criticizes the tendency of society to believe that works contain "the 'message' of the Author-God," and to use that message to validate the author's status (146). This theory is materialized in the visual art world where museums often describe the artist's intent on cards placed next to paintings to guide the viewers' experience. Doing so gives artists the power to impose their own intention onto the viewers and invalidate differing perceptions. Barthes sees any artwork as a "tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centers of culture" so that all artistic content draws from social context rather than from the author's own genius. He downplays authors as mere linguistic translators of society's collective authorship, who should therefore not hold power over the interpretation of their works. While Barthes' critique may apply well to the high-end art world, it breaks down on the streets. There, the viewers hold the power; the graffiti artist is subject to their preferences. The viewers not only have the ability to render a graffiti artist's work inappropriate and undeserving of exposure, but they can also *act* on their opinion, as the council did when they censored Banksy's work.

In opposition to Barthes' idea of non-authorship is graffiti, whose evolution as an art form stems from differentiation and variation. Graffiti is not homogenous; rather, it can be separated into several categories depending on the intent of the artist. *Gang graffiti* is used to "mark territory and war zones, send messages, insults to other gangs, warn away intruders" while *tagging* is about distinguished notoriety and the rise to fame (Gómez 644-6). Taggers prioritize quantity over quality in their work, spending countless hours saturating train cars and public spaces with identical words and phrases. *Murals,* often classified as street art, are on the top of the graffiti artistic hierarchy because artists see them as "opportunities for artistic or social expression" (Gómez 650). They evolved during the early 1970s, when "[graffiti] writers, competing for each other's recognition, and for public fame, created ever larger and more elaborate tags" (Lachmann 240). People who do graffiti in general are called writers, while those who focus specifically on murals are referred to as artists. Across all three classes of graffiti, writers strive to make their presence known.

Furthermore, graffiti emphasizes the crucial role of cultural circumstance in both the conception and execution of artists' works. For lower-income inner-city youth lacking resources to gain artistic proficiency, graffiti is considered a more convenient medium than other traditional art forms. Spray paints can be stolen, and the urban landscape, transformed into a canvas (Lachmann 234). Although graffiti artists learn their techniques from more experienced mentors, they strive to to develop their own style to distinguish themselves from the other artists. Writer Marilyn Randall argues that the artists' intentions to "transmit, imitate, transform, or innovate" create a "self-consciousness," which makes their identities crucial to the formation of their works (58).


*Different graffiti artist styles; from left to right: Banksy (photo by Adrian Pingstone), Eduardo Kobra (photo by Sturm), Shepard Fairey (photo by Herzi Pinki).*

All photos taken from Wikimedia Commons.

The idiosyncratic styles developed by varying street artists demonstrate Randall's concept of unique authorship – an identity that, as she claims, does not exist naturally, but emerges through differences in discourse (58). Banksy creates his other works of street art (example pictured above) with a style that is very similar to the one seen in his anti-immigration birds work. His unique stenciling style and color scheme is almost universally recognized despite that his civilian identity remains unknown. This style is distinct from those of other street artists (examples pictured above), whose works convey different meanings through their aesthetic disparities. Beyond just unique design, the very process of making street art further evinces an artist's individuality. When muralists risk police confrontation, railway electrocution, and falling from heights, they imbue their works with undeniable elements of authorship (Lachmann 240). In her book *Street Art,* Johannes Stahl states that all graffiti inherently takes on a political nature because "it oversteps the boundaries of the public code, and by doing so, always calls it into question" (Ferguson 24). Regardless of the intent of the artist, the very medium of graffiti carries elements of resistance.

Anti-graffiti campaigns contain elements of race and class bias, so taking away the voice of certain artists may carry enormous cultural consequences. In 1972, New York Mayor John Lindsay's anti-graffiti task force profiled the typical graffiti writer as "male, Black or Puerto Rican, 13 to 16 years old… and a student coming from a low socially economic background" (Ferguson 10) – a profile that characterizes as well as targets lower-class minority youth. In reality, however, white people were also becoming involved in graffiti, but were "not targeted as much as minorities" (Ferguson 11). Even nowadays, the government refuses to recognize the creative and artistic legitimacy of graffiti writing, seeking instead to stifle this voice. New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg's current anti-graffiti campaign, for example, not only paints over and power washes graffiti, but also grants a monetary incentive of up to $500 to the city's residents to report "graffiti vandalism" to the City-Wide Vandals Task Force ("Combating Graffiti" 7-8). Furthermore, Bloomberg restricted the sale of permanent markers and spray paint only to people over eighteen years old. This initiative to remove, prevent, and criminalize graffiti, silences the creative expression of an entire subculture. The mainstream social perception of all graffiti as vandalism, and the legal treatment of graffiti writers as delinquents, rejects art borne from those at the bottom of the social hierarchy. As anti-graffiti actions erase the artist's intention and validity, the work loses the richness and vitality of the artist's culture. Thus, allowing for the "birth of the reader… at the cost of the death of the author" may be a heavier price than Barthes imagined (148).

Despite institutional silencing of graffiti artists, recent mainstream appropriation of graffiti street art selectively grants power back to certain creators. According to the Washington Post article, the council who removed the anti-immigration bird mural claimed to have not known that it was Banksy who had painted the work at the time ("Banksy Anti-immigration Birds"), implying that their actions would have been different if they had known otherwise. This story seems entirely believable, considering that people go to great lengths to embalm Banksy's works for private sale. Some people pay to transfer the stencils from Banksy's work onto canvas, or even go as far as to carve the entire work out of the side of the building to be sold for thousands, sometimes millions, of US dollars (Associated Press). Attaching a dollar value to graffiti works seems to validate them in the eyes of the public. Banksy's prestige and recognition in popular culture transcends the perception of the graffiti artist as a common vandal. The viewers of his work see his artistry as essential to the work itself, making the work more deserving of permanence, value, and attention than the works of other lesser-known street artists. Had the local council of Clacton-on-Sea known the reportedly "offensive" and "racist" mural was one of Banksy's works, they might have overlooked the perception of the audience to preserve the supposed message of the artist.

Mainstream appropriation of graffiti art creates a mediator between artists and their audience, muddling the relationship between the two entities. Ferguson claims that the "high art community's" interest in graffiti comes mainly from the appeal of the "artists' willingness to dabble in illegal activities," turning graffiti into an exotic and "sexy" commodity instead of valuing the context of its origin (23). Since graffiti constitutes the "counterhegemonic character of a subculture," it can only gain legitimacy when ideological institutions concerning the state and the economy "situate [it] within the dominant framework of meanings" (Lachmann 232). When museums appropriate graffiti images onto the walls of their galleries, or clothing companies onto their merchandise, they are able to skew the artist's intentions and compromise the authenticity of the work. As a result, the viewer who interprets the image misreads the intent of the profiteering mediator as that of the work's original creator. Banksy made this point evident when he set up a small pop-up stall in Central Park, New York, selling authentic original signed prints for $60. Because open-air art sales connote much lower status than museums, the stall received very few customers (Kennedy). This situation exposed how the public judges artwork according to not their own perceptions, or even the artist's merit, but the status of the artwork conveyed by a mediator. Barthes seems primarily concerned with the contextual perceptions of the creator and the audience, but perhaps he overlooked the role of the mediator. In an interview, Banksy laments "commercial success [as] a mark of failure for a graffiti artist," commenting that the meaning of art is tainted through the illusion of money (Hamilton).

Recognizing graffiti artists may help to make art more inclusive, but capitalizing on singular identities of certain artists threatens graffiti's subcultural ideology. Considering Barthes, it is "the culmination of capitalist ideology, which has attached the greatest importance of the 'person' to the author" that causes the audience to care about the artist only out of the pursuit of economic validity (143). In general, graffiti writers who have historically opposed hegemonic influence in the form of law and capital now express uncertainty when receiving recognition in the midst of a cultural power struggle. Some openly refuse the role of the "Author-God," while others, like Banksy, seek to preserve their message, but deny galleries the authority to sell their artwork, refusing to profit off the very idea of the "prestige of the individual", which Barthes criticizes (143). On the other hand, people contend that with a net worth of over $20 million, Banksy has the financial security and an already established fan base to forego capital in sending out a message (Rahm). Shepard Fairey, another well-known and wealthy street artist, claims that commoditizing his graffiti is not an indication of "selling out," but instead a way for his art to reach an audience that extends far beyond his group of devout followers (D'Amborosio). Although his followers may feel betrayed because accepting money for art seems to go against graffiti's counterculture ideals, Fairey claims his focus is on widespread distribution. His motive is not to conform to countercultural taste, nor to that of the dominant culture, but to distribute a message that can surpass all cultural boundaries.

In his 2002 book *Existencilism,* Bansky accuses advertising agencies and town planners of being the true vandals of public space (Banksy). His works are either removed by the power of the viewing public, or preserved and sold by prospective profiteers, rendering him conscious of how intermediary transporters of culture create images of artists that are not genuine to their true identities and intentions. In his anonymity, Banksy would rather see his works submit to graffiti's competitive nature and get re-vandalized, or fade away to the prevailing power of nature itself, than to allow his voice to be silenced or misconstrued. He pushes for people to reclaim ownership of their living spaces:

> Imagine a city where graffiti wasn't illegal, a city where everybody could draw wherever they liked. Where every street was awash with a million colors and little phrases. Where standing at a bus stop was never boring. A city that felt like a living and breathing thing which belonged to everybody, not just the estate agents and barons of big business. (Banksy)

Barthes argues that individual authors' identities are lost to the collective authorship of their situational and cultural contexts, so much so that the authors should "die" to make room for the reader's interpretation. In light of this argument, Barthes fails to recognize that in the process of executing their ideas, the authors, or artists, validate their attachment to and influence on the work. Moreover, when hegemonic power lies with the audience, killing off the author contributes to further marginalization of groups whose voices already seem to be unheard. Is the best way, then, not to initiate the death of the author, but instead to kill off the capital mediator? Would such a murder foster the harmonious growth between a work's creator and its audience?

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**Ryan Kashtan**

When choosing a Writing 101 class, *Land of the Free* immediately grabbed my attention. Its premise was provocative – what's beneath the surface of a culture that prides itself as the "land of the free"? Initially, we examined what it meant to be free and the ways in which governments take away liberty, as well as how the United States specifically has historically lived up to its promise of freedom. Towards the end of the semester, we began to examine the modern state of imprisonment in the United States – a system that punishes its citizens on a scale unparalleled by other countries, even those that are perceived as oppressive. America's escalating reliance on imprisonment was an issue that had drawn my attention since I first encountered it in a high school debate. I began to wonder whether the privatization of punishment was a driving force behind the massive expansion of imprisonment, and whether privatization raised criminal justice concerns that conflict with the obligations that the government has to its prisoners. I began to explore the existing narratives and perspectives on private prisons, and, with Professor Whitt's help, molded my essay into my own contribution on the issue.

# Private Incarceration:
## Trading Freedom for Profit

Ryan Kashtan
Writing 101: Land of the Free
Professor: Matt Whitt


Fueled first by Ronald Reagan's war on drugs and then by the post-9/11 incarceration of non-citizens, the United States has had an imprisonment explosion over the past few decades. The U.S. currently imprisons roughly 716 people per 100,000[1]. These numbers, drastically higher than the imprisonment rates of the next highest countries, make the U.S. – the supposed "land of the free"[2] – the world's leader in incarceration. The U.S. incarceration rate is roughly 1.5 times that of Rwanda and Russia, 2.6 times that of Brazil, and a whopping 4.9 times that of Spain, the countries that rank second through fifth in terms of those with the most prisoners.[3] The U.S. incarceration problem is being increasingly highlighted both in the academic world and the media. But what often gets overlooked in the debate about the incarceration epidemic is the role of private prisons. These prisons are for-profit private entities that are contracted out by the government. Since 1990, the number of privately run prisons in the United States has increased by 1600%, and private prisons are now a $55 billion dollar industry.[4] Both the federal and state governments justify this increase as a necessary cost-cutting measure, and there is evidence to suggest that private prisons do have a lower per capita cost than public prisons.[5] However this lower per capita cost structure fails to translate into greater efficiency. Moreover, private prisons also cause affirmative harm that has far reaching implications for the criminal justice system for two reasons. One reason is that they go beyond the legitimate function of prisons in administering punishment by trying to influence the allocation of punishment, which is a function properly reserved for the state. Another reason is that they run afoul of traditional theories of punishment in the United States, most importantly with the predominant punishment theory of retributivism. Moreover, these negative effects cannot be cured with stricter regulation.

The privatization agenda was born out of the escalating cost concerns associated with America's incarceration binge.[6] Thus, as an initial matter, it is important to examine whether, leaving any potential negative effects of privatization aside, the hoped-for efficiencies of privatization have been achieved. It may be true that private prisons cost less per prisoner, on a dollar for dollar basis, to run than state run prisons. A number of cost comparison studies have shown that private prisons result in average savings of operational costs of about 10-15%.[7] Some scholars, however, have questioned the accuracy of the data.[8] Further, the industry

does not benefit from the increased efficiencies associated with free markets that have robust competition because the private prison industry is dominated by two large corporations (the Corrections Corporation of America and the GEO Group), which combined manage roughly 75% of the private prisons).[9]

Dominated by these two companies, the private prison industry in the U.S. is a duopolistic profit machine. According to Sheldon Richman of the Cato Institute (a libertarian think tank), "Rather than ceding a service to the competitive market, prison privatization constitutes merely the contracting-out of a government monopoly. Whatever efficiencies that may be realized through the competitive bidding for a monopoly government contract, the resulting service can hardly be considered 'free market.'"[10] Thus, any "savings" cannot be assumed to result from increased efficiencies that result from privatization. Instead, private prisons have more surreptitious ways of reducing costs. For example, it is well known that private prisons "cherry pick" the prisoners they serve, refusing to sign contracts that would place them in charge of the higher risk, higher cost inmates that government prisons are required to serve.[11] Thus, their perceived cost savings will reflect "artificial efficiencies" associated with serving an easier to manage prison population. More importantly, savings are often achieved through staff reductions or through salary and benefit savings from hiring a more inexperienced workforce. These staffing decisions often come on the backs of prisoners' safety.

The most tragic example of the ramifications associated with attempting to rely on privatization arose out of the mismanagement of medium risk prisoners who were transferred to a Youngstown, Ohio, CCA facility with staff that was ill equipped to handle them, resulting in two deaths, 47 assaults and 6 escapes all within the first 14 months of the prison's opening.[12] Another private company, Wackenhut Correction Corporation (now GEO), was responsible for two facilities in New Mexico that collectively experienced nine stabbings and five murders within their first year of operation[13] (to which the company responded that "New Mexico has a rough prison population").[14] There is also a great deal of anecdotal evidence that private prisons embark on other cost cutting measures that are not reflective of private market efficiencies. For example, there are stories of private facilities where prisoners have no toilet paper and are forced to eat raw meat and food that is infested with insects.[15] All of these "savings" are achieved despite the fact that the compensation for the most senior executives of the largest private prison corporations is much higher, well into seven figures, than that of their public counterparts.[16] While it is possible that these atrocities might also occur in a public prison, private prisons exist to earn a profit. Like any for-profit corporation, private prisons strive to make as much money as possible in connection with their products and services. Further, those who run the company strive to maximize their own compensation, which is often dependent on revenue and profit targets and, in the case of public companies, the company's stock performance. Simply put, the incentives that exist in the private arena provide motivations that do not exist in the public domain.

Private prisons, however, do not produce any true efficiencies; worse yet,

the undeniable profit motives of private prisons negatively impact the criminal justice system. Private prisons go beyond the legitimate function of prisons in administering punishment by trying to influence the allocation of punishment, interfering with basic theories of punishment, especially recidivism. The *allocation* of punishment – the deprivation of an individual's freedom for committing a crime – has traditionally been viewed as a non-delegable state function, whereas the administration of punishment, or simply carrying out the government's mandate, can be delegated to prisons, including private prisons. Reserving the allocation of punishment to the government is fundamental to a democracy because an individual's liberty interest to be free from incarceration without due process is grounded in the constitution. An individual's rights in this regard are rooted both in Article 1 of the Constitution, which has been interpreted to place limits on Congress' ability to delegate its duties to other branches of government and to private parties, and in the due process clauses of the fifth and fourteenth amendments to the Constitution, the purpose of which is to protect individuals from arbitrary exercises of power.[17] Indeed, "protection of the individual from the arbitrary and capricious exercise of power, by an official body or a private party acting under delegated authority, is an essential element of free government."[18] Thus, in order to maintain the legitimacy of our criminal justice systems and, indeed, our democracy, many have argued that the deprivation of liberty must remain entirely the responsibility of the democratically-elected government.[19]

While proponents of privatization argue that private prisons simply administer punishment,[20] the financial incentives created by the private prison structure distort the distinctions between allocation and administration. Moreover, the distorted profit-motivated incentives of private prisons are incompatible with multiple theories of punishment in the United States. Justice Scalia has argued that "punishment … is now acknowledged to be an inherently retributive practice."[21] And it is widely accepted that deterrence is the "primary alternative to retributivism."[22] Retributivists punish out of a sense of moral responsibility,[23] and argue that "criminals *deserve* punishment *in proportion* to their crime;"[24] while proponents of the deterrence theory of punishment claim that "punishment should make crime less frequent."[25] The displacement of these basic state functions within a distorted profit motivated system interrupts either goal of punishment.

At the most basic level, the distinction between allocation and administration of punishment is blurred *any* time a prison employee has power over an inmate, whether in a public or private prison. Both public and private prison officials routinely determine disciplinary actions within the prison walls, such as whether someone will be placed in solitary confinement or will lose free time or other privileges. Prison officials are often also responsible for decisions relating to prisoner status, such as whether prisoners are eligible for parole or work release.[26] These actions affect the allocation of punishment, not just its administration. Entrusting private prisons with these actions may have significant negative consequences for prisoners. For example, private prisons, motivated by profit considerations, are incentivized to encourage longer prison stays and therefore have implicit motives to increase the length of an individual's prison term, which may in turn color the disciplinary actions to which the prisoner is subject. Certainly, any profit-motivated decision to lengthen a prison term cannot be consistent with a retributivist theory of punishment. The prisoner is not getting what he "deserves" (under the retributivist theory) if his freedom is curtailed for a longer time because a private corporation seeks to make more money from his incarceration. Likewise, under the retributivist theory, a private prison does not have a moral responsibility to its prisoners. Indeed, its profit motives explicitly conflict with any moral responsibility. For these reasons, even delegation of the most basic disciplinary functions to a private for-profit entity is arguably unjust.

Perhaps even more troubling is the impact of the perverse incentives that privatization generates on recidivism rates. If private prisons produce more future criminals, then it is clear that they are impacting the allocation, not just the administration, of punishment, because it is the prison system itself that is contributing to the repeated incarceration. While private prisons are likely to rely on favorable recidivism rates as evidence of their superior efficiency over public facilities, they have every incentive to encourage repeat offenders so that they can make profits from repeated imprisonments. If private prisons produce more repeat offenders, this outcome is inconsistent with the deterrent theory of punishment. On the contrary, imprisonment will not deter future crime because there are other forces at work that are conflicting with this goal.

The data on recidivism demonstrates the ineffectiveness of private prisons to deter future crime. There have been several studies that have found that recidivism rates were lower at private institutions than public ones. However, one study conducted in the late 1990s was criticized for, among other things, not properly matching up the private and public prisons that formed the basis of comparison.[27] Selmen and Leighton revealed that another study in 1999 that claimed private prisons had improved recidivism rates was primarily funded by the private prison industry.[28] Yet, another study, conducted for the National Criminal Justice Reference Service in 2003, found no significant reduction in recidivism rates.[29] Another 2008 study of inmates in private and public medium security prisons in Oklahoma conducted by Spivak and Sharp reached a similar conclusion.[30] The results are not surprising: private prisons are not incentivized

to ensure that prisoners don't recidivate.

The profit motive to create a steady stream of prisoners also leads private companies to advocate for stricter laws with longer sentences; their attempt to influence criminal justice policy to enhance profits clearly distorts criminal justice policy. The private prison industry makes no secret of this goal. In a recent 10-K filing with the Securities and Exchange Commission, CCA acknowledged that it could be hurt by the "relaxation of enforcement efforts, leniency in conviction or parole standards and sentencing practices, or through the decriminalization of certain activities."[31] In response, the industry retains lobbyists to influence criminal justice laws.[32] For example, in 2004 Congress passed legislation that authorized the Immigration and Customs Enforcement Division to increase the number of beds in detention facilities that it paid private companies to run. In that year alone, CCA spent $3 million on lobbying efforts.[33] Over a ten year period, the industry was estimated to have spent over $45 million in lobbying efforts.[34]

These attempts to influence policy to maintain the viability and increase the profitability of private prison industry break down any walls between the administration and allocation of punishment. In essence, these attempts to influence stricter criminal justice laws by definition mean that private prisons are attempting to not only *administer* but also *allocate* punishment. Additionally, it is difficult to reconcile lobbying efforts with either the retributive or deterrence theory of punishment. Stricter laws created as a result of private interest lobbying cannot satisfy a deterrence theory because the goal of such efforts is not to create laws that will deter people from committing a crime, but rather to fill an empty prison cell, thus interfering with the principle of proportionality. Laws created as a result of lobbying efforts at the behest of private companies who stand to gain from increased imprisonment rates cannot be consistent with the retributive theory either. The policy of proportionality underlying this theory, which is supposed to reflect society's moral judgment about deservedness of punishment for particular crimes, cannot be advanced when that policy is infected with the profit motives of private industry.

Perhaps most perniciously, the private prison industry's profit incentives cause it to target specific segments of the population that are likely to enhance its bottom line.[35] The war on drugs marked the beginning of the incarceration boom and it is well documented that the drug wars resulted in an increase in incarceration rates for African American men.[36] Because African American men became the "mainstay of for-profit imprisonment,"[37] private prisons have advocated for laws, such as stricter sentencing rules for drug offenses, which disproportionately affect African American males.[38] After the drug wars slowed down, the post 9/11 crackdown on immigrants provided a new potential source of revenue for the private prison industry. Indeed, the CEO for Cornell Corrections, a private prison company, expressed enthusiasm about the new business created by the crackdown on illegal aliens that followed the attacks,[39] and the private prison industry lobbied for stricter criminal justice laws pertaining to non-citizens.[40]

Motivated by profit, the lobbying efforts of private prisons are rationally targeted at producing the most prisoners at the cheapest cost. Thus, it makes sense to lobby for tougher laws that target those individuals with the fewest resources to combat

charges leveled against them. Privatization creates incentives for penal enforcement against poor or disenfranchised individuals. As Selman and Leighton explain:

> Companies are ready to follow the money and push for more privatization by identifying social problems that will ... promote ... privatization ... The industry has broadened its market to include what it refers to as "specialized" populations: the mentally ill, drug addicts, youth offenders, probationers... [41]

This presents a fundamental problem. By allowing private prisons to exert this influence, "the state may merely be opening up a new way for large enterprises to profit from the misfortunes and powerlessness of certain individuals."[42] A system that encourages discrimination cannot be consistent with retributivism – a person's race should not mean that he or she deserves punishment any more than someone of another race.

Many commentators have maintained that privatization is not inherently problematic, and some advocate for increased regulatory oversight to mitigate the problems that have been associated with private prisons.[43] Harding, for example, argues that private prisons in the United Kingdom have more accountability for their actions because disciplinary issues in private prisons are regulated by government officials who work at the prison.[44] In the United States, in contrast, the disciplinary rules, but not the way they are enforced, are regulated by public officials.[45] More effective regulation, Harding argues, will increase accountability and avoid the problem of discipline bleeding over from administration into allocation of punishment.[46] While increased regulation can improve accountability, it is unlikely, however, to be a complete panacea for the defects that lie within the privatized system for two reasons. First, and most importantly, increased regulatory oversight cannot solve all of the distorted incentives that lead private prisons to lobby for stricter criminal justice laws. Private prison companies have a duty to their shareholders to maximize profits by increasing incarceration rates. While they might not completely ignore moral imperatives, because doing so may eventually affect their profits, they do not have an affirmative legal obligation to advocate for socially just laws that will redress existing imbalances in criminal justice policy or to ensure that the laws that they advocate are consistent with legitimate punishment objectives.[47] Because a for-profit corporation's objective is to maximize profit, its motivations are not naturally aligned with the public policy objectives to redress imbalances in the prison system. Second, on a more practical level, the drive toward privatization itself arose from the desire to save money.[48] Thus, increased regulatory oversight will necessarily negate the goals of the cost savings initiatives that led to privatization in the first place.

Private prisons can, and often do blur the line between "public good and private interest,"[49] and once punishment leaves the public domain, "it loses its moral legitimacy."[50] While the foundation of our democracy rests on the availability of justice and liberty for all, these underpinnings frequently do not apply to private companies. If private prisons go too far over the line in their prioritization of profit objectives over individual liberty interests, there is a good chance that they will not survive. However, leaving aside obvious abuses that would cause a corporate shutdown, there is much room for more subtle abuses that negatively affect an individual's liberty interests. Particularly because the individuals affected by privatization are "human beings … rendered helpless, dependent, and vulnerable by action society itself has undertaken,"[51] the profit motive underlying the private prison structure is difficult to reconcile with the basic principles of liberty that underlie our democracy. Thus, while private prisons have addressed governmental short-term budget shortfalls, these for-profit structures have considerable negative implications for prisoners' freedom and conflict both morally and legally with legitimate goals of punishment.

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**Karen Young**

On the first day of Writing 101: *Writing Black Eros*, Professor Sachelle Ford asked us how we felt while talking about race. I was honest -- it made me feel uncomfortable. I told the class that I felt I didn't have enough authority or knowledge to make a secure argument or hold my own in a conversation. Through reading various types of African-American literature, researching the history of racial tensions, and listening to the opinions of my classmates, however, I became more informed on the racial issues that plague our country today and the historical significance of race in literature.

I wrote this essay after reading Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* and *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination.* In class, we analyzed how the white figure and black figure were inextricably intertwined, due to our nation's history tainted with slavery and prejudice. These books taught me to read differently – to be more attuned to the subtle racial references that are characteristic of American literature. With this new literary outlook, I began to read *everything* more critically, including sports articles. I noticed that even today our sports media rely heavily on the contrast between races, piquing my interest in the relationship between sports and race, and leading me to write this essay.

This class helped me to develop my writing in an academic setting and taught me that the editing process is just as important as the initial writing phase; however, I think the most important lesson I gained was the ability to step outside my comfort zone and talk honestly about race. As I learned from Professor Ford's class, talking about race doesn't have to be super theoretical and abstract; in fact, I found it easiest when pairing race with another topic I enjoy – sports. For racial inequality isn't an isolated issue: it dwells in *all* sectors of our society.

I would like to thank Professor Ford for helping me to grow tremendously in my writing and encouraging me to widen the scope about which I write. I would also like to thank my classmates from Writing 101 for giving me extraordinary insight, and my family for always supporting my writing! Thank you also to Sheryl Emch and all of the Deliberations staff for giving me this wonderful opportunity.

# Black Athletics and White Identity:

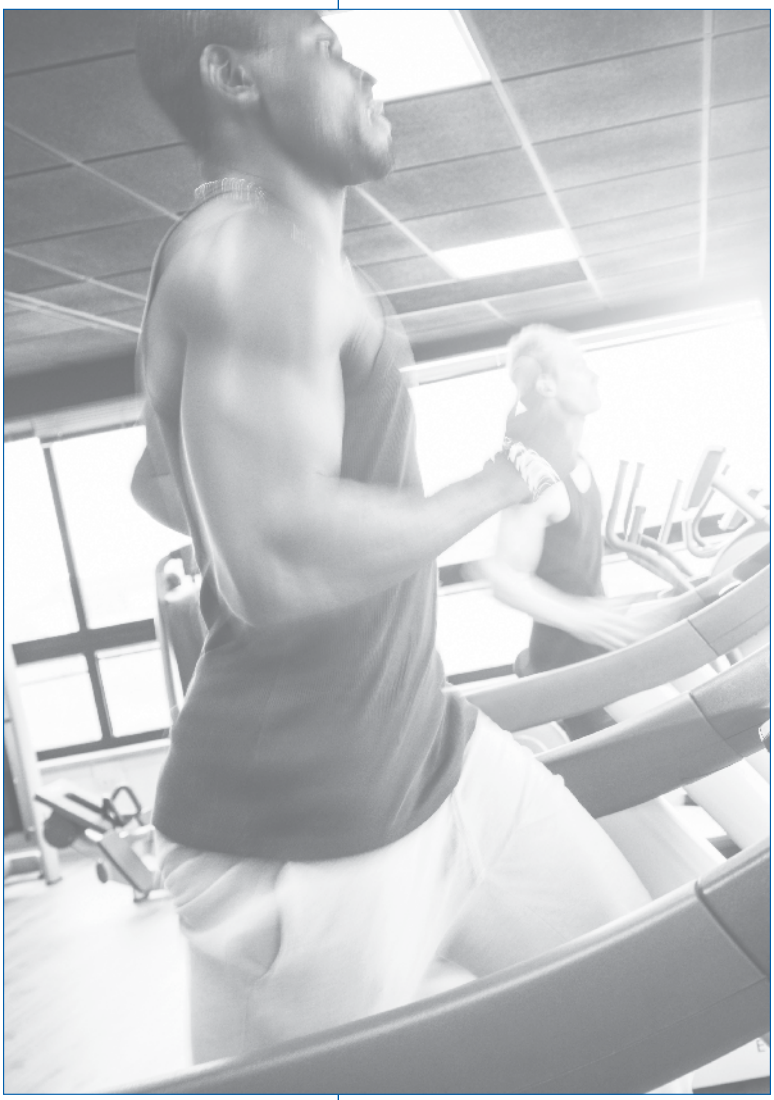
## The Reciprocal Process of Identification

Karen Young
Writing 101: Writing Black Eros
Professor: Sachelle Ford

In her book, *Playing in the Dark*, Toni Morrison contends that American authors write literature for a predominantly white audience. Not anticipating a black audience, these authors craft a specific tone to appeal to their white readers. American literature relies heavily on a black presence in order to identify whiteness, and Morrison criticizes those authors who argue otherwise. Binary opposites of each other, white and black are inextricably connected. Public discourse, however, begins to diverge on the question of whether this dichotomy between whiteness and blackness translates into modern society. While some, such as Morrison, believe that American literature manipulates the black presence to identify whiteness, I would like to advance this idea into the realm of sports media. Even in today's visually-centered society, the typified black presence remains in the figure of the stereotypical athlete. By restricting black success to athletics, white culture has deemed blackness as representative of physical capability, in contrast to white mental superiority, and has magnified the racial gap of success.

Historically, humankind has felt a deep, innate desire for identification, a process which depends upon the comparison of oneself to all surrounding individuals. American identity was and continues to be formed with a similar principle. Early Americans utilized the surrounding population to identify themselves in terms of their dissimilarity to African slaves, a characteristic that is evident in early American literature (Morrison, 52). In her discussion of American authors such as Edgar Allen Poe and Ernest Hemingway, Morrison highlights the necessity of a black presence in order to clearly identify white protagonists. For how can humans know who they are without knowing who they are not? Yet this form of oppositional identification creates a white dependency on the "other's" vulnerability. If a black citizen achieves an accomplishment of similar merit to that

of a white citizen, the white identity can no longer be defined as the absence of blackness, thus threatening the white conception. In response to this perceived threat, white citizens historically have attempted to suppress black citizens in order to maintain the ability to define themselves contrastingly (Morrison 17). In fact, Carol Boyce Davies connects this suppressive, identity-oriented behavior to a "Eurocentric" attitude in her article, "Beyond Unicentricity: Transcultural Black Presences". Davies argues that "Eurocentrism," or the focus on Western civilization, depends on the juxtaposition of European refinement with non-European savagery (100). Critical to the formation of the American identity, Eurocentrism remains prevalent in modern society, now known as what Davies defines as "US-centrism" (101). Alluding to this effect of Eurocentrism in literature, Morrison explains that "it was not simply that this slave population had a distinctive color; it was that this color 'meant' something" (49). This concept can also be extended to today's sports culture: the blackness of the majority of successful sports figures is not a coincidence or product of innate talent, it is a deliberate categorization by the white majority meant to define black success in terms of physical prowess.



In order to understand the connection between today's sports culture and Eurocentrism, one must understand the basis of Eurocentrism. Aimed at solidifying the identity of a selective class, Eurocentrism separates citizens into binary groups: European and non-European (Davies 100). Morrison identifies the reliance on opposition to the white American who "knows [himself] as not enslaved, but free; not repulsive, but desirable… not a blind accident of evolution, but a progressive fulfillment of destiny" (52). These contrasting characteristics allow identification to occur not by means of the existence of a trait, but merely by another race's lack thereof. Current sports media operates on a similar binary opposition of athleticism. Athletics itself is based on a dualistic competition, advancing the "us against them" mentality; a natural extension of this idea is the competition between black and white athletes both on the field and in sports media. Primm, DuBois and Regoli complicate the statistical over-representation of black athletes by highlighting the under-representation of blacks in the more corporate-associated areas of sports in their article, "An Exercise in Subtleties and the Transmission of Racism: An Analysis of Sports Illustrated Covers". Although their statistical racial analyses of *Sports Illustrated* covers reveal a decreased likelihood for black football players to land a cover compared to white football players, Primm, DuBois and Regoli still praise the increased numbers of black athletes. These authors may argue that this overrepresentation of black athletes is a positive improvement for racial equality, but I maintain that the manipulation of these images continues to advance the idea of white intellectual dominance. In portraying black citizens as predominantly successful in the athletic sphere, sports media construct a dangerous assumption in the public mindset that the majority of blacks can only gain success by using their brawn rather than their brain. These inaccurate beliefs lead corporations, schools, and administrations to hold inherent prejudice against black citizens, making the

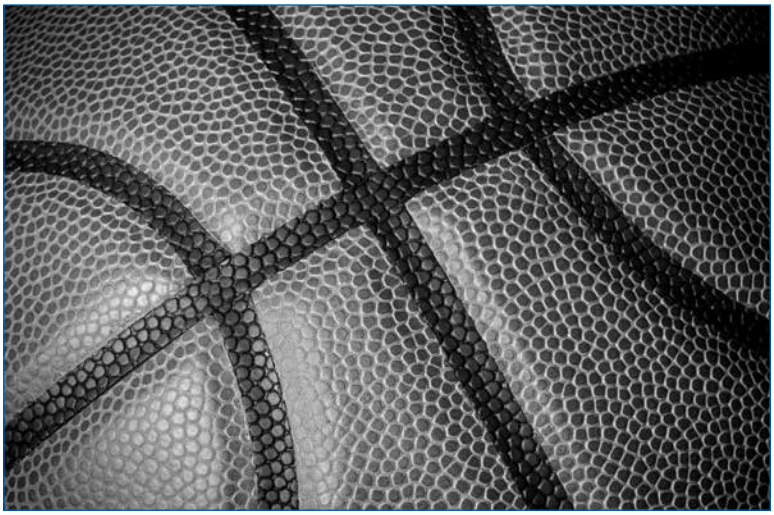
already difficult road to intellectual success more treacherous. In essence, society unconsciously, yet intentionally, prevents blacks from entering into positions that require this mental superiority. By prohibiting blacks from entering these realms, white Americans identify blacks as lacking the intellectual advancement that, in contrast, they believe themselves to possess.


Rather than compete on an equal playing field, athletes are limited by their race because it determines the value of their skills in the sports domain. Statistically, black athletes have played the "non-central" positions, which necessitate more physical talent, while white athletes have played the "skill" positions, which involve more intellectual problem-solving (Primm, DuBois & Regoli 242). Primm, DuBois and Regoli further identify this intellectual domain as more valuable by explaining how typifying the "non-central" positions based on race can cloud "judgments about the players, their contributions to the outcomes of games, and their contributions to their respective sports" (243). In football, for example, the quarterback is a "skill" position while the offensive guard is a "non-central" position. By featuring black athletes overwhelmingly in these "non-central" positions, sports media associates the black presence with physicality and the white presence with intellect, thus pushing whites to the top of the power hierarchy (Davies). Just as "Africanism, deployed as rawness and savagery [provided] the staging ground arena for the elaboration of the quintessential American identity" in literature, I contend that the restriction of black athletes to specific positions builds the foundation for the modern white identity (Morrison, 44). Publications, such as *Sports Illustrated* and *The New York Times,* highlight the intuition of white athletes while focusing on statistics for black athletes. This dichotomy of racial value persuades readers that black physicality can be quantified and is thus limited, while white instinct is too abstract to be restricted to numbers. Consequently, when media enhance the physicality of black athletes – through the quantification of their value in terms of statistics, such as how fast pitchers throw – it creates a caricature of black athletes that imprints onto both black and white minds, creating a false perception of racial worth.

Sports media continues to define racial identity through purposeful manipulation of photographs of black athletes. *Sports Illustrated,* a staple of the American sport culture, has influenced the white identity for years in its skewed depictions of black athletes. The February 23rd, 2015 edition of *Sports Illustrated* depicts Jimmy Butler, a member of the Chicago Bulls NBA team, holding a basketball at his chest and cutting sharply to the other side of the court (Nelson). By placing the words "Sports Illustrated" immediately behind his biceps, the image seems to emphasize his muscular strength. This simple association of Butler's physical power with his successful *Sports Illustrated* cover contributes to the stereotypical view that black success stems directly from physical strength rather than mental capability. For example, during his time at Indiana University and later as a college basketball coach, Isiah Thomas observed an extremely low graduation rate for black college basketball players. Thomas argues in his article, "Black Males, Athletes and Academic Achievement," that this rate is not due to the players' inability to finish school, but rather a flawed educational system that prioritizes athletic success

over intellectual exploration for black students. Although the education system is a major factor in black students' success rates, Thomas fails to see that the false depiction of black athletes might be the underlying cause for society's warped view of black intelligence, and therefore a major component of discriminatory actions towards black students in our educational system. Not only does the magazine focus on Butler's musculature, the image also highlights the perspiration on his face by placing white lettering behind his face that enhances the sheen of his sweat. By focusing on Butler's body and sweat, the image reinforces the physicality in his black identity, in contrast to the perceived intellectual superiority of the white identity.

The image alone, however, does not solidify the identification of white readers; the cover headings along with the words of the article reciprocate and enhance the message projected by Butler's image. Underneath Butler's knee, the heading reads, "The Unlikely Breakout Star: Jimmy Butler". By placing Butler's accompanying title below his body, the magazine suggests that the physicality in Butler's image reigns superior to the cognitive script in his article. The words on display, however, reveal even more. By labeling Butler as an "Unlikely Breakout Star" the magazine implies that there is little hope for Butler's success. Similarly, on the other side of the cover, another title reads "The Unlikely MVP: James Harden" in reference to the black NBA player who won the league's Most Valuable Player award. These two "unlikely" successes have many similarities, the most obvious one being their race. Although society still holds the common perception that black athletes are more athletic than white athletes, *Sports Illustrated* repeatedly labels black competitors as "unlikely" to arise as "stars" in their respective sports (Primm, Dubois & Regoli). As a result of these expectations, the success of black athletes generates even greater enthusiasm than expected.



The magazine's unfair depiction of success stems from society's desire to identify white intellect in opposition to black physicality. To be a "star" in a given field requires the ability to think critically and excel in challenging situations, two characteristics of high intellect. If the magazine had deemed the two black athletes likely to become stars, readers might have interpreted it to mean that *all* black athletes possess the large intellect required for success, putting black and white athletes on the same physical *and* cognitive level. Contrary to the media's expectations, LeBron James has achieved this "star" status in the NBA due to his critical thinking and leadership qualities. In response, sports media highlight his exceptionality by calling him "one-of-a-kind," with the intention of referring to his overall exceptionality as transcendent of race. This reference, however, also subtly rationalized the magazine's portrayal of most black athletes as unable to achieve such stardom.

The racial identification process remains incomplete, however, without the article about the photograph, Ben Golliver's "Jimmy Butler: Running the Gauntlet". Just as Morrison claims that American literature develops the white identity through "the alliance between visually rendered ideas and linguistic utterances," sports media cannot fully develop their interpretation of the white identity without acknowledging black athletes' images and the discourse surrounding those images (Morrison, 49). In his article, Golliver first describes Butler's rapid speed, and then mentions the "racial tension" in Butler's hometown. By referencing Butler's race immediately following his physical feats, Golliver exposes his internally-adopted stereotypes, revealing his own susceptibility to the media's uneven portrayal of black athletes. I contend that Golliver's readers, in response to his association of race and physicality, fall victim to the same erroneous preconceptions of black athletes, thus propagating the stereotype that blacks dominate athletically, and reciprocally, that whites dominate intellectually. Informed by Butler's coach, Golliver argues that "Butler's dedication and intelligence set him apart," and seems to be intentionally vague about from whom Butler is set apart. We, as readers, are thus left to infer the connections between race and intelligence – to either fall victim to the common belief that race draws a harsh line between intellect and physicality, or to rise above the prejudice and explore the independence of race from intellect and physicality. Due to Golliver's earlier association between Butler's physicality and race, this statement might persuade readers of the false belief that intelligence is a rarity in the black population, and in contrast, is abundant in the white population. Although Butler and a white reader are two entirely different individuals, their identities are intertwined by the mass production of Butler's image. Society's filtered view of Butler's image not only identifies whiteness as an opposing construct to blackness, but also

simultaneously convinces black citizens of the physicality on which their racial identity is largely based.

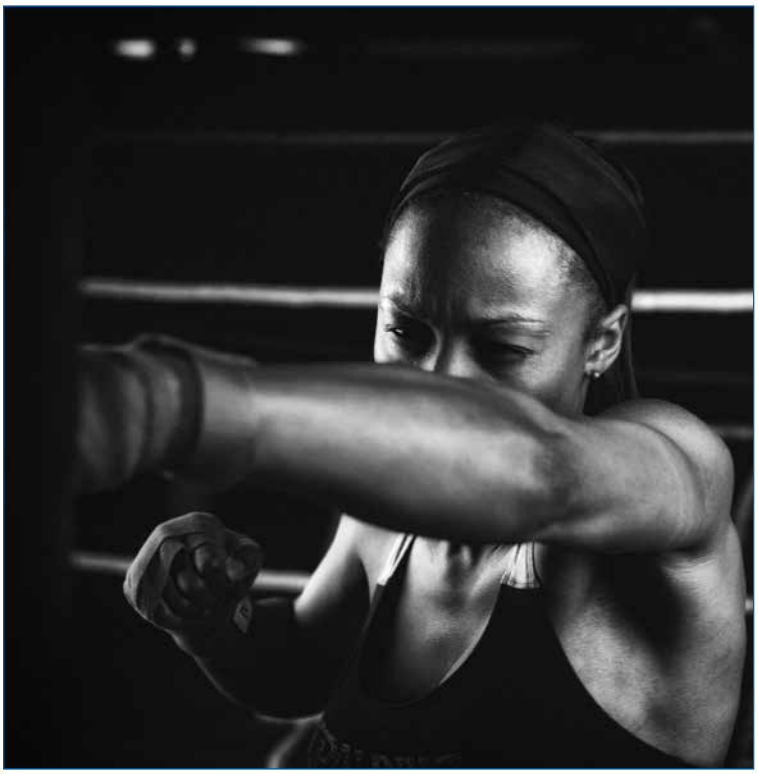
*Sports Illustrated,* although very widespread in its publication of stories on black athletes, is not the only source that portrays black athletes with a fundamental need to rely more on their physicality than white athletes. The *New York Times* follows a similar pattern in Harvey Araton's article, "No Need for DeAndre Jordan to Apologize". The image preceding the article reinforces the stereotypes of black physicality by placing DeAndre Jordan in the center of the shot, leaning back in a position that clearly accentuates his muscular form. Behind him, blurred by the camera's focus, stands the white referee, watching and regulating the game with a whistle in his mouth. Although Jordan remains the focal point of the photograph, the referee's presence in the background suggests, I believe erroneously, that the white man is more intellectually capable of controlling the game while Jordan's blackness prevents him from entering this position of power. I would venture to argue that the referee was captured in the photo to persuade the readers of the common inherent stereotype that black athletes, such as Jordan, do not hold the level of intellect needed to control their physicality, and thus require the presence of a referee to oversee the game.

Just as the words and images of Golliver's *Sports Illustrated* article cleverly complimented each other to enhance racial differences in athleticism and intellect, the words of Araton's article, even if unintentional, seem to follow the prejudiced filter of the photograph. Conveying the story of Jordan's tumultuous trading experience earlier in the week, Araton explains that Jordan is "a conflicted young man with a major career decision [who] reneged on a handshake agreement to leave the nest," thus equating Jordan's professional exchanges to the much simpler and more primal experience of a bird leaving its home for the first time. This animalistic association of Jordan seems to echo the unequal distribution of physicality and intellect from the preceding photograph, possibly persuading readers that Jordan's blackness inherently draws him to the physical and primal career of professional basketball.

Araton describes Jordan's temporary indecisiveness as "part of the free-agent free-for-all, begging a player to accept your millions and hoping that he really knows what he wants," but in Jordan's case, he "only thought he did". This indecisiveness applies to when Jordan verbally accepted an offer to join the Dallas Mavericks before backing out to remain on his current team, the Los Angeles Clippers. By stating that Jordan only "thought" that he knew what he wanted, Araton claims that Jordan was not capable of making this decision by himself. Instead of loading the responsibility of the business transaction on the player, Araton blames the rash decision on Jordan's agent. By implying once again that Jordan was incapable of making such an important trade decision, Araton suggests to his readers that he questions Jordan's intellectual ability. This biased visual and verbal depiction of Jordan's business transactions is an outcome of the inherent stereotype of black physicality that favors athletic success over intellectual triumph for black citizens.

Although I have argued extensively that the modern white identity depends

heavily on the depiction of black athletics, the effect of this malleable appearance on the black identity cannot be ignored. By portraying blacks as successful almost exclusively in the physical realm of sports, the media leave public discourse to imply that blacks excel in physical activities, while whites remain superior in mental abilities. Harrison et al., in their article, "Living the dream or Awakening from the Nightmare: Race and Athletic Identity", employ statistical analyses to explore the identification effects of these restrictive roles. Unable to find success in other domains, many black youth turn to sports as an outlet and a potential career, identifying themselves with not only their sport, but also their entire race (91). Although only a small fraction of high school athletes graduate to college and professional athletics, the black population reports a stronger athletic identity than the white population (95). Images of black athletes not only erect the white identity, they also shape the athletic identity of the entire black population. This athletic identity, however, does not necessarily benefit blacks, as it is often correlated with "increased social isolation and decreased social activity" (95). I contend that by increasing the athletic identity in black athletes, media have diminished their racial identification. To diminish black identity by elevating athletic identity is to weaken the protection of black culture against attempts of the media to manipulate the black image. As long as athletics provide the most opportune chance for blacks to escape the institutionalized cycle that perpetuates their poverty, the athletic identity will continue to threaten blackness and to reinforce "superior" whiteness.



Identity formation is essential to psychological development – without an identity, a person cannot estimate his or her own capabilities, or contribute to society. Although critical to the development of self, identity formation stands largely unprotected in society. Influenced by family, work, and peer relationships, one's identity develops as a product of the environment rather than that of the individual. Consequently, white and black identities reciprocally influence each other. Just as Morrison argues that the Africanist presence is essential to the white identity in American literature, the black athlete remains vital to defining the white identity in both sports and the rest of society today. In essence, race is not something that we are: it is something that we are not. This interdependence has caused the white manipulation of the black image, victimizing the black identity. Rather than praise the overrepresentation of blacks in athletics, society needs to condemn the underrepresentation of blacks in all other sectors in order to equalize the relationship between black and white identities. For which is more hazardous: the white identity developed in opposition to the appearance of black incapability, or the black identity developed in response to this erroneous depiction?

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**Sam Furlong, Sara Snyder, Angela Chen**

When assigned our final project for our Writing 101 course, *Science of Food Choice,* we initially wanted to focus on solutions to addressing food insecurity in any U.S. city, but after some research decided to narrow our focus on the Durham area. Our research made us realize that Durham itself has several food deserts, as well as several strong initiatives and programs to combat food insecurity. Since we were focusing on Durham, we took advantage of living in the town we were studying and decided to visit a corner store in a food desert to gauge what was available within our city limits to low income residents. The experience helped us view, if only in part, the struggles that face our neighbors in Durham. If our group could sum up our experience we would say that it helped reveal an often misunderstood inequality within our community, and made us further consider the privilege of the healthy food options we have enjoyed. The group has bonded significantly through the rigors of the writing process and we are now close friends!

# Addressing Food Insecurity in Low-Income Durham Communities

Sara Snyder, Sam Furlong, Angela Chen
Writing 101: Science of Food Choice
Professor: Lee Anne Reilly

## Introduction

There is a well-documented link between socioeconomic class and diet quality (Darmon and Drewnowski 2008). Poorer Americans generally have diets with lower nutritional quality and density (Darmon and Drewnowski 2008). Subsequently, richer Americans generally eat healthier and more nutrient dense foods (Darmon and Drewnowski 2008). Historically, wealth has been marked by overindulgence and obesity, and poverty has been characterized by malnourishment and starvation. Thus, it goes against basic intuition that the American poor experience higher rates of obesity than the rich (Lovasi et al. 2009). This is caused by the over consumption of energy dense but nutrient poor fast food that is more affordable and accessible than a healthy alternative. Despite consuming enough calories to become obese, the poor in America hardly consume enough of the nutrients necessary for a satiated appetite or good health (Dinour et al. 2007). This phenomenon is known as the Hunger-Obesity Paradox. A central issue causing the poor to not obtain enough nutrients is food deserts, areas where nutritious and cost effective food sources are in low supply. The subsequent issue present is one of improving the diet quality of the poor, and thereby improving the nutritional quality of low income Americans.

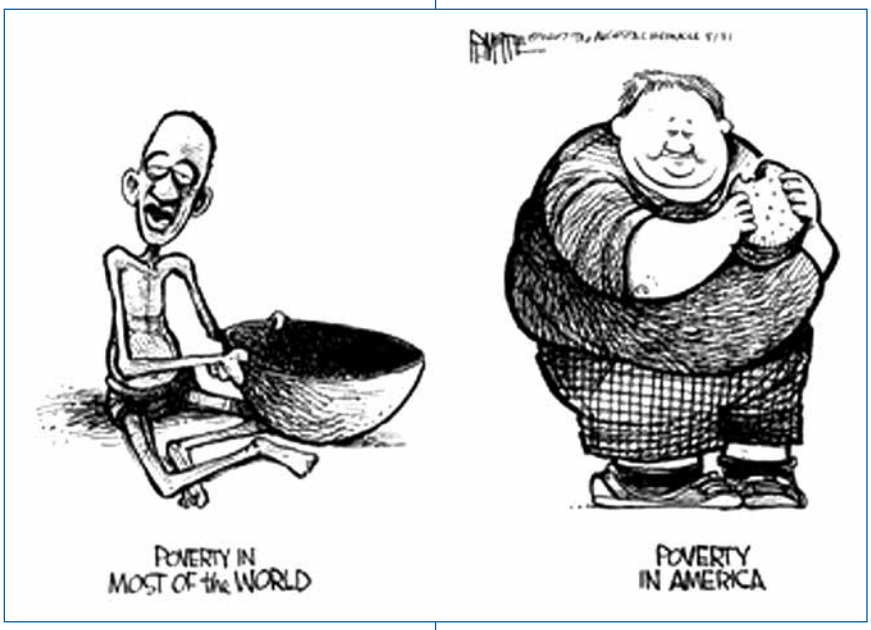
When observing the diets of America's impoverished, three factors--availability, accessibility, and desirability-- become apparent. Availability is whether or not the healthy food is present in local grocery stores in underprivileged and impoverished areas. Accessibility is an individual's ability to actually acquire healthy food--this incorporates transportation and pricing factors. Desirability is the demand for healthy food and people's ability to prepare healthy food.

The analysis of these three factors -- availability, accessibility, and desirability-- reveals the underlying issues of nutrition and poverty. While federal-level solutions can effectively reach many people, SNAP and other food assistance programs are part of the Farm Bill, which is heavily influenced by powerful agribusiness lobbies (Feinberg). The numerous interest groups invested in the Farm Bill make it difficult to make meaningful improvements to federal food assistance programs. Furthermore, poverty and nutrition are universal issues that often manifest in different ways depending on location. Cities such as New York and Los Angeles have shown that local solutions, whether government or grassroots, are time and cost effective. Durham currently has several programs and initiatives in place to address problems in the city's food deserts. Following in depth analysis of

the issues that are present in Durham, two current programs, the Durham Farmers' Market and SEEDS, will be analyzed, and solutions to address the gaps in these programs will be proposed.

## Overview

Food availability in low-income neighborhoods significantly influences the diet of the residents. It is shown that low-income neighborhoods have fewer chain supermarkets, with low-income neighborhoods having 25% fewer supermarkets available compared middle-income neighborhoods (Powell et al. 2007). The primary reason for this is that growth of large chain supermarkets on the outskirts of inner-cities in more affluent areas offer consumers a better quality, variety and price for food options. As they expand and gain popularity, smaller, independent neighborhood grocers are crowded out of the market. As a result, residents are offered the undesirable alternatives of the energy dense foods readily available at corner stores and the fast food chains that are left behind.




Source: Krause, Madison. Hunger. Digital image. Madisonkrause. [Internet]. [2015 Sep 3] Available from: https://madisonkrause.wordpress.com/hunger/

Along with being geographically isolated from grocery stores, the quality of food available tends to be comparatively worse in low-income areas. In a study on food deserts in Durham, participants noted that local corner stores often sold rotten produce, if any produce was sold at all (Parson et al. 2013). Participants further noted that the lack of variety of produce sold in these stores limited their ability to consume food that contained important nutrients (Parson et al. 2013). Fast-food restaurants, which are abundant that abound in low-income areas also encourage consumers to eat larger portions than are recommended for a healthy diet (Lovasi et al. 2009). Furthermore, when low-income families do not have a reliable source of food, they are inclined to overeat what food is available, often sacrificing the nutritional quality of the food they purchase for a larger quantity (Radimer et al. 1992; Dinour et al. 2007). Therefore, both the unavailability of healthy food options and the abundance of processed, calorie dense food in low-income neighborhoods contribute to a high obesity rate among poor consumers.

Along with availability, accessibility heavily influences the food choice of low-income consumers. Because low-income consumers often live in food deserts, they have to travel farther to access grocery stores that sell fresh produce (Alwitt and Donley 1997). This poses a difficult transportation challenge to low-income consumers, who oftentimes rely on public transportation to get to supermarkets outside of their neighborhood (Lovasi et al. 2009). Reliance on public transportation limits the amount of groceries that consumers buy, as they can only purchase as much as they can easily carry onto the bus and back to their homes. Even if a low-income consumer can find transportation to a store, price might inhibit their consumption of nutritious food. The Parsons and Haynes-Maslow study, on the perceived barriers to fruit and vegetable consumption in North Carolina, found that the expensive price of fresh produce was cited as a barrier four times as often as any other barrier they analyzed (Parson et al. 2013). Thus, the cost of fresh produce and transportation barriers severely limit the ability of a low-income consumer to access healthy food.


Source: Market sign. Durham Farmer's Market [Internet] [cited 2015 August 20]. Available from: http://www.durhamfarmersmarket.com/

Desirability also affects the food choice of the low-income consumer. Low-income families often lack the skills necessary to cook healthy food (Smith et al. 2013). This limitation greatly decreases the demand for healthy food, as these consumers will not buy produce they do not know how to prepare. Along with limited cooking skills, low-income workers often lack the time to prepare a meal and lack utilities (ie. stovetop, oven, microwave) necessary to cook (Smith et al. 2013). The many difficulties with cooking meals and the strong food trajectory shaped by unhealthy eating habits restrict low-income consumers' desire for healthy food. Furthermore, food choice trajectory, or the pathway built off someone's history of interaction with food that "gathers momentum and provides expectations for future food choice decisions", contributes greatly to food choice (Sobal and Bisogni 2009). Since the typical diet of a low-income consumer lacks adequate nutrients (Levine 2011), it is likely that the food trajectory of SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) recipients influences them to buy unhealthy foods even if they possess the monetary ability to purchase more nutritious foods. (Sobal and Bisogni 2009).

*Figure 1. This is a screenshot from North Carolina Health News' Interactive Food Desert Map. The dark blue portion of the map is an area in East Durham that we visited to gauge the food environment of Durham ood deserts.*

Interactive: Food Deserts and Farmers Market's Map. North Carolina Health News. [Internet]. [cited 2015 April 25]. Available from: http://www.northcarolinahealthnews.org/interactive-food-deserts-and-farmers-markets/

The government issues food stamps, provides cheap public transit, and often sponsors farmers markets and community garden projects. These policies and programs address only the surface level of the multifaceted issues at hand. Families below the poverty line face a constant struggle with everything from paying the bills to dangerous neighborhoods with gang activity (Lovasi et al. 2009). It is not surprising that nutrition is often a secondary concern. To understand what is needed to improve nutrition, it is necessary to attempt to understand what is actually going on in food deserts. In this light, we decided that a trip into a low income food desert--in this case East Durham--would help lend us perspective for our project (Figure 1).

Our experiences provide us with the lenses of perspective, and thus, we, as researchers and writers, admit that we lack the necessary life experiences to fully comprehend all the issues that influence food insecurity in the Durham area. To be more specific, our backgrounds have all involved privilege, in regard to race, money, and/or education. Although we felt that our foray into the food desert might lend us insight for creative solutions to the problems at hand, we did not assume that we would be able to completely comprehend the struggles inherent in food insecurity; we hoped to just begin to understand the depth and complexity of this issue.

For the experimental design of our project, we chose a family of three children and a single mother as our 'model SNAP family', which theoretically has about $200 to spend on food including SNAP and family contribution (NCDSS). Using our theoretical $200 budget, we made it our goal to enter East Durham and buy enough healthy food to feed our typical family. After entering into Durham and attempting to buy food for our imaginary family we found a shocking number of issues that lack conventional and pre-existing solutions.

At a small food mart in the East Durham area (Figure 2), for example, there were virtually no healthy options available for purchase. The shelves were lined with cheap, sugary, and highly processed foods, and the refrigerated section was filled with beer and soda, instead of fruits and vegetables. There were some carbohydrates that contained less fat and sugar than chips and candy. Several stores had an "ethnic" section that included options such as pinto beans, black beans, tortillas, and rice. These are much healthier options than candy and soda. Also, some stores did sell canned vegetables; however, no corner-stores we visited sold any fresh produce, which tends to be more nutritious than cooked vegetables. Furthermore, even if canned goods were present, the stores only marketed unhealthier foods. Our expressed goal of buying healthy food for a family of four with $200 was simply not feasible. It is therefore not surprising that there are high rates of obesity in food deserts, while at the same time many individuals remain hungry; potato chips and soda are hardly filling, let alone nutritionally significant.

## Current Solutions

### Farmers' Markets

Farmers' markets are physical retail spaces temporarily set up for farmers to sell locally grown produce directly to consumers. Unlike conventional supermarkets, farmers' markets operate seasonally, with non-permanent

structures; they sell mostly fresh vegetables, fruits and meat, and occasionally prepared food and beverages.

Durham Farmers' Market started in 1998 with only a few farmers, but has since expanded and established itself permanently in Durham Central Park in 2007 due to the rising popularity of shopping local. It is open on Saturdays year-round with additional hours in the summer season, selling only fresh items produced by vendors within seventy miles of the market. Recently, the market has started to accept SNAP benefit through EBT (Electronic Benefit Transfer) cards. It is also in the process of raising money for its Double Bucks Program, which is a financial incentive that stretches the benefit further when customers spend up to ten dollars of SNAP benefits in the market (Tucker 2014 Apr 25).


***Figure 2. This is a corner store our team stopped by and shopped in. It is very typical of the other two shops we found in its vicinity.***

Source: Big Apple Food Mart, Durham NC. Google Maps Street View. 2014. [Internet]. [cited 2015]. Available from: https://www.google.com/maps/@35.9940711,-78.8749079,3a,75y,16h,90t/data=!3m6!1e1!3m4!1sT0MXq7OSPpPQvSt1lf-PUw!2e0!7i13312!8i6656!6m1!1e1

Both the acceptance of SNAP and the prospect of Double Bucks Program have great potential in increasing low-income population's participation in farmers' market. Double Bucks is modeled after the Health Bucks program in New York, which provides SNAP recipients with a $2 coupon for every $5 spent using SNAP benefits at participating farmers markets. Research on the effect of this program has shown that farmers' markets that offer monetary incentives averaged higher daily EBT sales than markets without incentives. (Baronberg et al. 2013) A majority of vendors have also reported more new customers shopping and an increase in repeat customers (Tucker 2014). Farmers' markets, however, are not without their faults when it comes to facilitating the low-income group to purchase fresh food. Durham Farmers' market is located only in downtown Durham, posing transportation difficulties for residents living far away, and thus not addressing the food accessibility issue in food deserts. Moreover, they operate during very limited hours, which is another barrier for people with full-time work schedules. The incorporation of EBT benefits also creates its own problem – the significant cost of financing the coupons and additional institutional cost of hiring staff to run the program.

### *SEEDS*

An urban community garden is any plot of city land that food is grown on by a group of residents. While the recent trend of community gardens began in upper-class neighborhoods, the model has been introduced into low-income neighborhoods (Birky 2009). A notable example of this is SEEDS, an urban community garden located in a food desert in East Durham. SEEDS has several programs that help connect subgroups, such as inner-city youth, in the Durham community to agriculture and healthy food.

SEEDS' strategic location in a food desert allows it to directly address and improve food knowledge, access and availability in a low-income area in Durham, as well as the socioeconomic disparity in Durham's food access. By establishing gardens in urban areas that overlap with food deserts, SEEDS is making fresh produce that is not an option available in one of Durham's low-income neighborhoods. Furthermore, SEEDs helps bridge the gap between inner-city members and food knowledge. In an interview, Will Allen, a retired professional basketball player and current urban farmer, emphasized the disconnect between Americans and food that has occurred as Americans stopped passing down agricultural knowledge to younger generations (Allen 2010). By actively engaging consumers in the process of growing their own food, urban farms can reduce this disconnect.


Source: SEEDS Welcome Sign. Digital image. SEEDS. [Internet]. [ 2015 Sep 3]. Available from: http://www.seedsnc.org/history/

While SEEDS' longevity suggests that it is a favorable model, it is not a perfect solution. The money to maintain a community garden must come from somewhere. SEEDS, founded by Duke's past president's wife, Brenda Brodie, who had the means to secure significant foundation grants, continues to rely on outside support. Along with the cost of maintaining the garden, the community must be willing to

put forth the time and effort to maintain such a project. Low-income community members who work two or three jobs may not have the time to garden, be exhausted from working long hours, or only be able to garden during unsafe hours at night. Furthermore, community members must be included in the planning and execution of the garden in order for it be successful. An outsider, no matter how well-meaning or knowledgeable, cannot hope to achieve sustained community involvement in a project without working in conjunction with community members throughout the entire process. While these barriers to success should not dissuade someone from starting a community garden, these factors must be considered for an urban garden to grow and prosper.

## Recommendations

### *Mobile Markets*

Mobile farmers' markets are potential solutions to the shortcomings of farmers' markets (mainly accessibility issues and limited operation hours), and have been proven in other cities to increase fresh food consumption among low-income individuals. They are essentially farmers' markets on wheels that are stationed in different areas throughout a city, providing consumers with more convenient access to fresh produce. Following USDA's announcement of *Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food* initiative, mobile markets have been introduced as a solution to the lack of healthy food availability in food deserts. Unfortunately, , there is currently only one private for-profit business in Durham, LoMo Market, which runs fresh produce food trucks, and it does not target the low-income population.

This model of mobile markets, however, has been experimented with slight variations in many different cities, among which *New York's Green Cart* initiative is the most studied and analyzed. A joint effort by Mayor's Office of Food Policy, New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, and Laurie M. Tisch Illumination Fund, the New York City *Green Cart* initiative was introduced in 2008 with the goal of increasing points of purchase of fruit and vegetable in underserved communities. Since 2008, it has issued one thousand permits for mobile fruit and vegetable vendors to operate on streets of low-income communities. Its ultimate mission is to increase individuals' consumption for fresh produce, promote healthy eating, and decrease rates of obesity and diet-related diseases among the poor population. Survey results show that Green Carts has achieved formidable success, with 63 percent of its customers being regulars (people who shop at Green Carts at least once a week), 71 percent reporting increased consumption of fresh produce, and 64 percent living less than five blocks away from a closest Green Cart (Fuch et al. 2014). A key to its success is its unique business model, which operates on a public-private partnership that secures enough funding. It provides technical assistance to its vendors as needed, striving to make every food truck successful. The initiative itself is also constantly seeking ways to improve. Currently, it is building up a better campaign to advocate the importance of produce consumption.

The New York City Green Carts can be easily adapted to the county of Durham and at a relatively low cost. The city of Durham could give the mobile markets institutional support by establishing an overarching organization loosely governing all markets and by giving certain waived fees or assistance with marketing. Most of the implementation could take place on the private side. Socially conscious food entrepreneurs would be counted on to invest and sustain the markets. The mobile markets would serve all places of worship throughout the low-income areas on weekends, and community centers and bus stops during weekdays. Improvements on the New York model can also be made. In New York, as of 2013, only 27 percent of the vendors have an EBT machine, which means that SNAP benefits are not accepted in most stores (Fuch et al. 2014). Similarly, Durham government could allocate some funding to subsidize the acquisition of EBT machines for vendors. There is also no efficient tracking system of all the licensed Green Carts in New York. Being able to monitor the location and performance of the markets would both enable the city to better allocate its fund, as well as better inform local residents of the whereabouts of the Green Carts.

Source: Aracadia Mobile Mart. Bozzuto. [Internet] [cited 2015 August 20]. Available from: http://blog.bozzuto.com/virginia/alexandria/arcadia-farms/#.VeH2INNViko

In conclusion, an adoption of the Green Cart initiative in Durham will likely improve accessibility and availability of fresh produce for low-income consumers. Together with farmers' markets, mobile markets will make healthy options more available and accessible to underserved populations by offering them more affordable produce in greater number of locations.

## Transportation

Accessibility of grocery stores stands out as a prominent problem facing low-income families, particularly


Source: Bull City Connector. Digital image. Duke Magazine. 20 May 2014. [Internet] [cited 2015 Sep 3]. Availiable from: http://dukemagazine.duke.edu/article/campus-city-connector>.

the difficulty with transportation as discussed previously. Durham currently runs the Bull City Connector (BCC)—a free bus service— that includes a stop near a Whole Foods and Harris Teeter. However, the BCC only runs through a small portion of Durham, which does not include several food deserts. Solutions to address this problem can either be initiated by the local government or by food retailers, and both are shown to be able to deliver some helpful and cost-efficient services. Relatively low cost programs involving vans, taxis, or carpools that have been carried out in other cities can be modified to suit the particular needs in Durham. These funded transportation services tend to rely on the strong support of an entire community, and require funding from either the government or private investors. Similarly, although food retailers in Durham have not carried out projects targeting transportation concerns, there are successful models to follow that can not only enhance a store's community good will, but also potentially expand its customer base by tapping into an underdeveloped market.

In Los Angeles, the city government operates shuttles in 16 targeted communities and are designed to facilitate non-commuter needs, such as shopping trips. They cost only 25 cents per trip, with the rest of the expense funded by sales tax receipts (Gottlieb et al. 1996). The community residents played a crucial role in advocating these shuttles and in developing their routes during the early stages of this program. The reviews from residents have been overwhelmingly positive because of the price and convenience. Another development for facilitating food access, also in Los Angeles, are *Smart Shuttles,* which only operate in high density, low-income immigrant neighborhoods. They operate akin to taxis, have flexible routes according to customers' demands, and are equipped with GPS and computer dispatching. The service costs 75 cents and takes riders to any location of their choice within a defined geographical service area.

On the retailers' side, El Tapatio in South Central Los Angeles, an independent full service market, runs a shuttle "store-to-home" service that is free of charge to customers who purchase $25 or more (Gottlieb et al.1996). The program was an immediate success and the store has expanded its fleet of three vans to five shuttle buses. The store manager estimated that the program costs about $4000 per month but it has become an invaluable marketing tool that brings in a loyal customer base.

The solutions we have presented are all viable options to alleviate the difficulty of food accessibility faced by the disadvantaged population. Our review of past program outcomes revealed that these initiatives are not costly to implement, but do require government readiness to provide financial support, along with individual and community willingness to promote and participate.

## Cooking Classes

Another way for Durham to address food insecurity in low-income families is by establishing after school "healthy" cooking classes. This would further address current food insecurity in homes if students were allowed bring home whatever they cooked to share with their families. Alice Ammerman, a Professor at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's School of Public Health, explains that "in order to make use of seasonal fresh produce, cooking skills are essential, but these are becoming a lost art". Authors of an article published in *Nutrition Journal* found that while the food eaten at home is still the largest source of energy for Americans, only slightly more than half of US adults cook foods on a given day, a significant decrease since the 1960s (Smith et al. 2013). They also proposed that the decrease in time spent in food preparation is because they are relying more heavily on packaged and convenience foods (Smith et al. 2013). If a consumer lacks preparation knowledge and skills then he or she will lean towards purchasing pre-prepared convenience foods instead of raw fresh food (Soliah and Walter 2006). Therefore, increased reliance on pre-prepared food is likely caused, at least in part, by a lack of preparation knowledge. By offering cooking classes, communities could begin to help members better understand nutrition and apply their new cooking skills to prepare healthier options for their families.

While cooking classes address the food desirability of a low-income consumer, there are several aspects of cooking classes that would limit their success in low-income communities. The historic, stigmatized gender role of women primarily cooking meals could deter men from signing up for such classes (Harnack, et. al). Also, even if low-income consumers learned how to cook with produce, they would not be able to apply this knowledge if they cannot afford fresh produce or do not have the appliances at their home with which to cook. While cooking classes have potential to provide useful skills to low-income consumers that would help them prepare healthy meals, it is clear that this is an incomplete solution and requires other initiatives in order for them to be successful.

## Conclusion

It is easy to say that widespread food deserts are "bad"--the lack of nutritious and cost appropriate food assuredly is a sign of a low standard of living. Yet, at a more grassroots level, it is difficult to understand the daily hardships of living in such an area. A single mother often carries heavy groceries through a dangerous neighborhood, in inclement weather, with two small children in tow. This is not an anecdote or exaggeration, but rather the reality that many-23.5 million Americans face- weekly (US Census Bureau). Solutions currently in place, such as the SNAP program and farmers' market, fix parts of the problem; SNAP allows the mother to purchase food for her children, and farmers' markets accept SNAP to make healthy food options more affordable. Yet, in Durham these solutions often fall short of solving the issues that complicate the food consumption of those in poverty. Mobile farmers' markets would complement the current farmers market by improving access to more food locations. A mobile farmers' market would increase SNAP participants' fruit and vegetables purchases and better regulate food prices to improve costs for the poor. Transportation to cheaper and safer areas with better food sources would allow the mother to safely access cost effective food sources. Classes in school could be implemented to insure the next generation is capable of preparing healthy food for their families. No single solution solves all of the problems faced by those in the food deserts of Durham every day, but a concert of solutions, a symphony of policy and changed practices, might prove to soothe the issues felt by those in the depths of poverty. The solutions we present would serve Durham well because of their low cost of implementation and positive results in other cities. It should be noted, however, that community support and involvement in the adoption of these proposed new practices are also critical to their success. Although the anecdotes we shared might not be entirely generalizable, as issues may vary because of the unique environment within each food desert, the general themes remain the same. People need the money to buy food, transportation to get to food, and a place to buy the food. These issues, and the subsequent solutions we presented, are nearly universal in their applicability.

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# The Mentoring Narrative:

## Recovering from Breast Cancer Treatment

Rachel Yang
Writing 101: Medicine, Culture, and Healing
Professor: Saiba Varma

### Introduction

For particular illnesses such as cancer, biomedicine's aggressive treatment regimen only magnifies the suffering caused by the disease. As a result of breast cancer therapy such as mastectomy and chemotherapy, women must adapt to radically different body images. By conducting an extended illness narrative interview with a family friend, whom I will refer to using the pseudonym "Mary," I address two questions: How are breast cancer patients' identities changed by biomedical intervention? How does the illness narrative reveal a new self-image? A breast cancer survivor for three years, Mary was diagnosed with stage 2 invasive lobular carcinoma, was treated with a double mastectomy, and received implants and reconstructive surgery on both her breasts. While some women may choose the less invasive lumpectomy procedure or may choose chemotherapy over mastectomy, in both cases, biomedical treatments for cancer involve radical transformations. Specifically, in this paper, I argue that modern biomedicine fractures the breast cancer patient's identity, making it difficult to incorporate these irreversible transformations into a reconstructed self.

Narrating their illness experiences and mentoring younger women enable breast cancer survivors to come to terms with the many aspects of the illness that they suffer, especially since the doctors, who treat only the disease, often overlook other effects. The illness narrative, a research methodology developed in the social sciences, can provide a window into a patient's lived experience. For example, illness narratives may reveal women's difficulty in incorporating such changes into their sense of self, or they may help make the transformed body more familiar. In *The Wounded Storyteller,* Arthur Frank (1995) explores stories told through suffering bodies, claiming that the ill "need to become storytellers in order to recover the voices that illness and its treatment often take away" (vii). In this sense, illness narratives convey experiences that transcend biomedicine's conception of disease.

To make this argument, first, I explore how the cancer diagnosis disrupts Mary's body image and sense of temporality. Then, I analyze how biomedicine medicalizes her breasts, fracturing Mary's sense of self. Finally, I show how Mary's illness narrative takes the form of what I call a "mentoring narrative," through which she reclaims her identity.

### Methods

I conducted an ethnographic interview with Mary, a 55-year-old breast cancer survivor who underwent a double mastectomy. I interviewed Mary on a Saturday afternoon in March at Mary's home in Virginia. Through the interview,

**Rachel Yang**

Although often viewed as a scientific practice, biomedicine actually forms knowledge on the body and illness in a culturally distinct manner. Dr. Byron Good, a professor of medical anthropology, describes that "[medical knowledge] is a dialogical medium, one of *encounter,* interpretation, conflict, and at times transformation" (Good 1990:86). Throughout the Writing 101 course, *Medicine, Culture, & Healing,* we explored how biomedicine works as a system of knowledge, focusing on the conflicts that can arise when a patient encounters a medical practitioner. Whether from a common cold or a life-threatening disease, everyone has experienced how disruptive an illness can be. Especially in Westernized societies, we rely heavily on biomedical treatments to cure our ills. However, as someone who hopes to work in the biomedical field, I was shocked to learn that much of the suffering that we associate with illness is either directly caused or amplified by biomedical practices. In general, biomedicine frequently represents the body as an object to be examined and tested and defines health as simply the absence of disease. In this paper, I argue how such practices have unique consequences on a patient's recovery.

By interviewing a close family friend, I explore the effects of breast cancer treatments on her sense of self. Embedded throughout my analysis, claims I can only hope are convincing, is a very powerful illness narrative, a story that I know deserves to be heard. I am extremely grateful to my family friend for allowing me to share her personal story, and I also want to thank Professor Saiba Varma for all her support in helping me develop my research question. I hope that readers of this paper not only begin questioning biomedicine's efficacy and demanding more patient-centered care, but also are inspired by the therapeutic power of sharing one's own and listening to others' stories.

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1994 Medicine, rationality, and experience: An anthropological perspective. New York: Cambridge University Press.

I hoped to explore how women make sense of their cancer experiences and how their illness narratives are shaped by their relations with others.

I structured the interview around questions adapted from the MINI, a semi-structured interview schedule that elicits different meanings of the illness experience (Groleau 2006: 671). After conveying some general background information about the interview, I obtained Mary's informed consent by asking her to sign a form detailing the risks and benefits of participating. Afterward, I transcribed and coded the interview by themes such as "perception of reconstructed body" and "dealing with diagnosis." Overall, Mary's narrative illuminates how breast cancer and its treatment are transformative processes.

In the past, I have often spent the holidays at Mary's home in Virginia, and I am close with Mary's entire family. Mary treats me like a second daughter; consequently, the interview was conversational and often interspersed with side conversations that digressed from the research question. The interview was, however, full of emotion—there were awkward silences, moments of uncontrollable laughter, instances when her voice stumbled and faltered, and pauses for reflection. Mary's tone ranged from solemn when reflecting on the transience of life, to lighthearted when joking about her tattooed nipples.

Despite our good rapport, one possible limitation I encountered was that the interview had to be audio-recorded. During the interview, Mary's tone would occasionally shift from that of an intimate personal conversation to one with a stranger; for instance, she would use the explanatory modifier "my daughter Olivia" (personal communication, March 15, 2015) that was clearly meant for a wider audience that, unlike me, was unfamiliar with her family. Although Mary was comfortable sharing her story with me, the recorder represented a "ghostly audience" (Langellier 1998:79) whom she seemed insecure in addressing. Since I had told her the interview was for an academic project, Mary perhaps assumed that someone at the university could potentially listen to or read her interview. For example, after I had turned the recorder off, Mary used more slang expressions, referring to her tattooed nipples as "tatted tits" (personal communication, March 15, 2015). This "ghostly audience" sensed by Mary, whom I became aware of only toward the end of the interview, may have caused Mary to censor her narrative and perhaps disrupted the atmosphere of trust between the speaker and listener that the illness narrative, as a dialogue, is dependent on. Mary's case thus raises questions about the appropriateness of recording patients' illness narratives.

## Analysis

### Impact of breast cancer diagnosis

Any illness, especially a potentially chronic one such as breast cancer, is an "[intrusion] upon an ongoing life process" and causes one "to look at the future from a totally different angle" (Hyden 1997: 5-532). A cancer diagnosis can abruptly force patients into the chaotic undertow of disease by disrupting their sense of temporality, or the stream of time on which all life experiences can be plotted. Illness, in particular, disturbs temporal continuity (Hyden 1997): the frequent doctor's appointments, the symptoms of the disease, and other illness events can interrupt the current of daily life, throwing people into a new temporal context that is much more unpredictable and volatile than before. For example, Mary described her initial difficulties in dealing with her breast cancer diagnosis:

> But it was um, the whole process, was, you know, you kind of in the beginning [stutters, pause], I called a friend of my mine who had breast cancer I know, and I said, "Well, they want to do a biopsy, [in a fast pace] what do I do, who do I go to? Do I go to a surgeon to have-?" That was my… how to start was my problem. Who do I go to? What do I do…? So that was my hardest leap was that, that first what do I do (personal communication, March 15, 2015).

As a rapid succession of questions raced through her mind, Mary probably felt suffocated by the feeling of time running out. The speed with which biomedicine delivers results and expects patients to begin treatment is efficient but can be disorienting; instead of receiving time to absorb the mammogram results, Mary was hastily pushed into making immediate treatment decisions. That "first what do I do" (personal communication, March 15, 2015) brought Mary's life to a halt, marking the beginning of her illness story: she was shocked out of the complacency of good health and may have no longer viewed the future with certainty. Breast cancer thus disrupted the continuity of Mary's life as she was given no opportunity to fit her cancer into a coherent temporal framework.

Furthermore, breast cancer diagnosis may have caused Mary to question her judgment of her own health. For example, Mary asked her doctors about the sudden presence of lumps:

> Mine wasn't there one year, and the next year it was there. And I was stage 2. In one year. And I asked my doctor, was it here? Could it have been here? And he said, "Oh, yeah probably." I don't know. I had no lumps, I had no nothing. But it just masked itself as dense breast tissue. So that was that" (personal communication, March 15, 2015).

Mary "had no lump…had no nothing," and was stunned by the diagnosis, which she was unable to physically detect herself. Because she was diagnosed despite following biomedical recommendations, such as looking for lumps through self-exams, Mary felt disoriented. There was a discrepancy between how ill her body actually was and how healthy her body felt. Biomedicine's diagnosis also revealed Mary's knowledge of her own body to be incomplete, suggesting that she could only rely on her doctors to accurately evaluate her health. In effect, Mary was robbed of her sense of personal agency as her body underwent life-threatening changes that she was unaware of and could not control.

Similarly, Mathieson and Stam's study on breast cancer survivors shows how recently diagnosed women also fear changes in their identity. One woman explained her fear of having "in capital letters, written from the top of her head to the bottom of her shoe, [the word] CANCER" and of her friends being unable to "get beyond that to see the person she was" (Mathieson & Stam 1995: 297). This woman feels her identity being overshadowed and wishes to return to the "person she was" before her diagnosis. Many women like Mary confronted with a diagnosis of breast cancer fear the effects of treatment, especially how the cancer label changes the way they are perceived by others. For instance, after receiving her diagnosis, Mary remembered having "nightmares that [she] would have concave holes in [her] chest" (personal communication, March 15, 2015). When absorbing the news of her diagnosis, Mary instinctively applied a mutilated image of breast removal to herself, and this nightmare of "concave holes" threatened the integrity and wholeness of her body image.

## Breast cancer treatment: medicalizing the breast

During breast cancer treatment, biomedicine can medicalize and objectify women's bodies in damaging ways. According to Iris Young's (2005) research on women's experiences with mastectomies, "in conformity with Western medicine's tendency to objectify the body and to treat the body as a conglomerate of fixable or replaceable parts, a woman's breast is considered to be detachable, dispensable" (1994). Although breast cancer treatment attempts to restore a woman's health, mastectomy and plastic reconstruction can dissociate the breasts from their associations with feminine identity. When analyzing the nuances of Mary's illness narrative, her suffering is unveiled:

> So basically what they do, it's [stutters] like gutting a melon…essentially. They go in, and the surgeon literally strips out as much breast tissue as they can, and they leave like a minuscule amount of skin. And then the…[pause] plastic surgeon comes in and they put like a meshing underneath your muscle, kind of sitting on your rib cage – it's real attractive [in a quiet, joking tone]- and in this meshing, they put in, they place what they call expanders [in an uncertain tone]. And they only put in a little bit of fluid at that time, just to kind of get it going. And then they sew you up and… send you on your way…. " (personal communication, March 15, 2015).

Mary described her treatment with the second person pronoun "you," perhaps as a way to detach herself from the way she felt her body was objectified and "gutted". In a study about breast cancer survivors' body consciousness, one participant, following her mastectomy and chemotherapy, was "without breasts, without hair, and wearing a baseball cap [and reported] being stared at in a restaurant, perhaps

mistaken for a man" (Langellier 1998:85). Many breast cancer survivors are suddenly made aware of how breasts signify femininity in the eyes of others. In fact, Mary described herself as "flat- I'm a man, you know" (personal communication, March 15, 2015) immediately following her mastectomy, revealing how breast cancer often brings concerns about losing one's feminine appearance. Western biomedicine's treatment of breasts as just diseased body parts disregards the emotional issues that surround breast removal in the context of women's social relations (Langellier 1998:93), especially regarding body image and gendered identity.

Although implant surgery supposedly rebuilds women's bodies following mastectomy, for Mary, cosmetic implants provided only a pretense of normalcy. Based on Mary's description of her implants, I got the impression that she had not fully incorporated the implants into her body image:

> I have absolutely no problem with showing people my [stammers] my scars and my tattoos because to me, they're not breasts anymore… So I have no problem showing anybody…They look pretty real. But they're not boobs. They're saline lumps (personal communication, March 15, 2015).

Though using the possessive "my" to describe her scars and tattoos, Mary never referred to the reconstructed implants as her own breasts. Mary returns only to a semblance of her previously healthy state, perhaps viewing these "saline lumps" as a superficial replacement of the breasts she lost during her mastectomy. Regarding restitution to a life before breast cancer, Batt claims that it is a myth that "medical treatments transform women with breast cancer back into perfect people" (Batt 1994: 243). According to Batt, medical professionals define "perfect people" as those who return to the state of health and physical appearance that existed prior to the onset of cancer. Accordingly, I believe the presumption that biomedicine can cure the insecurities of breast loss inaccurately assumes that people like Mary return to a normal life once treatment ends. In contrast, the end of biomedical treatment signified not the end of the illness experience and its sufferings, but rather the beginning of Mary's recovery, as she is left to begin adjusting to a completely transformed body. Mary's implants are likely a reminder of all she has lost during treatment, another imposed transformation that splinters Mary's personal awareness of her body.

Scholars have shown how biomedical language dominates the doctor-patient relationship, granting the doctor unquestioned authority to conceptualize cancer and dictate treatment while denying the patient a voice. In exploring breast cancer patients' negotiations with medical staff, Mathieson and Stam conclude that patients, "must learn a cancer vocabulary in order to articulate their concerns" and consequently fail to negotiate as equal partners within medical discourse (298). For Mary, "words may be inadequate to the task of articulating a coherent narrative" (Phinney 2002:341) because biomedicine, as empowered by its highly technical language, obstructs Mary from telling her story from her own perspective. Mary describes her cancer by stating, "And I had, my cancer was what they call invasive lobular. So it didn't present itself as a lump. What it, it's basically, it [stutters] it…it presents itself almost like a um what they call a thickening [in an uncertain tone]" (personal communication, March 15, 2015). Although normally an eloquent communicator, Mary stumbles over finding the right words to describe her cancer, and her use of "what they call," shows her personal voice minimized by the voice of medical experts. Nonetheless, the clinical narrative does not entirely take over Mary's voice and become her narrative: her use of the pronoun "they" in "what they call" (Personal communication, March 15, 2015) shows that Mary keeps her personal explanation separate from the biomedical

perspective, only temporarily borrowing the medical language to validate her narrative. Ultimately, however, biomedicine seems to pressure Mary to adopt a clinical narrative with detached scientific terminology, threatening to reduce her illness from a lived experience into a medical event.

## Healing through the mentoring narrative

Although biomedical treatments for cancer erode a patient's identity, many breast cancer survivors reconstruct new identities by using their experience to gain a sense of purpose. Frank delineates three types of narratives that people use to construct their illness stories, one of which is the quest narrative. According to Frank (1995), quest narratives "meet suffering head on" and are "defined by the ill person's belief that something is to be gained through the experience" (115). Building on Frank's characterizations, I propose a new kind of quest narrative: the mentoring narrative. The mentoring narrative uses the tribulations of illness to teach others and minimize their sense of victimization. In Mary's case, she redefines her cancer ordeal to help her fellow-sufferers, and in turn, this helps her make sense of and give voice to her illness as a collective experience. By empowering younger women in their encounters with biomedicine, Mary regains control over her illness story.

For instance, Mary now mobilizes others to become active agents in their illness experience. At the end of the interview, Mary emphasized her strong support of women doing their own breast exams and getting early mammograms:

> I really am a huge proponent of getting your mammograms done. And I honestly think that because of going through this and seeing women, I mean there was a young girl in the plastic surgeon's office who was fifteen years old. And she found a lump and it was cancerous. So women should, I think they should start, I mean they say 40 is when you should get your first baseline mammogram, but I think even before that women should self-check. I am a [with emphasis] huge supporter of that (personal communication, March 15, 2015).

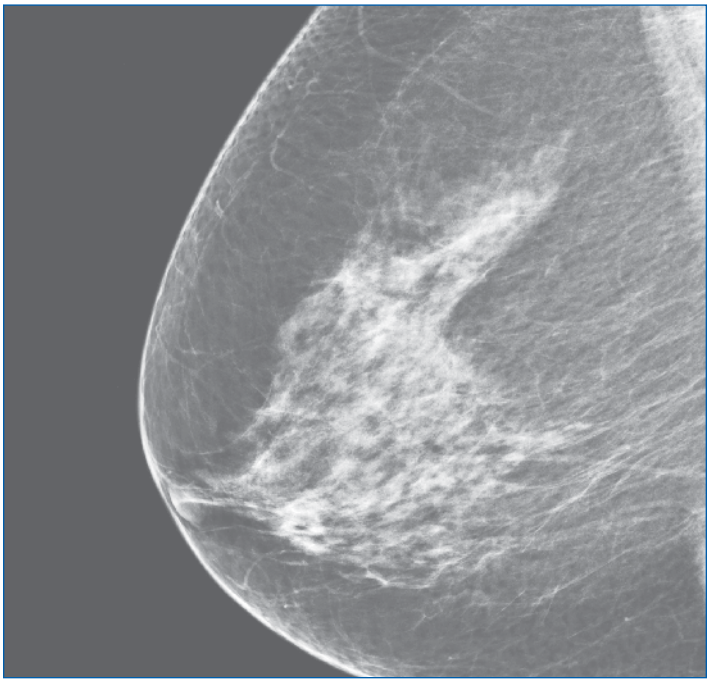
Since she was unexpectedly diagnosed after a routine check-up, Mary hopes to save others from the disorientation she felt by encouraging women to pay attention to and assert control over their health. She hopes that women who listen to her narrative are more knowledgeable about breast cancer detection and are, therefore, more prepared for the "splash of cold water on the face" (Personal communication, March 15, 2015) to which Mary compares her cancer diagnosis. Ultimately, Mary hopes that the disruption and loss of temporality can be reduced, if not, prevented for others.

Furthermore, Mary uses her personal cancer experience to allay others' preconceptions of breast cancer treatment. Although Mary's breast implants represent a biomedical intrusion into her body, she now uses them as a teaching tool to show others the reality of treatment:

> So I have this woman, and it's so funny because she's going in for surgery, I think, in a couple of weeks…So I showed her, and she was like "Thank you so much, I just thought I was going to look like a monster." And I was like, "Nah, no it's ok, it looks, you know. [brief pause] You're not going to be a monster." I mean, I think it's the fear of unknown. When I was in her spot, I had nightmares that I had this concave with holes in my chest. So that made me feel good. So you do. You kind of want to pay it forward, I guess. It doesn't look bad (personal communication, March 15, 2015).

Having survived and gotten past the fear of "concave holes" in her chest, Mary now reassures others that they will not look like monsters. Mary reclaims control over being objectified by biomedicine by, paradoxically, turning her implants into an object she allows younger women to view so they can better understand breast cancer recovery. Mary helps other women redefine their notion of breast cancer by replacing their stigmatized images of mutilated bodies with an example of her own visibly recovered, though scarred, body.

Since living in remission for three years, Mary has reflected on her experience and developed a new understanding of breast cancer, which she uses to encourage women to take ownership over their cancer, rather than letting it define them. The philosopher Ian Hacking (2006) writes that biomedicine creates "a way to be a person, to



experience oneself, to live in society," essentially making up people through the socially constructed interpretations of its medicalized classifications (3). Hacking (2006) describes how society classifies people as "definite classes defined by definite properties" (3): breast cancer survivors are often constructed as a class of women who are permanently damaged and deformed. Mary, however, challenges this classification by proving to others that one can heal and return to a life of normalcy after biomedical treatment, though not the same life as before treatment.

## Conclusion

Mary's illness narrative helps reveal how biomedical treatments, in their standardized attempt to cure a woman's body of cancer, can disrupt a person's body and identity. I contend that, instead of viewing the body as an object whose parts can be discarded and replaced, biomedicine can improve the outcomes of women with breast cancer by taking a more holistic approach to healing the body. Biomedicine views diagnosis as simply a means of "naming a specific disease and so [permitting] access to particular modes of treatment" (Moss & Dyck 2003:84), without acknowledging the effects of a new illness on the patient's sense of self. When suddenly labeled ill, many women develop extremely negative self-images, as they fear what other changes their bodies might undergo. For instance, the prevailing breast cancer therapies that treat women's breasts as simply damaged tissue minimize the importance of breasts to some women's gender identity. Breast cancer survivors struggle with unique changes in their identity that are often ignored by biomedical treatments, and recognizing and exploring these issues can reveal a clearer picture of the cancer experience and of how to better improve their overall health outcomes.

Surprisingly, many of the difficulties associated with breast cancer—the loss of temporality, fear of bodily mutilation, and a damaged sense of self—are not symptoms of the disease, but rather, effects of treatment. During treatment, Western biomedicine can transform a woman's body image from healthy to ill, and medicalizes her breasts in ways that fracture her self-identity. Mary's initial nightmare of "concave holes", for example, shows that the cancer stigma stemmed from her inherent fear of breast removal, one of the primary modes of treating breast cancer. Unfortunately, cultural competence in biomedicine, or "using the foundations of narrative medicine to better understand the patient's story and integrate what is important to them into decisions about their health care" (Hasnain-Wynia 2006:1), is at odds with American biomedicine's reliance on evidence-based, standardized treatment. The efficacy of standardized treatments is one of the hallmarks of our healthcare system, but evidence-based medicine often fails to address, and can even amplify, the emotional struggles of patients. Given how dependent American society is on biomedicine as "a rationality in everyday life" (Kleinman & Petryna 2001:6493) for health knowledge, we often fail to recognize that biomedicine, despite its curative abilities, has its own damaging effects.

Fortunately, Mary was able to knit back together the temporality that biomedical treatment disrupted, recreate what it means to be labeled as a breast cancer patient, and transform herself into a mentor for others. Rather than become disillusioned by biomedicine's practices, Mary is using her experience to mentor others recently diagnosed with cancer to reassure them that the unexpected destructive effects of treatment can be overcome. Mary is gaining a new sense of purpose by employing her mentoring narrative and has emerged from her cancer ordeal with a stronger sense of self, proving the therapeutic power of telling the illness story in both one's own and others' journeys to wellness.

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# From Generation to Generation:

## A Chronology of Depression

Eliane Shinder
Writing 101: Working Women & Women's Work
Professor: Leslie Maxwell

My exposure to the ramifications of traditional gender roles has primarily been through my paternal grandparents. With his large build, Zaidy, my grandfather, maintains a fairly intimidating facade that is reinforced by his taciturn nature. The words he does speak, however, are spoken with strength and pride. Savta, my grandmother, is in many ways the polar opposite. Where Zaidy is stiff and at times aloof, Savta is exceptionally compassionate and emotive. Where he is strong and dominant, in both speech and demeanor, she is passive and compliant. They nearly perfectly embody the traditional man and woman as individuals and as a marital unit.

When I was fifteen, my family spent winter vacation at Savta and Zaidy's house in Boca Raton, Florida. We'd just finished a meal, and were catching up around the cramped dining room table, when it became apparent that someone needed to clear the dishes. I watched my grandfather, who'd been sitting like a rock for the majority of the meal, dart a glance at my grandmother, and quickly realized he was tacitly commanding her to clear the table. My grandmother, then, obediently stood up and got to work. It was as though my grandfather held such a superiority complex that he deemed the most basic form of communication, speech, beneath him. I quietly watched the nonverbal interaction, struggling to mask my discomfort and avoiding eye contact with my grandfather. Instead, I focused on Savta, who heaved a tired sigh as she loaded the dishwasher. Upon completion of the chore, she returned to the table deliberately avoiding our watchful gaze. Conversation gradually resumed, but Savta remained silent.

I noticed another interesting phenomenon at dinner the next evening. When the seven of us convened, we had a natural tendency to segregate the table by gender. Granted there were only two men, but Zaidy, who is pretty severely hard of hearing in one ear (his conversational skills took a serious blow as a result), tended to show interest almost exclusively in my dad. They talked politics and work (the stereotypically male topics), while we remaining five females more or less entertained each other. My dad and Zaidy were discussing a lawsuit my dad was working on - a really interesting antitrust case involving Walmart - and Savta, clearly very interested, interjected to ask a question. My grandfather quickly snapped at her, "Don't worry about it. There's no way you would understand this." The silence that followed was suffocating. A pit formed in my stomach as I imagined what must

**Eliane Shinder**

Writing 101: *Working Women and Women's Work* was an exercise in so much more than just writing. Through the incredibly relatable nature of a course about gender conventions and inequalities, my professor, Leslie Maxwell, inspired me to question my surroundings more and to seek out patterns of gender inequality in my everyday life. As a result, I learned so much about not only the history of gender inequality (especially during the period in which women began to enter to workforce), but also about how prescriptions to gender norms still abound today.

One of our assignments during the year was to write a personal narrative describing our experience with gender conventions, and relating that experience to various materials we'd read for class. Our final project built on this assignment: we were asked to form a line of inquiry out of our narrative and conduct research accordingly, interspersing our narrative throughout our findings. As an aspiring doctor, I knew I wanted to somehow connect the invaluable lessons I'd learned in this class to health, and my grandmother's story of her struggle with depression seemed like the perfect avenue to do so. The piece presented here describes a social and emotional struggle that is, unfortunately, extremely prevalent in society today. But the main takeaway doesn't have to be a depressing one: through our recognition of how gender conventions can be consequential to our mental health, we've discovered a new way to target an illness that affects so many. The lessons I've learned from my experience in Writing 101 have prepared me to set out and make a difference in our society, and for that I am so grateful.

have been going through Savta's mind; I just couldn't fathom how I would react to being belittled by someone so close to me. Savta forced a sad smile and finished her meal in silence, once again avoiding eye contact with me and my sisters. She noticeably retreated into her shell.

Admittedly, I can't speak to the frequency of such interactions within the privacy of their home. But I assume that if my grandfather is comfortable acting this way in front of my family, the same would hold true behind closed doors. As I've grown up, I've become increasingly aware and critical of Savta and Zaidy's dynamic, a topic I frequently discuss with my father. From what I've gathered, my grandparents frequently fought throughout my dad's upbringing, and their marriage seemed particularly unhappy. The primary issue was that Zaidy treated Savta as though the intellectual world was beyond her, a notion that he had clearly maintained into old age. Savta briefly worked as a nursery school teacher, a job she thoroughly enjoyed, but lacked the ambition to pursue for long. She retired very young and resigned to a life in the domestic sphere. Her primary roles became exclusively mother and housewife.

My parents have conjectured that Savta may have wrestled with an undiagnosed, unattended depression. Despite the pleasant facade she constructed for the sake of her young boys, her prevailing sadness translated into retreat, both physically into her room and socially as she grew quieter. Such retreat is often characteristic of people suffering from depression, and this struggle was probably not uncommon among women, particularly housewives, of my Savta's generation. Collection of empirical data regarding women's mental health from the late nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries was difficult due to lack of valid and accurate methods of assessment. But scientists have conjectured that past health trends have a strong bearing on current ones, and contemporary society faces an indisputable gender disparity in mental health: according to the National Alliance on Mental Illness as of 2009, women are twice as likely as men to be diagnosed with depression, and about one in eight women is expected to obtain this diagnosis in her lifetime (NAMI 1). Moreover, many theories have been proposed on how the housewife role actually fostered the development of depression and related mental health issues in women. According to these theories, gender inequity is at the root of this health disparity from generation to generation.

## Stresses of the Housewife

Depression is more than an organically produced mental illness - it is precipitated by external, environmental stressors. In their book "Women Under Stress," Donald Morse and Merrick Furst examine the special causes of stress at each stage of a woman's life and, in one chapter, dedicate attention specifically to the predicament of the housewife. When analyzing the role of a housewife in the early to mid twentieth century as one would any typical profession, they found no shortage of such stressors. For example, a housewife received no recognition or external, material reward for her work, and had to endure the incredible monotony of her chores (which stands in stark contrast to more intellectually stimulating professions). An added dimension was that a woman could not resign from the role of housewife as she could from a traditional profession - her only option was divorce, which was often unfeasible due to the financial dependency of most housewives (Morse & Furst 255-256) or unattractive as an option for fear of being deemed a female failure. This particular predicament applied directly to Savta: her financial dependence coupled with her

aversion to divorce trapped her in a subservient and unfulfilling role. For these reasons, women inevitably incurred a high degree of stress as housewives that contributed to the onset of depression.

Phyllis Chesler's *Women and Madness,* a biological and cultural analysis of the plethora of mental health issues women faced during the 1960s (a time of extreme subservience to men), provides additional ways to interpret the high prevalence of depression among housewives. Recognizing the limitations of her analogy, Chesler compares the psychological identity of a housewife to that of a slave, arguing that women psychologically exhibit "symptoms" of slavery, such as "working around the clock in the kitchen, the nursery, the bedroom, and the factory" (41). A particularly significant facet of slavery is slave psychology, which is characterized by a fear of satisfaction, arising from recognition that a satisfied or pleasant appearance can unintentionally communicate to your oppressor that you can handle a heavier burden. By contrast, a fatigued or overworked appearance can prompt the oppressor to relieve the slave's burden. Through this lens, Chesler suggests that housewives may have unconsciously adopted a slave psychology as a self-protective measure (42). It was natural, even advantageous, for housewives to develop depression as it insulated them from acquisition of further responsibility.

We can also understand the correlation between depression and housewives through the concept of 'learned helplessness,' a psychological phenomenon at the root of most depression. Learned helplessness

> exists when an individual is conditioned to believe that an outcome has no relationship to or is independent of his or her response. People who experience learned helplessness perceive themselves as having little or no ability to exert control over life events or to predict them...this perceived lack of control or inability to predict events is not only at the root of helplessness but also at the root of reactive depression (Spendlove 476).

The likelihood that learned helplessness will promote depression depends largely on our own interpretations of that helplessness. If we attribute these feelings to ourselves rather than to the stresses of our environments, and as feelings that only we rather than society as a whole wrestle with, then we are more likely to develop some degree of depression (Spendlove 476). Housewives had been largely dependent on their husbands for social status, income, and more. The confinement of women to roles within the home (and consequential entrenchment of their dependence) naturally disconnected them from the outside world, contributing to a female "inability to predict events." As women in the subsequent generation began to enter the workforce (like Savta, for example), many took on traditionally female jobs, working as teachers and nurses. Income from these jobs, as previously noted, was inadequate to emancipate them financially. With a husband who controlled finances and made executive decisions regarding the household (like my grandfather, for example), it would have been natural to experience a lack of control. A combination of these environmental influences would surely have fostered learned helplessness in not only housewives, but also the subsequent generation of part time working women, increasing the vulnerability to depression among these demographics. Many of these predicaments undoubtedly applied to my Savta, whose minimal salary as a nursery school teacher rendered her completely dependent on her husband and, consequently, coerced her to abide by the rules he set for her and for the household. Over the years, this lack of freedom drained my Savta of her energy,

her spark, and ultimately, her happiness.

## Transmission to Future Generations

Transmission of depressive symptoms to future generations can be further understood through both biological and social lenses. For starters, depression is rooted in genetics. At the end of our DNA strands are caps called telomeres that are correlated with our lifespan: the longer our telomeres, the longer we live (and live free of many age related diseases like dementia, osteoporosis, and more). Individuals diagnosed with major depressive disorder are typically characterized by shortened telomere length. Moreover, a 2014 study by Dr. Gotlib, a professor in the Department of Psychology at Stanford University, discovered that this primary feature of depression gets passed to subsequent generations, especially with women: girls whose mothers had suffered from depression showed significant reduction in the length of their telomeres. Furthermore, the study followed these girls as they aged, and found that 60% of them developed depression by the time they turned eighteen (Gotlib 3). This study is part of a large body of research on the hereditary nature of depressive disorders, demonstrating the scientific community's recognition of the way such mental health illnesses can be passed down to future generations.

Biology alone, however, cannot explain the onset of depression - it merely serves to underscore the high prevalence of the illness. Depression is precipitated by the coupling of a vulnerable genetic makeup with environmental stressors, and these stressors plagued the working woman to the same degree that they plagued the housewife. Many women entering the workforce did so without absolving themselves of domestic duties, introducing the stress of having to juggle more responsibility and the need to reconcile one's own interests or aspirations with those of the family (Weissman 7). To make matters worse, women have historically been mistreated upon entry into the workforce. Since the 1980s, over half of women in the workplace have incurred various forms of mistreatment, including sexual harassment, interpersonal violence, and microaggressions (Cunningham 1).

This phenomenon is portrayed in the popular television show *Mad Men.* In the second episode, entitled "Ladies Room," our exposure to females in the workplace comes primarily through Peggy and Joan, two female secretaries at the office. Early in the episode, Joan remarks to Peggy, "there's nothing to be happy about here," setting the tone for our introduction to the office setting. Joan's biting words refer to her mistreatment by her male coworkers. These men regard women at the office as sexual ornaments and of little substantive value. They blatantly "check out" Peggy as she sits innocently at her desk, interfering with her ability to work. Furthermore, the primary interaction between the sexes is in regards to lunch dates and sexual pursuits. Ultimately, women at this office are completely objectified and degraded, and not without their awareness: we are presented with the striking image of another female coworker crying in the bathroom, presumably due to a degrading interaction with a coworker or simply as a means of releasing her pent up frustration. This episode perfectly illustrates the struggles women faced upon entering the workforce, a struggle that fueled the already rampant depression among women due to a history of mistreatment by men.

## Perpetuating Our Problem

Curiously, despite the prevalence of depression, our society has a history of stereotyping and stigmatizing the disorder, undermining our ability to treat it and perpetuating the problem. According to Ursula Hess, Western culture has largely deemed women more emotionally expressive than men, and internalization of this stereotype has led to a pronounced difference in behavior. Hess argues that "emotion stereotypes may eventually lead individuals to conform more closely to these stereotypes as they become more and more a part of their emotional history and emotional self" (641). These stereotypes are perpetuated by media portrayals of the stereotypical emotional woman: when women are overt about their emotions, they are depicted as unreasonable or excessively emotional, and as though they present a burden to those around them.

In an episode of *The Cosby Show* entitled "Cliff in Love," for example, Sondra makes no attempt to mask her unhappiness, to either the viewers or to her fellow characters. Throughout the episode, we watch Sondra's mood fluctuate in response to the attention she receives from boys. Her family then regards her post-breakup unhappiness as a nuisance due to the extreme manner in which she handles her emotions: she storms about the house singing depressing songs, snaps at her brother, and complains tirelessly of *men* (a word she utters with disgust). Her family walks on eggshells around her for the remainder of the episode, and complains about her insanity behind her back. Hess' discussion of emotional stereotyping prompted me to consider the impact of a media portrayal such as the one in *The Cosby Show,* and how stereotyping can undermine our efforts to address the root of the problem. After watching (and judging) Sondra's meltdowns, we, as viewers/the audience, become more

conscious of embodying the stereotype ourselves. In turn, we become more inclined to continue to bottle up our emotions and present ourselves to be as happy as possible. Emotional stereotyping can thus create emotional stigma, which is widely recognized as a primary obstacle in the battle against mental illness: "In response to societal stigma, people … internalize public attitudes and become so embarrassed or ashamed that they often conceal symptoms and fail to seek treatment" (Office of the Surgeon General 29).

Along those lines, Udoka Okafor describes her lifelong struggle with depression in a *Huffington Post* blog entry, dedicating specific attention to the way her high school mishandled her severe case. At merely sixteen years old, and after some of therapy, Okafor was told by the administration of her boarding school that her depression presented a liability and that the school wanted to send her home. Okafor describes how her confidence dissipated further in response to allegations that she was a liability and feeling as though she must not have been "worth fighting for" (1). Okafor regards her experience as an example of how society can, at times, "criminalize mental illness," and argues that the criminalizing actions of her high school are only/merely a microcosm of societal tendencies (1). When our society subscribes to behaviors that stigmatize and criminalize mental illness, the effects on women are detrimental. As previously noted, the prevalence of such stigmas and stereotypes breeds a tendency to silence one's struggles, making it become less and less likely that suffering women will receive the treatment they need (Office of the Surgeon General 29). This was a trend my parents noted all too well in Savta, as she grew quieter and quieter over the years.

What upsets me the most is the manner in which women continue to incur higher rates of mental illness than men and, according to Dur, this disparity is still rooted in suboptimal gender relations, specifically in the workplace. The article reports that women actually exhibit increased symptoms of depression as they climb the professional ladder, which the article attributes to the manner by which a woman's confidence and authority is viewed less favorably than a man's (Dur). Women in positions of authority are often evaluated more strictly than men and have to counter negative stereotypes and prejudices regarding powerful females (Dur 1). These are stressors that precipitate the onset of depression. These trends demonstrate our societal prescriptions to traditional gender norms regarding male authority and female subservience. Since the age of the housewife and confinement of women to the home, continuing throughout women's slow transition into a workforce where they were less than welcome, and up to the present day, these very prescriptions to traditional gender roles - whether we as a society are conscious of them or not - underscore the high prevalence of depression in women. Treatment will ultimately lie in abandonment of these rigid standards, creating not only a more liberated, as well as happier society. Throughout the rest of my life, I will be committed to reversing these traditional conceptions to prevent future suffering, because no one should have to live the way my Savta did.

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**Natalie Shammas**

When I first enrolled in *Coming of Age At Duke*, I could have never predicted how deeply influential the class would be in shaping my outlook on my past experiences. Not only did the course elevate my descriptive and analytic writing skills to a new level, but it also pushed me to write introspectively and unpack the feelings behind the hardest moments of my life. I can confidently say that *Coming of Age At Duke* has been the most positively impactful class of my academic experience—I have grown as a writer, a thinker, and a person.

When my professor, Sheryl Welte Emch, introduced our final assignment—a case study that explores an important issue in our coming of age—a pit formed in my stomach. At the time, I knew that most significant aspect of my development was my separation from ballet; however, the thought of writing about my estrangement and discussing my feelings associated with it made me anxious. I was close to choosing a different topic, yet I felt that I'd be doing myself a disservice by not exploring a time of my life that has caused me so much mental turmoil. With a bit of bravery and incredible support from Professor Emch, I poured my heart into this case study. Piece by piece, I unraveled and analyzed my story, and the process turned out to be profoundly healing—more than I could have ever imagined.

# Stepping Away From the Stage:

## Rebuilding My Identity After Experiencing a Turning "Pointe" With Ballet

Natalie Shammas
Writing 101: Coming of Age at Duke
Professor: Sheryl Welte Emch

### Abstract

This case study explores why I lost my passion for ballet—something that I identified myself with for years—and how I've struggled to find my identity outside of it. I analyze why and how I developed such a strong affinity for ballet in the first place and how my strong attachment to ballet eventually caused me to burnout. I then discuss how my detachment from ballet majorly affected me and continues to impact me today. This case study mainly draws from research on identity development in adolescents, identity development in young ballet dancers, and burnout in athletes.

### Flashback to June 2, 2012 (End of sophomore year)

"Thirty minutes until the start of the show, thirty minutes!!!!"

Usually, these words sent giddy stirs throughout my chest and stomach, but not this time. The only words that rang through my head were: *This is my last ballet performance. This is my last performance with my studio. This is my last performance on this stage. This marks the end of everything I've ever done with ballet.*

I bandaged 5 blistered toes, wrapped my sore ankle, and tied my pointe shoes on. I rubbed Icy-Hot on my shoulders, and massaged my knees and calves.

I turned towards Kayla, my best friend at my dance studio. I wanted to say something to her so badly. I wanted to tell her that this was my last performance, I wanted to tell her that I'm sorry because I won't be dancing with her anymore, I wanted to tell her that ballet has torn me to pieces over the past few months, and I wanted to tell her that I've decided to cut back. But these confessions would all lead to one response: an extremely shocked *why?* I was afraid that she'd tell me I was making a horrible decision. And *maybe I was making a horrible decision*—after all, my entire life for the past several years had revolved around only ballet. *How could I let all those years go to waste?.*

*This is my last bal. . .*

"Natalie!" My teacher called from behind the dressing room door, "We need to change the turn section of your solo." *Now? I go on in 25 minutes. How am I supposed to perfect something in 25 minutes?* She lead me to the stage, and behind the closed curtain, we adjusted what she wanted me to. I ran back to my dressing room, squeezed into my tutu, and stretched out my hips and hamstrings. *This is my last performance on that stage.*

Our group herded to the wings, and after a few words from our teacher, the curtain opened and music from *Paquita* filled the auditorium. I wanted to soak up the moment because I knew I'd never live it again, but I also wanted to be done and finally put my ballet life behind me. *This marks the end of everything I've ever done with ballet.*

It was time for my solo, and despite how much I was struggling with myself that day, I managed to pull off one of my best runs yet. The applause felt great, the final curtsies felt great, but nothing felt greater than when I walked off the stage into the wings. I'm done.

*I'm finally free.*

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The day of my last ballet performance actually parallels much of my high school sophomore year: I hid my feelings from others, I struggled internally, and my mind wrestled between two huge choices. I knew I needed to let go of ballet that year, but I didn't—I couldn't. I kept dancing the same number of hours as I did before, yet I didn't love ballet as I did before. It was a year of complete mental conflict. When I first began to cut back during my junior year, I felt lost—stripped of the one thing that had defined me throughout my life. *Who was I if I wasn't "the dancer?"* My loss of ballet played a pivotal role in how I experienced the development of my adolescent identity. I do realize that this change opened doors to a number of new experiences, but I also recognize that it made me far more insecure in a number of ways. While I thought I'd no longer have these insecurities once in college, I still hold them today.

This case study is an exploration of exactly why I lost my passion for ballet and how I've struggled to find my identity outside of it. I hope to identify why this transformation so greatly impacted my life, and come away with a clearer understanding of how my identity shifted as my love for dance dissolved.

## Growing Up As a Dancer

I still remember my first dance class—my mom dragged my whiny three-year-old self into the studio against my wishes, but it didn't take long for my nagging to stop and for my teachers to realize that I had special talent. Starting at five, I was moved into an advanced level and was placed front and center of my recital piece. For whatever reason it was—my natural flexibility or inclination to pick up choreography—I excelled at dance, and I loved it. I loved how beautiful it made me feel, I loved that it provided me with goals, I loved knowing that I had found my "thing."

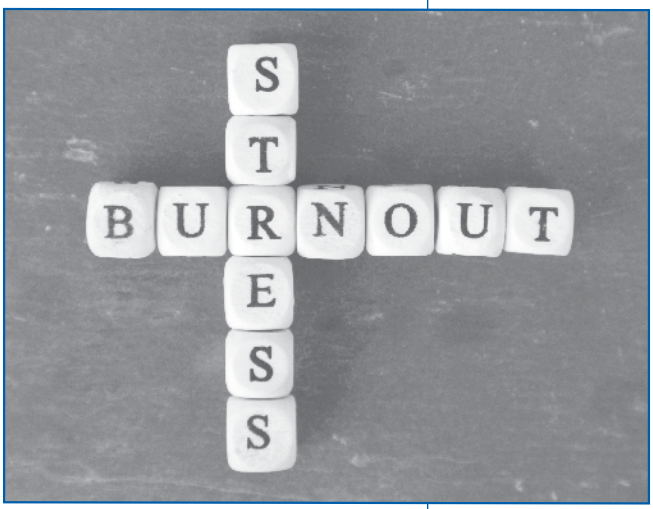
As I grew older, I began to wonder if ballet was something more than just a hobby for

Photo By Jacqueline Pilato

me. *Was this what I was meant to do?* I became increasingly competitive as well; I pinpointed my weaknesses and relentlessly worked at them. Unfortunately, one of my main weaknesses was something unchangeable—my body. Ballerinas are supposed to be slim with long arms, tiny waists, long necks, and most importantly, arched feet. When I was younger, I did have a thin frame, but my feet were always an issue. I remember soaking them in hot water and then rolling tennis balls under my arches, with hopes of somehow remolding my in-steps. Of course, they never changed. To add to my frustration, my once naturally thin body began to fill out when I hit high school. Since I couldn't control my body, I worked hard at what I could control—my technique. I'd obsess over every detail—from the placement of my head to the curve of my hands. Since my body wasn't perfect, everything else had to be.

Even more, everyone in my life knew me as "the dancer." *How could they have thought of me as anything else?* I spent my summers training with prestigious ballet companies, took over 20 hours of ballet a week, came to school wearing a ballerina bun, and did everything I could to achieve complete balletic perfection. I was never the smartest or the most outgoing person, but I was a great dancer and wanted everyone to know it. Additionally, ballet connected me to my family, and I believe it's the reason my mom and I have such a close relationship. We've spent countless hours on the road together, traveling to master classes, auditions, and summer intensives. She loved watching me perform and I felt like dance was my gift to her—the one thing I could do to say thank you for all she had sacrificed for me. My parents would send pictures of me dancing to my grandparents in Lebanon, and my teta (grandma) and jedo (grandpa) would call me and proudly say that they hung my pictures in their living room for their entire village to see. My teachers at school even knew me as a dancer. At times, I didn't feel like a "student" attending school, I felt like a "dancer" attending school. Dance defined me, and I wanted it to. I wanted it to be my identity.

Palen and Coatsworth (2007) help me understand my actions and thoughts during this time, claiming that one of the "most crucial developmental tasks . . . is achieving a cohesive identity" (p. 722). Undoubtedly, ballet was my gateway to a cohesive self. It wasn't merely something I did; it played an integral part in how others and I saw myself. I defined myself based on my ballet-accomplishments, staking my success in the perfection of my technique. *Since my body wasn't perfect, everything else had to be.* If I worked hard enough, I could perfect my technique, and in order to do this, I constantly set goals for myself: one week I'd focus on fully rolling my feet through the floor during tendus and dégagés; another week I'd be determined to nail my triple turns. According to Palen and Coatsworth (2007), my actions of "setting and achieving goals [were] important for [my] identity development process" (p. 725). The more goals that I accomplished, the more I thought of myself as a dancer. However, in order to live up to this dancer identity, I consistently needed to acquire the "skills . . . that [would] help [me] become who [I] hop[ed] to be" (Palen & Coatsworth, 2007, p. 725). That's why I worked so hard and pushed myself constantly. I wanted nothing to threaten my identity as the dancer.




Like all dancers, my body and mind were the engines that would help me maintain my dancer identity and reach these goals. In order to achieve, I knew I physically and mentally needed to resemble a professional ballerina. *But where did all this motivation come from?* I've looked to Palen and Coatsworth's (2007) research to help me understand where my drive for balletic success developed.

Their work suggests that because ballet was my "self-defining activit[y]," it provided me a context "particularly conducive to acquiring the skills required for goal achievement" (Palen & Coatsworth, 2007, p.725). In other words, because ballet was such a major part of my life, it affected what my aspirations were. Absolutely everything I did was motivated by one goal, and that goal was to become a professional ballerina. With this goal, however, came "[my] recognition of a discrepancy" between who I was and who I wanted to be "in the future" (Palen & Coatsworth, 2007, p.725). I wanted to get rid of the gap that existed between professional dancers and me. I worked hard at my technique because professionals have impeccable technique; I obsessed about my body because professionals are known to have a certain body type. I think that recognizing at such a young age what my shortcomings were caused me to develop the perfectionist tendencies that I still hold today—if everything wasn't perfect, I feared that I'd never reach the goals I set for myself. For example, highly arched feet and slim bodies are what ballet companies want. I stressed over my feet because they were a threat to my identity—they could have prevented me from achieving my goal of becoming a professional ballerina. And If I wasn't slim, I thought I'd lose my gracefulness and aesthetic qualities, so I began to obsess about my diet and weight. My entire identity as the dancer was continuously at stake, but I was determined to acquire ballerina qualities. *I could control my success as a dancer. I could control my ballet fate.*

Photo By Jacqueline Pilato

I wanted to learn; I wanted to improve. I had so much internal motivation to succeed in ballet, and it's difficult for me to pinpoint where this motivation came from. What I can say, however, is that even accomplishing the smallest of goals would set off sparks within me. I loved the feeling; it was my high, and I yearned for it over and over again. According to Palen and Coatsworth (2007), my internal motivation actually came from those sparks that I'd feel when I accomplished a goal; in other words, "intrinsic motivation . . . [was] inherent in [my] goal-directed behavior" (p. 732). The process of achieving became innate: I knew that each goal I accomplished was a new stone reached along my path to becoming a ballerina. I'd identify what I wanted to achieve, work relentlessly at it, and during one class, it would finally click and come together. That *click* was what I lived for; that *click* is what internally motivated me.

It's hard to ignore the fact that external forces motivated me to succeed in ballet as well. Contrary to what most people would think, ballerinas want to receive corrections from their teachers because they want to be noticed. If a teacher approached me and corrected my placement or adjusted my port de bras, I knew I was doing something right. *I knew I was doing what I needed to do for that teacher to notice me.* Sociologist Charles H. Cooley (1902) coined the phrase, "looking glass self," to refer to the idea that other people's reactions to us serve as a mirror, reflecting our image so that we, too, can see it (p. 183). In other words, self-knowledge is derived in part from reflected self-appraisals, our beliefs about others' recognitions and appraisals of us. Without a doubt, my self-concept was staked in the recognition I received from my dancing. Often, I'd consider myself to have an off day if a teacher only corrected me once or twice. On the other hand, the applause from audiences and the awe-inspired comments from my family raised my view of my own self-worth. My favorite part of every performance was curtain call, when I'd take my curtsies as the audience cheered. It would be at that moment when I truly felt accomplished for all the hard work I put into a performance. *The audience thought I was great, so I must have been great.*

## My Turning "Pointe"

Around ninth grade, I realized that if I continued to work hard, I could make a career out of ballet. Other girls from my studio had gotten jobs with ballet companies, *so why couldn't I?* At the same time, and for the first time, I started to earn positive results as a student. My first high school report card read: French I- 100, Algebra 2-100, Biology-100, Government-100, English I-96. Numerous questions started running through my mind. *In addition to being a "great dancer," was I also "a great student?" How would I handle myself in two very different domains?* I also began to question if my love for and dedication to ballet were simply a result of never feeling adequate at anything else. *Did I truly love ballet or was it simply a fallback for never succeeding in school? Even if I did truly love it, should I cut back on it since college would give me a more stable future?*

In search of some answers, I decided to attend the Rock School for Dance Education's ballet intensive during the summer of my sophomore year. I had heard that attending the Rock for five weeks would give me a good taste of what it was like to be a professional ballerina—everyday I'd have two ballet classes, a pointe class, and two to four hours of rehearsals. If this didn't tell me whether I truly loved ballet, I didn't know what would.

Everything seemed to be going right for me at the Rock—the artistic directors were noticing me, and I was cast in a great role for our showcase. Internally, however, I was struggling. My mind was growing numb from ballet. At home, I had schoolwork to break the cycle, but at the Rock it was just ballet class after ballet class. In addition, I began to grow insecure about my weight as I saw girls who were skinnier than me taking extreme measures to stay thin. *If I wanted to become a professional, shouldn't I be doing what they are doing?* I also felt an immense amount of pressure to be perfect in every class, at every combination, and at every step. It's like I forgot about actually enjoying ballet and focused only on impressing others. Some teachers liked me while others didn't, and I beat myself up about this. *How could I make everyone like me? Everyone had to like me. Was it because there were others who are skinnier than me? Or because others had better feet than me?* I began to grow anxious before every class and often cried at night from the day's stress. Physically and mentally, I was exhausted. One night, I found myself Googling, "how to make yourself throw-up." After about 15 minutes of searching, I caught a hold of myself. *This was unhealthy; this pressure needed to stop.* As I looked down at my red blistered toes, I realized that I no longer wanted ballet to devour my life. I couldn't have it define me anymore. From then on, my life path changed.

Ballet no longer held the same place in my heart, but what facilitated that change? Did I burnout? Although ballet is not considered a sport, I found Gould et al.'s (1996) description of athletic burnout in tennis players to really resonate with me. According to their research, "psychological, emotional, and physical withdrawal . . . as a result of excessive stress which act[ed] on [me] over time" caused my ballet burnout (p. 323). After years and years of intense training and straining my body, I felt like I hit a wall. Every single day, I witnessed the unhealthy things dancers did to their bodies, and it seemed as if the only way I'd succeed in ballet was if I did those unhealthy things, too. The intense environment at the Rock left me feeling "powerless to control events and make decisions about the nature of [my] experiences and the direction of [my] development" (Gould et al., 1996, p. 325). I felt trapped in a cycle of endless ballet classes and extremely hard work, only to find myself being critically evaluated by others. I realized that no matter how hard I pushed myself, it was my teachers and directors who determined my balletic worth—not me. The feeling of losing my control was unsettling—I yearned to have it back. I believe that all the stress that came from my perceived loss of power greatly contributed to my burnout.

Although my experiences at the Rock played a key role in my transition from *the dancer to someone who dances,* I don't believe it was the only source of my burnout. When I began to succeed academically as a student, it was the first time in my life that I saw myself as more than just a dancer. I began to question my identity solely as a dancer, and I think there was a part of me that wanted to be known as more (than just a dancer). During this confusing time, I sometimes thought of myself as my own traitor— *after years of spending hours in the dance studio, after years of dedicating my life to ballet, how could I even want to think of myself as more than a dancer?* Gould et al.'s (1996) research helps me explore these questions by explaining that burnout occurs "because the structure of high-performance sport (e.g., time demands) does not allow the young athlete to develop a normal multifaceted identity" (p. 325). In my case, being stuck in the dance studio for years and focusing so intently on ballet prevented me from realizing that I could do more, that I could *be* more. I realized that throughout my whole life, my "identity [was] solely focused on [ballet] success" (Gould et al., 1996, p. 325). I began to want to succeed academically, I began to want to have time to read and find out what I was intellectually passionate about, and my first high school report card was the spark that led me to believe I was capable of doing so.

When I identified myself as only a dancer, it was as if I brainwashed myself to see just the pros and no cons of ballet. Like Pickard (2012) explained in her research on young ballet dancers, I accepted "commitment, sacrifice, physical and emotional pain and suffering . . . as part of the process of becoming and embodying an identity as a ballet dancer" (p. 42). I *wanted* that sole ballet identity so badly for years, and I'd have sacrificed anything to have it. When I began to question what my identity was and what I wanted, I began to wonder if the suffering for ballet was worth it. *Why was I doing something so painful and uncomfortable to my*

*body and mind? And should I continue to do it if I have something else that's more stable?* It took the academic success and the burnout I experienced at the Rock to take my head out of a ballet mind-set. Studying didn't make my muscles hurt, it didn't make my feet bleed, and it didn't make me constantly stress about my body. It seemed that identifying myself as a successful student gave me a clearer view of my dance life. Once I began to recognize myself as an accomplished student and thought about the obvious benefits that come with high academics, my desire to become a ballerina became blurred— I saw that "the costs outweigh[ed] the benefits relative to alternative activities" (Gould et al., 1996, p. 324). To me, the pros of going to college seemed to outweigh the pros of going to a ballet company, causing me to think about discontinuing my involvement in ballet. I knew that college—especially a high-caliber college—would be more likely to give me a stable job and enjoyable lifestyle.

I feel that the culmination of burnout and staking my self-worth in more than just ballet dulled the spark that ballet once lit in my mind. Nailing triple turns and earning lead roles didn't give me the same high that they used to. Lacking the intrinsic motivation that I once had, I increasingly searched for praise. However, even my teachers' recognition didn't feel as satisfying as it used to. Palen and Coatsworth (2006) explain that my elevated feelings from external motivation were perhaps no longer stable because my internal motivation to succeed in ballet had dissolved. Applause and positive comments from teachers didn't seem to have the same effect on my mind when I became emotionally separated from ballet. I no longer had those internal *sparks* that could keep me excelling at dance.

## Separating Myself

Here was the plan: I'd arrive home from The Rock, call my ballet teacher, and tell her I'm cutting back on ballet and quitting the performing company.

This didn't happen: Instead, my teacher called me when I got home and said, "I'd like you to be Clara in this year's *Nutcracker*." I let out a pathetic, "Yay." I think she expected more excitement out of me, but I didn't know what to say. I knew I needed to say no, but I *couldn't*—the words wouldn't come out. For weeks, I had been mentally preparing myself to let go of ballet, but I physically couldn't bring myself to do it.

When I realized over the summer that ballet wasn't my path anymore, I changed my school schedule to include a much harder academic load. This seemed reasonable at the time because I was expecting to have a lighter dance schedule; instead, I started tenth grade with an intense dance schedule *and* an intense academic schedule.

For the first two months of school, I cried every night. I couldn't handle school and dance; I couldn't handle trying to be perfect at both. Since I wasn't planning on becoming a professional, I felt like I had no purpose in dancing anymore. *So, wasn't I wasting my time by going to ballet? Shouldn't I spend my time studying?* I found myself slacking off in ballet class; I had no more motivation to improve. I just wanted class to end so I could go home and do my schoolwork. At the same time, I couldn't imagine what my life would be like without ballet. I didn't want to tell others that I cut back on dance; I liked that others knew I was talented at something.

As I began to look for new opportunities, a new dance teacher at my high school, Amanda, urged me to explore styles outside of ballet. I started taking contemporary and modern dance private lessons with her. It felt so invigorating, so refreshing to try something new. I was motivated to improve in

modern, yet I didn't feel pressured to be "perfect." Modern dance is much less restricting than ballet—there are often no exact counts and there is fluidity in modern technique. Each modern class is different from the other, adding a sense of freshness that I no longer experienced with ballet.

When my junior year of high school started, I mustered the strength to quit my studio's performing company and cut back on my ballet hours. I dedicated that year to working hard in school, dancing modern, and trying to veer my mind away from ballet. However, I wasn't necessarily happier.

When I cut back on dance, I felt like I had no excuse to not be perfect in my academics. I studied and studied and studied. I gave up numerous social events to study, I skipped my brothers' college graduation dinner to study, and I had to do every assignment 100% or I felt inadequate.

More than anything, however, I struggled with who I was. *Could I still consider myself a dancer even though I didn't dance as much as I did before?* I felt like I was transitioning from "the dancer" to "the person who does dance," and that identity change was far from easy for me.

Ballet had become engrained in my body, on my surface and at my core. It was—and still is—in my posture, my mannerisms, the way I carry myself, sit, stand, speak, and eat. I became a dancer through a process of construction that began in early childhood, and breaking away from that was a struggle. During my tenth grade year, I knew that ballet was no longer the right path for me. However, I continued to dance intensely that year, causing me an immense amount of internal struggle.

Leon Festinger (1957) would suggest that my internal struggles at the time were a result of dissonance—a state in which people are troubled by inconsistencies in their thoughts, sentiments, and actions. For me, my dissonance grew from the action of continuing to dance ballet, even though my head and my heart no longer wanted to dance ballet. My thoughts and actions did not match up, causing me to mentally struggle. As Festinger (1957) theorized, restoring consistency required me to expend a great deal of psychological energy. Indeed, during my sophomore year, my thoughts were completely consumed by coming to terms with my decision to cut ties with ballet. Throughout my life, I've noticed that I tend to spend a lot of time thinking about a decision before I actually carry out the decision. For me, thinking about a big decision is one thing, and actually bringing myself to play out what I have decided is completely another. In this case especially, it was a huge step for me to cut back on dance. *How was I supposed to actually cut back on something that I had dedicated so much time to?* It was much easier said than done, and in my situation much easier thought than done. Although my thoughts and actions were not in line, I do believe that my sophomore year was important for mentally preparing myself to actually cut back on ballet my junior year. Nevertheless, I dreaded going to ballet class my sophomore year because while I was physically dancing ballet, my mind knew that it wasn't where my heart was, and I knew it wasn't where my head should be. *I shouldn't continue to dedicate myself to ballet; I should be studying or doing SAT practice.*

My dissonance was "especially acute" because of my initial "investments of time, energy, and money" in ballet (Schmidt & Stein, 1991, p. 262). For years, I danced approximately 20 hours a week, and even when I wasn't dancing, I was thinking about dancing. In addition, I knew that my parents had given up a lot of their time and money for me to dance. They'd drive me to festivals, buy me a new pair of pointe shoes every two weeks, fly me to summer programs, sew costumes for me—the list is endless. Their schedules revolved around my dance schedule. Knowing that my family and I had "made these sacrifices" only for me "to discover that the chosen activity [ballet] has not lived up to expectations" made me "extremely vulnerable to dissonance" (Schmidt & Stein, 1991, p. 262).

It was my choice to sever my ties with ballet. No one pressured me to quit, so one would think that I wouldn't be conflicted by my decision. Linder, Cooper, & Jones (1967), however, explain that dissonance is often experienced when one has freedom of choice. I had no reassurance that I was making the right choice to quit ballet, and this troubled me. Cutting back on ballet would be a huge step in my life and the biggest change I had ever experienced. *This had always been my identity. Ballet made me special. Will people still think I'm special if I'm no longer the dancer? What will I think of myself if I don't do something at such an advanced level?* I wanted a simple, *you're making the right decision* from someone, but the choice was left fully to me, further increasing my internal struggle.

Making the transition even harder, by cutting my ties with ballet, I felt that I was also cutting ties with something else: my dance studio. After years of training, I had begun to identify myself with my dance studio. Even though I had "come to dislike" ballet, I found "it difficult to quit because [I] would lose...part of my self-concept by no longer being identified with the team" (Schmidt and Stein, 1991, p. 262).

I had made close friends through my dance studio—friends who had supported me through performances, auditions, difficult classes, and injuries. We truly had shed blood, sweat, and tears together, and it saddened me to think that I'd no longer be a part of that group.

Even more, I had formed close relationships with my teachers. Because I had danced seriously for so long, it seemed that there was an understanding between my main ballet teacher and me that I would continue dancing at a high level throughout high school. It made me feel horrible to think of breaking that understanding, making my transition out of ballet even more of a struggle. I have learned from Schmidt and Stein's (1991) research that my reluctance to leave ballet due to understandings between my ballet teacher and me is common, especially since I gave my ballet teacher no indication during my sophomore year that I was losing my passion for ballet. I knew she would be completely shocked and disappointed with my decision to quit—and she was. These "heightened social costs of termination and understandings" between us made it extremely difficult for me to "discontinue participation" (Schmidt and Stein, 1991, p. 262). I believe this is why I found it so difficult to tell my teacher that I didn't want to dance anymore when she called to tell me that I had been cast as Clara. I didn't want to hear the disappointment in her voice; I wasn't ready to end the relationship we had built over the years.

There were certain things that I did to help me transition into a life with less ballet. In their research on retired gymnasts, Lavallee and Robinson (2007) found that one of the ways gymnasts coped with retirement was by finding "a meaningful replacement for gymnastics" (2007, p. 138). For me, as a former ballet dancer, modern dance was that replacement. It "recreat[ed] the satisfaction [and] stimulation" of my ballet experience (Lavallee & Robinson, 2007, p. 120). I enjoyed my modern classes, and I think the novelty of modern re-sparked that light that used to flicker within me when I danced ballet. Lavallee and Robinson (2007) also claimed that retired gymnasts struggle because they have to "tolerate cravings to perform gymnastics moves", and this is another reason that modern was a great replacement for me—it gave me another outlet for movement (p. 133). I liked modern movement because I found it to be freeing compared to the precision of ballet. Even more, modern gave me additional opportunities to dance on stage, and brought back that *gnawing, yet wonderful, churning sensation* that I used to feel before I performed ballet.

Modern, however, could only help me cope with so much. I struggled mentally when I cut back on ballet, and many of my anxieties began to increase. I initially thought that my desire to be perfect, my body insecurity, and my fear of failure would lessen with ballet's burden lifted off my shoulders, but they didn't. Like the gymnasts in Lavallee and Robinsons' (2007) study, I struggled with "piecing together a new identity in the real world" (p. 120), and my "adjustment difficulties during this period . . . ranged from low self-confidence, increased anxiety, and disordered eating" (p. 127). While dancing ballet, I became very aware of my body, and as a result, I had developed an "extraordinary sense of bodily control" (Lavallee & Robinson, 2007, p. 138). I'd notice the smallest physical details about myself because ballet requires such a high level of specificity. As a result of my "heightened awareness," however, I was also "acutely aware of the subsequent loss of physical control" that I experienced when I stopped dancing ballet (Lavallee & Robinson, 2007, p. 138). This is possibly why I became so insecure about my body when I cut back. I felt that I had less control over every physical aspect of myself—from my flexibility, to my weight, to my muscularity, etc. Like the gymnasts, I began to develop "disordered eating habits and exercise addictions in [my] attempts to maintain control" (Lavallee & Robinson, 2007, p. 138). It was hard to have control over myself and be anxiety free when I no longer felt the connection to the one thing I had always had. *I felt unstable.* Similar to the gymnasts in Lavallee and Robinson's (2007) study, I had spent the majority of my life "living" for ballet—"not just physically, but also mentally and socially" (p.120). *So, how was I supposed to lead a regular life?* I felt "isolated, lonely, and socially un-sustained in a world without [ballet]" (Lavallee & Robinson, 2007, p. 136). Throughout my whole life, I had only identified myself as one thing—a dancer. When I no longer had ballet, I felt that I needed something else to cling onto; I felt that I needed something to perfect so that I could bring back some stability. That something became my schoolwork. I felt that in order to "start again in the real world," I had to put all my energy in academics because that's what I had done with ballet (Lavallee & Robinson, 2007, p. 130). I found comfort when I succeeded in school, because not only did it make me feel like I gained a bit of my control back, but it also made me feel like quitting

ballet was worth it.

Since the beginning of my sophomore year, I have struggled to piece together my identity. People who know me well or who hear my story will sometimes ask me, "Do you regret it? Do you regret quitting?" This question usually makes me very sad, because even today I still believe that I fully haven't figured out how to cohesively connect my old life that included ballet with my new life that does not. In the moment that someone asks me the question, I often forget the negative feelings that ballet brought to my life and reply "yeah, a little." Saying this only confuses me more because I don't know if I truly believe it or not.

## So Who Am I Today?

In the process of writing this case study, I've had to dig way back into my mind and relive some of the hardest moments of my life. Even though I've omitted or glossed over certain parts, I can confidently say that writing this has been very healing and reassuring. It's reminded me of some of the internal struggles I felt while dancing ballet and has proven to me that I made the right choice. Even though I sometimes forget, I *know* that quitting ballet was the best decision for me.

With this being said, *how exactly do I identify myself today?*

My transition process out of ballet was long and challenging, and I've realized that my transition into discovering my current self won't be a swift process either. The truth is, the person I currently am is under construction, and there are some parts of me that I still don't fully grasp. I do know, however, that my ballet background continues to influence parts of my current identity. I usually don't like talking about how ballet has influenced who I am now, but I think this case study has somewhat mended my broken feelings with my past and has allowed me to almost fully come to terms with the decisions that I made.

I grew up yearning for a sense of aesthetic and technical perfection in my ballet dancing, and I do think that this is why I currently feel the need to do everything perfectly all the time. For example, I rewrite sentences in essays over and over again until I think they flow well, I double check every problem I do, and I always read the optional essays that professors assign—basically, I don't half-bait anything. And when I feel like I didn't do something as perfectly as I could have, I beat myself up about it. Knowing that I've completed something to the best of my ability comforts me.

Mentally, most of my current thoughts are consumed by these questions: *What's next? What goals do I still want to accomplish? What more can I achieve?* I believe this thinking is also influenced by my ballet days when I wanted to accomplish one small goal after another. Different from when I was younger, however, I'm currently unsure of what exactly I'm working towards, and where my current motivation to succeed comes from. I don't know who I want to be in life, or what each accomplishment will mean. Despite my uncertainty, I've somehow managed to stay extremely motivated. My drive for ballet came hand-in-hand with wanting to accomplish my goal of becoming a professional ballerina, *so, where does my motivation come from now if I don't know what I'm working towards?* Maybe that is what I'm motivated by—to discover who I want to become.

Undoubtedly, I do feel a heavy weight on my shoulders caused by the uncertainty of what I want to do in my future. I've dabbled in a number of things, and interestingly enough, I find myself to be happiest in environments that are intense and high pressure like my ballet environments were. I'm drawn to people who are passionate and who take themselves and their work seriously because those are the types of people ballet has taught me to respect. But I also like being a part of a supportive and collaborative system because I've seen the beautiful results that working together can bring.

Although I no longer feel the gaping hole that quitting ballet left in my life, I'm constantly searching for something that recreates the passion I once felt for ballet. I know what having immense passion for something feels like, and I desperately want to have that feeling again. Until I have those *sparks,* I will feel like my identity is somewhat incomplete. However, I think it's a huge step in a positive direction that I no longer directly feel negatively impacted by the absence of ballet in my life. That's one brick in the major rebuilding process of my identity.

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# Brittany:
## A Trans Person and A Politician Dance

Jesse Rencurrell Pollack
Writing 101: Constructing Transgender
Professor: stef shuster

***An opinion is not a right, it's a responsibility.***
***The number of people who've been enslaved, tortured,***
***or killed due to opinions grounded in ignorance is incalculable.***
***Holding one of these opinions not only makes you***
***unwise, it can turn you into a monster.***

# BILL 356

Authored and signed by Senator Roy Martin

**1)……..**
**2)……..**
**…**
**49b) Any Individual who desires to cross-dress or otherwise behave as or be the opposite sex is NOT permitted to use any gendered facility (restrooms, locker rooms, etc.) other than their own biological sex.**
**…..**
**67) Persons who feel uncomfortable, for religious or otherwise personal reasons, doing business with, employing, or otherwise professionally interacting with a transsexual or some other member of the homosexual community are free to deny service to that individual as given by the first amendment of the United States Constitution.**
**...**
**90a) If a transsexual or crossdresser commits a crime and is sent to any local, state, or federal penitentiaries, he or she will be sent to the penitentiary corresponding to his or her biological, not desired, sex.**
**90b) It is not required of any penitentiaries in Indiana to provide "hormone therapy" for transsexual individuals. Any medical requirements of penitentiaries in Indiana stem only from *life-threatening* ailments.**
**…**

**Jesse Rencurrell Pollack**

At the time I had enrolled in the Writing 101 course *Constructing Transgender,* I was new to the realm of sexual and gender diversity. I was vaguely familiar with concepts like the gender continuum, non-binary pronouns (which I still mess up occasionally), and trans identities, but not much more. Unfortunately, like many others, most of my ideas of trans people were informed by popular culture, which is not ideal for casting trans people in a positive light.

This all changed when I did the readings and had discussions in class. I suppose the turning point for me was watching the film *Cruel and Unusual,* which depicted what being a trans person in this country is really like, especially people from humble beginnings. It's shocking to see the cycle of oppression trans people have to endure just to be who they are.

This made me all the more excited when my wonderful instructor, stef shuster, said that the third and final project was open to any genre, whether it be film, story, poem, etc. I knew at this point I wanted to write a story. Yes, it's important for people to know information, to know that formal arguments and data are invaluable in academia. But it's equally important for people to feel motivated to inform themselves on a topic. People, even the most rational among us, are guided by what impassions them. It is human nature to want to know more about a subject about which you feel strongly. My hope is that this story will be the catalyst that motivates you to delve into this topic. Once you do, it will open your eyes to the horrors that the queer community in this country experiences.

The clock was so audible.  Every time it ticked I could feel my blood pressure rise, the hairs on my arms spike.  It sounded louder every time, and I feared that the next tick would burst through my ear drums. Eventually I felt my heart beat in sync with the clock. I unconsciously made a little rhythm to follow the second hands with my foot. This helped ease the nerves, but not by much.

And now the anxiety sinks in. Every little mistake I've made for the last 5 months campaigning are being repeated and magnified by 100 in my head. Every tie off by half a centimeter, every stuttered, slightly off, weirdly worded answer to one of Chris's questions. All of it. I can't win. I fucked up just a bit too much.

It's ok. It's ok. I have a perfectly nice job, a perfectly stable home. I have two wonderful children. I'll be fine, I don't need to be senator. Fuck, I don't want it. Too much responsibility, and God knows I don't need to add to my laundry list of anxiety issues. This is good. I know it is. I want Chris to win.

But I couldn't stop. I couldn't stop thinking about that perfect response that I would have had to Chris in the December CNN debate, had I not thought of it 5 minutes after the debate ended. It wouldn't leave my mind, no matter how much I tried. It consumed me. "If policy 99 was so good, why did our stocks plummet 6 days after its implementation?" I kept repeating it to himself. I had to get it right. God damn it. I couldn't think of anything else. No other thoughts could cross my mind, just that would-be response. Each time my mind forced me to repeat the response again my heart got faster, my blood pressure spiked. Insurmountable masses of frustration and anger built up with every word.

"The polls are in ladies and gentleman, we are ready to call the vote."

I'm lightheaded.

The clock was so fucking loud.

"Say hello to your new senator, ladies and gentlemen, Roy Martin!"

Oh.

---

Hi there, my name's Roy, and I'm quite literally the deadest person you'll ever meet.

While I was alive, I'd say I had a fairly good life. I was happily married, my children were amazing, and grew up to be fantastic human beings (far better than I was fortunately).

Was I a bad person? Well, I did cause a lot of harm, sure. But in my defense, I was also in a position of power, and so I had the means to cause a lot of harm. I think many people are quick to blame law makers for making shitty laws that hurt people, and are quick to comment on their character. But in observing the lives of others, I realize that most people have character flaws, pretty severe ones. Many people don't live in situations that call upon those flaws, or don't have the means to make their flaws have a meaningful impact on anyone, or they have virtues whose motivations far exceed and suppress their flaws. Perhaps if Martin Luther King was born in a truly post-racial, color-bind world, he would have been a serial killer. Who knows?

It's actually kind of funny though, the kind of politics that happen in America. The lawmakers are the most powerful, yet the least impacted by the laws they create. It's like they live under a shield, and no matter what they do, no matter how many people they screw over, they know they'll be fine, so what's the point of trying? I've seen the lives of civilians thousands of years in the past, in civilizations where the lawmakers were held the most accountable. Lawmakers who made bad laws would have to suffer a consequence on the magnitude of the damage they did. I've seen ancient politicians executed, cast into poverty, jailed, sold into slavery, and banished. The ones with the most power, the ones with the most influence, were the most vulnerable, had the most to lose. Barbaric? Maybe, but it sure as hell kept them honest.

I was lucky then that I lived in America, where politicians were held much less accountable for what they did. I guess, though, it did kind of screw me in the afterlife.

---

"I feel numb, like everywhere."

***"Yeah, you're going to have to get used to that. Not having a corporeal existence means you won't be able to feel things like you did."***

"Will I ever feel again?"

***"Yeah, of course, just in a different way."***

"Ok"

***"So do you know what happened? Do you know where you are?"***

"No. I don't remember much. I remember going through this haze, I'm not sure how long. It's as if I had ingested a gallon of LSD."

***"Yes, that would be you going into the shock of not having a body. You were born in your body, your conscious doesn't know of any other way to express itself. It had to cope."***

"How long was I in shock for?"

***"About 2 years."***

"That's surprising." It was weird. It really was surprising, and had I been alive I would have thrown a shit fit. But I felt oddly calm, subdued. I asked God why, and they explained that my emotions are still recovering from the haze, in shock. They then said that it was only temporary, and that my emotions should be back to normal within a few minutes.

"So, what happened?"

***"Well, you're dead, if you haven't gathered. Had a stroke, not too surprising given that you constantly subjected your body to the influx of poisons associated with the 'Southern Diet'."***

I felt a bolt of sadness, not as much as I would have felt had my emotions been normal. It was saddening that I'll never see my family again, that I left them there and I don't even remember my last interaction with them.

***"Don't worry. They'll be fine. Your wife died spending the last few years of her life trying to reverse the damage you did, in honor of Brittany Thompson. She never was too big of a fan of your political agenda, and your daughters went on to become very successful computer scientists and mathematicians."***

The prick of sadness was still there, but it dulled a little.

God and I spent the next few hours talking about personal affairs of my life, of the world, what the meaning of life was, etc., all those lovely things. God wouldn't answer a lot of my questions, said it would "Spoil the fun of what happens next."

"What does happen next?"

***"Tell me, what do you think happens next?"***

"I'm not sure. Heaven?"

***"Nice try."***

"Then what?"

***"Do you think you were a good person?"***

By now my emotions were back and as sensitive as ever. I felt a rush of anger at the implication. Of course I was a good person. All of my life I defended my morals. I was a wealthy politician who gave to charities frequently and passed laws that only benefitted my people. I was one of the few senators in my state whom it wasn't revealed was involved in some sex/drug scandal. Indiana had a history of those. I didn't take bribes. I didn't vote for my own pay raise. Hell, I even got the minimum wage in my state to go up by $3.00/hour. That's pretty fucking good, if you ask me.

***"Yes, those are good things you did."***

I forgot God could read minds.

***"But, the question wasn't, Have you done good things? Hitler, at some point in his life, did a good thing I'm sure. The question is, were you a good person?"***

"Um-"

***"Let me answer that for you. Your disregard for an entire group of people made you a bad person. You were so caught up in how lucky you were to be born a white, Christian, able-bodied, heterosexual, cisgender male that you belittled and wreaked havoc on the trans community in your state. You forgot that not everyone was you, had your mind and your body, and that made you callous. This is unfortunate for you, because you were a senator.***

***To put it in short, my friend, you lacked what most people lack when judging others. You lacked empathy. You lacked an understanding of their feelings, their experiences. You would have done none of the shit you did if you knew what trans people were going through."***

---

I'll finish telling you about my conversation with God, but I want to make one thing clear.

I honestly wasn't trying to be an asshole.

I know that sounds weird, and if you got a chance to read Bill 356 and its lovely reference to "transsexuals" and the "homosexual community", you'll probably want me hung.

The thing is, I really didn't know that much about trans people. I lived in a fairly conservative community, and actually thought of myself as a pretty liberal senator; in fact, I was a registered democrat. Still, though, when I was a kid, I never met a trans person, at least not an out one.

In fact, the closest I've ever been to trans people is through one movie called *Ace Ventura: Pet Detective,* which was about a character played by Jim Carrey who has to go on a quest to find Snowflake, the Miami Dolphins' mascot. He finds out the person who captured Snowflake is a former football player who got shamed into exile after he made a fundamental error in a past Super Bowl, and took revenge on the Dolphins by pretending to be a female detective and fumbling the Miami Police department's attempts to find Snowflake. (I say "pretending to be a female detective" because the antagonist was not actually trans, he just disguised himself as a female to be coy.)

This was the extent of my trans education. A joke.

This was all when I was about 9. My mind was plastic, and the media molded something in. Because I was never exposed to any contradictory information, my mind never got unmolded. I went through my entire life with the unquestioned assumption that trans people were weirdos who liked to pretend to dress up as the opposite sex, and who needed help.

With my views and my ingrained assumptions about trans people, what did I think about a law that lets trans people use gendered facilities that correspond with their own gender identity? I thought it was ridiculous. These delusional people

wanted to harass people of the opposite sex, which would mean that women would be in danger every time they went into the bathroom of being sexually assaulted by what at the time I thought were "guys pretending to be girls". Not only did passing Bill 356, and specifically section 49b, seem reasonable, it seemed dangerous and irresponsible not to.

So, you can imagine what I thought of the protesters who marched in my state, who burned down the Indiana flag, who yelled and chanted and stood in the middle of the street, after I passed Bill 356. I just thought of them as insane. *No one told me how gender worked.* No one told me trans people weren't making a choice, that their gender identities were as real and immutable as their skin and eye color. No one told me that trans women wanted to use the women's bathroom because of-fucking-course they did, they're women. Imagine, growing up in a conservative household where I assumed from the beginning of my life that there are only two genders, male and female, and that your gender is the genitalia you have. It never even occurred to me to think differently.

---

"What's going to happen to me?"

***"It's quite simple. No one truly has empathy. But some people are good at simulating it, the more creative ones at least. It's not a coincidence that a lot of feminists on earth are artists, writers, academics, etc. People who have abstract and creative minds are the best at synthesizing empathy, because they have good imaginations. They can imagine what it's like to be someone else, and derive conclusions from that. Many white critical race theorists got by because they could imagine being a person of color, and looking at the world from those eyes. Everything white. Everything so very white. People looked at you and assumed who you were. You had no identity.***

***Then, there were less abstract thinkers, more practical ones. Your engineers, your doctors, people who could see what was in front of them but didn't want to exert the effort to see what was in front of someone else. Not to say that all artists were critical race theorists, or all doctors and engineers were republican, but it's not a coincidence that many people in each group thought in their respective ways.***

***This is also not to say that it was IMPOSSIBLE for some people to simulate empathy, anyone can do it. But for some it takes more effort.***

***For you, because you had a responsibility, because you had an influence in so many people's lives, your efforts at simulating empathy were sub-par, and you should have done better."***

"I'm sorry."

***"No, you're not. You have no idea the damage you caused. So I'm going to show you. Or, rather, you are going to show yourself.***

***Brittany Thompson, the trans woman who, in 2009, at age 55, hung herself in her prison cell, was your responsibility. You caused her death. And now, you will experience it. You will live her life. The life of the woman you oppressed. You will be your own tyrant.***

***You chose not to simulate empathy in your life. And now you will have to get it the hard way. Have fun."***

---

**Part 2: Roy Gets to Play Pretend**

This is Brittany's diary. I've decided, after living her life, to share some of the diary with you. This is what I lived. I've only a few pages to share because I want to respect Brittany's privacy, especially after I killed her. That means that what you're about to read, is only a tiny fraction of the agony and desperate, uphill, losing battle Brittany and I experienced. But, that being said, perhaps after you read these few pages, empathy will come your way, as it did mine.

---

I feel like I don't belong. No matter what I do, I can't be happy.

By now I've known who I am for a while. Looking back, the realization was not in one moment. It did not come to me in a dream, in an epiphany. It came as the tide rises. Along the continuum of certainty, I started at zero, and over the course of a few months, I creeped to 5, 10, 15. Today, I reached 100.

I have no choice to accept who I am now. It makes me happier, but it doesn't fix the broken world I live in. The world where people *just don't understand.*

Everywhere I look, I see happy cis people. On TV, on the internet, in magazine ads, in L'Oréal commercials, I see either beautiful cis women or 6-packed, rough, gorgeous cis men. They all look so amazing and perfect. I've only ever seen trans people being made fun of. In the TV show *Family Guy,* one of the characters, Brian, sleeps with a woman who, unbeknownst to Brian, is trans. When Brian finds out, he has a violent and disgusting reaction. There's a scene when he throws up for literally 30 seconds straight. Is that who I am? A joke? A laughing stock, never to be loved, only to be reviled?

I'm not out yet, maybe that'll make things better. Maybe then

I can meet more people like me. People who are in the wrong bodies, people who want to tear off their skin like a bad jacket and put on another gender. Maybe that'll make it better.

---

My mom still calls me Brandon. She's known for 3 years now that's not my name, that's not me. Every time I correct her, she gets this look of sadness.

No, not of sadness. I could deal with sadness. I would love sadness. Her look is of pity. And every time I see it, every fucking time she looks at me with that disappointed, pitiful frown, I want to burn down the house. Every time she calls me Brandon, it feels like someone is squeezing my heart, harder each time.

Honestly though, I'm not sure I can keep doing this. I can't keep looking my mom in the eye. I can't keep being called "Brandon the Faggot" at school. I can't stand how lonely I am, how my lack of belonging is magnified when I'm there. I can't stand the creeping, deathly chill I get whenever someone puts emphasis on "he" when they refer to me.

I'll kill myself if I stay for much longer.

---

I remember once, my conservative uncle was trying to prove that members of the LGBTQ community were inherently immoral people, so he displayed this statistic sheet that showed members had higher rates of everything bad. Suicide, prison sentences, drug abuse, etc.

Oh how I understand that list so much now. I'm this close to robbing a bank.

I got rejected from my, say, 40th potential job today?

I hate Indiana so much. Apparently the new senator passed some bill 3 months back, Bill 356, that basically made it legal for employers to do whatever the fuck they want when it came to hiring trans people. It was hard for a trans person to get a job in Indiana before, but now these bastards have a *legal basis* for slamming the door in my face. I'm honestly worried that every possible employer I'll go to will do just that.

I can't take being homeless anymore. The police keep kicking me out of places where I sleep, and I'm running out of the money I stole from my mom when I ran away a year ago.

---

I feel happy for the first time in my life I think.

I met my wife at my new job. Every time I go into work, I feel the sense of belonging and love that I never felt before. That I certainly didn't feel at school or at home. I feel normal.

It's actually kind of funny, everyone I work with, including my employer, is religious, but they don't seem to mind that I'm trans. When I went into my job interview, it was the first thing Tatiana, the manager, noticed. I went in, and immediately, I felt the glare, the judgement, but it was overcome by a smile. And not a bullshit

smile either, I've seen plenty of those. I introduce myself as Brittany and people go "Oh, ok," and they grin that big fake teeth filled disgusting grin and shake my hand really slow like I'm a mental patient. Not Tatiana though, her smile was real. Genuine. I could feel it. I explained my situation to her, and she told me "The first thing Jesus said to do was not to judge. If you're happy, I'm happy". I think it was the first time someone accepted me, and it felt so warm.

I've been working at the office for 3 years now, 2 of which I've been able to afford hormones. For the first time, when I look in the mirror, I'm slowly getting happy. I look at the breasts starting to grow and I feel like they've always been there. I couldn't imagine my chest any different. And, besides that, my mind is clearer, less foggy, less depressed.

My wife and I moved into an apartment just up the block. It's not amazing, but it does.

I think my life is finally fixed. I think I have nothing but positive memories to look forward to.

---

**Now there seems no reason why, I should carry on*
*In this land that once was my land, I can't find a home*
*It's lonely, and it's quiet, and the horse soldiers are coming*
*And I think it's time I strung my bow, and ceased my senseless running*

---

It wasn't my fault. How else was I not to starve? I had been homeless for 7 years, and I was completely out of options. If I hadn't started fucking people for money, I'd be dead right now.

---

15 years. In a men's prison.

---

*For soon I'll find the yellow moon along with my loved ones*
*Where the buffaloes graze in clover fields without the sound of guns*

---

I can't take it. My life is falling apart. Bill 356 denied me hormone therapy. All of the beautiful, sweet changes to my body are being reversed. It's turning me into a monster. All of the feelings of fulfillment, of happiness, are all gone now. I can't even remember what happiness felt like. I feel 13 again.

I'm trapped between two hells, each one worse than the other. Either they put me in with the other prisoners, where I am constantly getting assaulted, physically and sexually, by both the staff and other inmates,

Or they put me in solitary confinement, in this dark, empty room the size of a closet. The walls white, as if to emphasize how empty my life here is. At first solitary isn't so bad. It's kind of nice not being subjected to the constant, grotesque, unchecked abuse of literally every human being on the other side of the wall.

Then, slowly, I start going insane.

Please, understand me when I say insane. I don't mean "That test was insane" or "Dude, are you really going to eat that whole pizza? That's insane". No, I wish it were like that. I mean, I start going *insane.* I have no one left to look at, no one left to think about, but myself, and how wrong my body is, and how I just want to jump out of my own skin. And it doesn't stop, not for one second. It doesn't come in waves, there are no breaks. It is constant, increasing, unceasing. I go sometimes for 4 or 5 days in solitary without a minute of sleep. And if I'm lucky enough to doze off, just for a second, I only have horrible nightmares, each one worse than the last. Although, I guess I can't really tell if the nightmares are worse than my reality. Eventually, I start screaming. It helps me feel a little better, but not for long. I scream so much and don't stop, not until my voice is completely gone. After about a week, they come for me and put me back with the other prisoners. And the cycle repeats.

Whenever I'm in one form of excruciating torture, I want desperately to be in the other.

---

*And the red sun sinks at last, into the hills of gold*
*And peace to this young warrior*

---

I'm standing on my last legs here. I just got denied parole. I have 2 more years to go. I can't make it. I don't know how I'll do it. Please, God, save me. Oh, God, I'll do anything.

---

*comes*

---

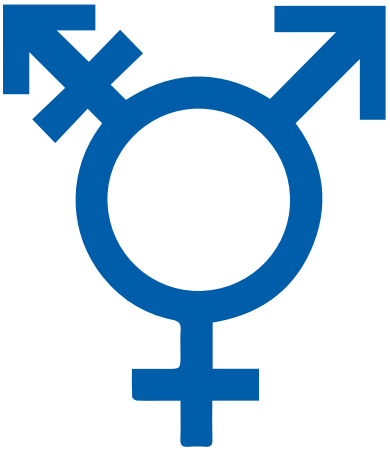
I forgot what my wife looks like.

---

*with a bullet hole.*

---

Do you understand, Roy?



**Discussion**

The research I conducted for this story was mainly from reading Leger and MacLeod's "The Collection," and watching Baus, Hunt, and Williams' documentary "Cruel and Unusual". My story, due to its heavy emotional content, had to be authentic, and thus I did my best to be very thorough and careful in my research. I couldn't just make things up because that would be both disrespectful to trans persons and not give a sound idea of the oppression that trans persons endure. So, I borrowed different ideas and emotions from the stories I read and the documentary I watched. Since the piece is not a biography, many of the characters' experiences are derived from my own creativity as opposed to being directly based on someone. That said, it is important to know that my creativity was well informed.

There is some clarification to be had about what exactly is fictional in the story. All of the characters are fictional (Perhaps not God, depending on what you believe) as well as Bill 356. However, everything that happens to Brittany is based on real experiences of trans women, both in and out of prison. While the exact wording of Bill 356 is fictional, it is based on very real laws that exist. Currently, there are 29 states in the United States in which one can be fired for not being heterosexual, and 32 where one can be fired for being trans. I was inspired by the recent controversy about Indiana's "religious freedom" laws, which is why I had the story take place in Indiana. Roy Martin is based on every privileged politician who has ever authored and signed laws like Bill 356 because they did not understand, nor care to understand, that they were effectively signing a death sentence for thousands of people. In my opinion, there are too many Roy Martins to count.

The purpose of my piece was not to talk about the nuances and intricacies of society's problems in the traditional intro-thesis-conclusion fashion, but rather to tell a story that hopefully would inspire you to continue down this line of research on your own. There are many academic themes that connect with my story, and that deserve further exploration, including, but certainly not limited to, trans representation in media, the power of cisgender, white, male, and class privilege, and the barriers of racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, and transphobia that uphold such power differentials.

For me, I know the journey is not over. I have a lot of growing, reading, and thinking to do. But the results are more than worth it. As I said in the beginning of my piece, what we think affects other people, either in beautiful or in utterly devastating ways. In order for society to grow and change, so must we.

**centered & italicized text are lyrics from the song "Indian Sunset" written by Bernie Taupin.*

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*Deliberations* is dedicated to publishing the writing of first-year students in Duke University's Writing 101 courses in order to make it available to a broader audience. We invite writers enrolled in Writing 101 during the 2015-16 academic year to submit written work to be considered for publication in the 2016 issue. We seek exemplary writing of any length, and we encourage submissions from the natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities. For instructions on how to submit writing for consideration, please visit our website at http://twp.duke.edu/deliberations/submission-information

## Colophon

The text of *Deliberations* is composed in Minion Pro with the display set in Myriad Pro and Helvetica. Riverside Printing printed 1000 copies. We would like to thank Denise Sharpe at Riverside Printing, who is primarily responsible for the layout and graphic character of *Deliberations*.

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Editorial correspondence should be addressed to:

*Deliberations*
Thompson Writing Program
Box 90025
Duke University
Durham, NC 27708-0025
writingprogram@duke.edu

**Top row left to right:**
Jesse Rencurrell Pollack, Natalie Shammas, Angela Chen, Sam Furlong, Sara Snyder, Eliane Shinder, Sheryl Welte Emch

**Bottom row left to right:**
Ryan Kushtan, Rachel Yang, Karen Young, Helen Yu

**Not pictured:** Melissa Pascoe.

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**Thompson Writing Program**
**Box 90025 • Duke University • Durham, NC 27708-0025**
**http://twp.duke.edu/**