

# **CITY TECH WRITER**

**Volume 13 2018**

**Outstanding Student Writing  
From All Disciplines**

**Megan Behrent & Suzanne Miller  
Editors**

Cover by: Yaroslava Govorova

Art Director: Lloyd Carr

About the Cover:

*I chose the owl because it is a symbol of wisdom, intelligence, and prosperity. All of which are key features to our education and learning. The vivid colors represent bright thoughts and ideas that the writers have used to compose the work in this journal.*

— Yaroslava Govorova

New York City College of Technology  
City University of New York

# Preface

Welcome to *City Tech Writer*, Volume 13! As always, our writers cover a lot of ground... We'll discover a new way to fight climate change, travel to the Culinary Olympics, and contemplate the end of a country. There are pieces about live-action roleplay, visualization in bioinformatics, and the endless quest to discover the largest prime number; one writer shares a passion for manners and another connects her personal struggles to a life of altruism.

Also, we are pleased to have this enchanting owl on the front cover. This owl—so unique and vibrant—inspires us to explore extraordinary ideas and consider new perspectives, all while reminding us to watch over our right to free expression. In short, this spirited creature is the perfect representative for *City Tech Writer*!

We'd like to thank the faculty throughout the College who submitted outstanding writing from their courses; Communication Design Department Chair Mary Ann Biehl for her support; Professor Peter Fikaris, whose communication design students produced many creative cover designs; and Yaroslava Govorova, who designed the brilliant cover for this volume. We'd also like to thank Julia Jordan and William Luperena along with the Lu Xue and Julie Bradford, who designed posters for *City Tech Writer*'s "Call for Submissions."

A big thank you goes to Professor Lloyd Carr, the journal's Art Director since its inception, who coordinated the graphics and prepared the cover for production; the Reprographics Center's Lubosh Stepanek, who did a wonderful job of printing the cover, and Myrlene Dieudonne, Assistant Director of Campus Services for her coordination of the printing. A special thanks goes to printers George Pompilio and Peter Pompilio, who produced the volume with skill and care and to Professor Steve Caputo, who helped with various aspects of the journal's production. We are grateful to President Russell Hotzler, Provost Bonne August, Associate Provost Pamela Brown, Dean Vazquez-Poritz, and Dr. Stephen Soiffer for their invaluable support and encouragement. A special thanks goes to the President's Executive Assistant Marilyn Morrison and Shani Tait-Santana, Assistant to the President. In addition, we'd like to thank the Assistant to the Provost, Imelda Perez, and Administrative Coordinator Chioma Okoye for their help and guidance. Thanks goes to English Department Chair Nina Bannett for her support and assistance. Arianna Bollers and Marlon Palmer in the Faculty Commons have been extremely helpful with various tasks, including the distribution of the volume. We are grateful to English Department Office Assistants Lily Lam and Selima-Nijah McMillan for being so generous with their time. As always, we wish to thank Professor Jane Mushabac. By starting this journal in 2006, she demonstrated the value of acknowledging outstanding student writing.

Megan Behrent and Suzanne Miller  
Editors



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# The Report on Words

Yasmine Soofi

Then, I grab my blue inky pen  
My motley thoughts  
My bottomless ideas  
My bilateral words

Evaporate!

"Come on, friends"  
I beg them and cry  
"Let's plant a blue baby  
Lettuce." No answer!  
"We'll grow sweet corn  
And nourish sorghum  
And produce our food."

Still, no answer

My heart becomes a squirrel  
In a very small cage  
Each cell in my brain  
Whispers, "I'm sorry."  
Then they come back

It was the year we held hands  
Hand by hand and walked  
To a green field to farm  
Then I bent down to plant  
But they tied my hands

# The Village in My Memory

Kaniz Fatema

The thing I am proud of most is my native village. The thing I remember most is my native village. The thing that appears to my mind most deeply and most passionately is the memory of my native village. My sweet childhood memories. Childhood is perhaps the sweetest period of a person's life. I have just left my childhood behind, and perhaps I am waiting for the second childhood. I have some memories that I treasure and will go on doing so. All the memories are about my beautiful village.

I was born in a small village in Bangladesh. My father was a small businessman and my mother, a housewife. Ours was a small house where I lived happily in the midst of my parents, brother and sister. Our house was made of corrugated iron sheets and the floor was constructed with brick. Having this type of house was very prestigious and common at that time in our village. Variations in the design, size and height of the CI sheet-built houses were related to the status and wealth of the family.

Bangladesh is a river-blessed country. My village was also wrapped by a small river. The only transportation was by boat at that time. My village is a beautiful girl wearing a green-colored dress. I never got bored because she changes her makeup and dress six times a year. It gives us six different tastes of nature, six ways to survive life. Unlike most of the countries, which have four seasons, Bangladesh is blessed with six: Summer, Monsoon, Autumn, Late Autumn, Winter, and Spring.

I remember when I made my first step onto New York City's land. It was in November 17, 2015 at JFK airport. I opened the door of the exit and the coldest wind touched my soul. New York is gorgeous in winter, and I always admire the snow-covered trees at the best New York parks. But I hate wearing all the heavy jackets for most of the year. Winter is the longest season in New York. Once one of my favorite seasons was winter. In my village, it was a very nice and enjoyable season. It comes with its fog, mist, and cold, and the northern wind blows terribly. The old people and children are found sitting around fire to make them warm. I have six uncles. Due to that fact, our joint family is big. We are 21 cousins in total. My grandfather used to make that fire to warm us up early in the foggy morning— so foggy that we couldn't see anything from even a little distance. Morning dew over the green grass made the grass look like pearls. I spent beautiful moments sitting beside the misty river of my village.

We have traditional winter foods called "pitha" (cakes), that are awesome. Now I miss those foods, that traditional taste. The winter season is the season of festivity. There was a competition of making different kind of dessert

like “firni” (made of rice, milk and sugar), cakes. The thing I most loved is date palm syrup in the winter morning. The juice with its earthy, sweet botanic taste on a winter’s morning is heavenly. The date juice sellers collect this juice from date palm trees. They make a hole in the tree and tie pitchers tightly around the top for the whole night. In early morning, they collect it and go door to door to sell. Once my two cousins, my sister, and I stole a pitcher. The trees are not so tall, so we could easily reach it. The foggy weather gave us favor.

My grandfather told us stories in the evenings of winter. My grandfather is no more. So those golden days of my life are impossible to get back. Here in New York I have everything but no chance of listening to those stories. We are getting busier with time. I know it is making us selfish. We are too busy to even pass time with ourselves. People are here living more glamorous and convenient lives. But I cannot see the simple and strong relationship bonds here. Yes, here people are getting more advanced, but there is a cost also. People are going far away from their own family, forgetting the value of family. Maybe this is a disadvantage of a technical and luxurious life.

March to May is the hottest time of the year in Bangladesh. The weather warms up a bit each day until May 1, when the heat starts intensifying more rapidly. The soil turns a dusty khaki and then almost white in my village. The sun is a round red globe, beating down relentlessly. Nature becomes so spicy... and the rough and warm wind tries to make us feel better—sometimes a refreshing breeze blows and it gives us relief from the excessive heat.

In my village, I played some traditional games. Nowadays kids play with electronic devices and gadgets. In my childhood, the story was different. We played “Romal chor” with as many players as possible. One of them is decided to be the “chor” (thief). The rest sit facing one another in a circle with their eyes closed or open for some time. Within this period the thief runs behind his friends and suddenly leaves his rumal (handkerchief) behind one of the sitting players. On some signal from the thief, everybody starts looking for the handkerchief behind them. The one who finds it runs after the thief to catch him. The thief runs around in circle and tries to save himself from being caught and takes the vacant seat of the person chasing him or her (with the rumal). If the thief is caught by the person with the rumal, he again becomes the thief; in this way the game continues. The more players, the merrier the game. The game helped me to develop qualities like discipline, sportsmanship and loyalty among the team members.

We also played “Kanamachi.” We stood in a circle. One of us became the kanamachi: a piece of cloth is tied over his or her eyes. We then gradually increased the circle, and the kanamachi (who is blindfolded) runs after the others trying to touch one of us, as if buzzing around haphazardly like a fly. We shouted out the rhyme ‘kana machi bho bho, jake pabi take chho’ (Buzzing fly, catch whoever you can!) The person who is touched has to be identified by name. If correctly identified, he or she becomes the new kanamachi, and it goes on.

At night, our family members normally spent time gossiping in the open field. My mother had a small vegetable garden, so we could eat fresh vegetables.

It has been long time since I have had that fresh vegetable taste. I am not saying New Yorkers don't get fresh vegetables. But picking up vegetables and fruits from one's own garden and eating them is a different satisfaction. The moral is that village people can get fresh everything, and they are stronger than urban or city people. "People living in rural areas are more optimistic about the future and happier about their quality of life than people in cities and towns, a new survey has found" (Bridge).

Bangladesh has both the world's largest delta system and the greatest flow of river water to sea. So, the most important season of all is Barsha (rainy), a time of lashing and tearing winds. In this season, 70 percent of my village land goes underwater from rivers and rain. The rains are at first a welcome relief from the baking, dusty, hot season. But, as the rains continue, the land turns into a brown and watery mass, ever-changing in shape and texture. Then my village looks like a blooming flower on a pond. During that season, we usually use boats to go anywhere and one of my cousins taught me how to drive a boat. It was really funny.

If someone asks me which is best—village life or town life? Definitely my answer would be village life. The life with nature. I love my village. I want to go back to my village again.

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# Esperanza: Finding the Light Through the Darkness

Diogelina Rosado

Just like many others in America, I come from another country. When I came here I struggled with issues such as discrimination and learning a new language; however, I suffered more in the Dominican Republic. When I was five and my sister was four, my mother left us to come to the United States for work. Soon after that, my father got arrested in the D.R. and was sentenced to nine years in prison. My younger sister and I were then passed from relative to relative. We were beaten on a daily basis. My mom made sure to send money weekly for our care and education, but our relatives took the money and let us go hungry for days at a time. Being alone made me wonder, “Why did our parents leave us? Were we not enough?” I cried myself to sleep with bruises all over my body, in complete pain.

Over time, I realized that I couldn’t live this way, so I decided to run away with my sister. Once we were on the streets, life got harder. We went hungry more often; we couldn’t find a safe place to sleep, and we would have to walk the streets with only the clothes on our backs guarding us from the elements. Throughout this ordeal, the only thing that made me continue to fight was having my sister by my side; I knew I had to be strong for her.

My sister and I had been living on the streets for almost two months when our lives were drastically changed again. At dusk one evening, we were begging for food when my sister heard someone call her name. Before I could even look up, she began to run. When I did look up, I saw the most beautiful face—it was the face of my mother. She had been searching for us for days. Once we were in her arms all I heard was “mi niñas,” “my girls.” It was then that she told us she was bringing us with her back to America.

The events of my early childhood have inspired me. After coming to America in 2009, I have been able to see with clarity the side of immigration that so many are blind to. Things that seem simple like food, shelter, education, and the welfare of others are things that I value above all.

In 2012, I went back to the Dominican Republic for the first time since coming to America. It was then that the concepts that I value so much were tested. One afternoon, I saw a woman without legs crawling on the sidewalk outside of a supermarket begging for food and money. As I watched, people walked past her as though she were not there, or looked at her as if she were invisible. I felt that I had to help her because I understood what she was going through. While speaking to her, I found out her name was Maria. Along with two

of my aunts who had come with me from America to the Dominican Republic, I helped Maria find shelter, food, and a new wheelchair so that she would be able to get around.

My experience with Maria made me want to do something to help others like her and myself. When my aunts and I returned home to America, I told them I wanted to do something more. That is when *Esperanza*, a small non-profit organization in the D.R., began. *Esperanza* is dedicated to helping the homeless and those with disabilities who are living in the Dominican Republic. Through community events such as dinners, parties, car washes, bake sales, and the use of donation boxes, we provide support to facilities and homes that help the homeless and/or disabled. Just last year I received a call from Maria telling me that she had received prosthetic legs. “Thank you for making my dreams come true,” she said while crying.

My traumatic experiences have put me on a path to changing the lives of others. I have become more open-minded, empathetic, and courageous. I now live by the notion that one person can change the lives of others. Winston Churchill once said, “We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give.” College is my starting point for creating positive changes not just in my native country but across the world. I want to expand *Esperanza* into an organization that builds hospitals, houses, schools and other public infrastructures in regions like the South Sudan. My lifelong journey of helping others is not over, and I look forward to what the future holds.

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# Learning Good Oral Health Habits: A Lifelong Journey

Bushra Meraj

Because I grew up in India, a third world country where dental health is not given even remotely the same importance as medical health, I learned toothbrushing at a later age than many of my classmates. I must have been around the age of four and well grown into my primary dentition when my parents finally became serious enough about teaching me how to brush. Before this time, although my parents had tried to teach me brushing, they were never firm enough about it for me to follow through. In fact, when I would cry from the pain the hard bristled toothbrush was causing on my sensitive gums, my father would try to relieve my anxiety by saying, “It’s okay honey, tigers don’t need to brush.” What he meant was that if I was going to be fierce and confident like a tiger, I need not bother with dainty things like brushing. Due to the outdated and ignorant views of my family, my bad oral habits continued.

It was not until I started attending pre-school and my teacher at the time, Ms. Bukul, noticed I still had food residue sticking to my teeth from the night before that she sent home a strict warning to my parents that if I did not start brushing soon, I would be dismissed from school. Because Ms. Bukul was concerned about both my own oral health and the negative image I was sending my classmates about appearance and self-care, she decided to take this drastic measure. Well, it certainly worked. Like most Indian parents, my mom and dad were much sterner about my education than my need for oral hygiene; thus, they finally decided to step in and teach me the proper way to brush.

When I first started brushing, my mom went nice and slow and gave me only the front teeth to brush myself while brushing the side teeth for me afterwards. Even then, I remember I would give my mom a hard time and refuse to brush with paste because its taste made me gag. I was particularly adamant about my mom not touching my molars and premolars because I hated the feeling of having my cheek stretched by a rigid toothbrush. My mom, being a smart parent, decided to come up with a compromise, or rather, an offer that I couldn’t refuse. She would allow me to stay up past my bedtime and watch my favorite horror series with her if I had made sure to brush twice that day. Because that show was very special to me, I would hold my breath and count until 30 to brush my teeth in both the morning and the evening, just so that I could finally receive my treat at the end of it.

As I grew older, I learned that brushing is actually a privilege that people who can’t afford dental hygiene products or clean water are deprived of. I started to appreciate the “just clean” feeling that I felt that the minty toothpaste left after swiping and cleaning all the gunk and residue out from my oral cavity. Because

Indian dishes are often drenched in odorous ingredients such as onion and garlic, I began to relish brushing as a way of relieving some of that bad breath before I went to see my friends and family. I also learned to incorporate all portions of my mouth when brushing, including outer, inner and biting surfaces of my teeth, as well as my tongue, something my mom had never taught me.

Although my parents and teachers did definitely introduce me to brushing to maintain oral health, I'm appalled that they never taught me the importance of flossing and mouthwash. To their credit actually, I believe they were ignorant of even the existence of such dental hygiene products themselves, so there was no way they could have taught me about them. In fact, for many Indians, mouthwash is still a discovery because it is not readily available or publicly advertised. Therefore, for me, discovering mouthwash through a T.V. commercial for Listerine was the "aha, I finally get it" moment that turned my life around. Before this time, I had no idea that there was such a quick fix to halitosis that could be bought over the counter. At first, I bought the mouthwash with my own allowance as a teenager because my mom wasn't too happy about spending six dollars on a blue liquid that made her mouth sting. However, as I began using it more and more, and saw my foul breath going away, my family all decided to give it a try and began appreciating and incorporating it into their daily healthcare routine.

Flossing was another self-discovery for me, but a particularly enjoyable one. I remember as a tween, I used to "sweep the gunk" out of my teeth using the fallen hair strands from my mom's hair. It just felt like such a pleasurable and relieving experience to be able clean the meat fibers that had become stuck between my teeth and were bothering me. At the time, I didn't realize that what I was doing was flossing and neither did my mom. However, she decided to get me some clean thread to clean in-between teeth simply because it seemed more sanitary than using her fallen hair. It was not until much later, when I came to America, that I discovered that there was actually such a thing as dental floss, designed specifically to clean those hard to reach interproximal areas, and that it came in many varieties, including flavored ones. I've learned that I still enjoy flossing as much as I did as a child because of the deep cleaning satisfaction it provides me.

Because my parents were always very hit or miss regarding my oral health education due to their own limited knowledge on the subject, I became more proactive about not letting the same happen to my brother. Since I'm fourteen years older than him, I decided to teach him everything I knew about dental hygiene. When my brother would refuse to brush and floss, and my mom gave into his temper tantrums, I decided to take on the role of the strict parent who would reinforce health standards in the house. I would forcefully sit him down, open his mouth and brush his teeth for him when he would refuse to brush them himself for any period longer than four days. Of course, that didn't work as planned since no one can overpower a biting two year old, so I then took to the reward method to teach him how to brush. Much like my parents who bribed me with my favorite show, I decided to bribe him with pizza. He would get an entire

pizza party with all the fixings every Friday if he had been good the previous week, brushing twice and flossing daily. I realized that the reward method worked like a charm. Abdul soon began brushing and flossing even without the added incentive of receiving pizza at the end of the week.

I imagine that the first step towards teaching kids how to brush and maintain oral hygiene is always the hardest. Once they overcome this initial anxiety and awkwardness, most kids realize that they actually enjoy the acts of brushing, flossing and rinsing and they particularly enjoy the just clean feeling it provides them afterwards. Therefore, it is imperative for parents and caregivers to not be lenient in this initial stage of health education and not give into kids' unruly demands to stay brush-free. Whether they choose the reward method, as I did with my brother, or the punishment method, as my pre-k teacher did with my parents and me, the main goal remains to teach a child oral health standards early. Looking back, I believe my pre-k teacher, Ms. Bukul, may have been the most influential person in my life because if it weren't for her, I would have lost more than 50% of my teeth and gums to cavities and periodontitis a long time ago. I only hope that I can be as influential and teach young children the importance of brushing, flossing, and rinsing as a dental hygienist in the near future.

# No More Cinderella Toothbrushes

Nazrin Akbarova

*“Sometimes your joy is the source of your smile, but sometimes your smile can be the source of your joy.”*

— Thich Nhat Hanh

When you get your photo taken, you hear everyone around shouting, "Say cheese! Smile!" Therefore, you do—you open your mouth and show your teeth. When you look at the picture, you see a happy person looking back at you. The healthier those teeth are, the cheerier you look. Why is that? It's because your teeth are important in many ways. If you take care of them, they will help take care of you. Strong, healthy teeth help you chew the right food to help you grow. They help you speak clearly and yes, they help you look your best.

The world around us is not black and white anymore. We are surrounded with an incredibly diverse palette of colors everywhere in our daily life. Not only do sweets and confectionery products have appealing banderoles but toothpaste and toothbrushes also have miscellaneous colorful complexions. Everyone realizes that all of these techniques aim to attract kids' attention. Giving a brush the style of a toy, besides being a marketing tool, carries a tiny element of good intention: to develop a useful habit of brushing teeth. However, they neglect an important fact: kids should not think of oral hygiene as a game otherwise it will diminish the important role of the process itself. For instance, a kid brushing his or her teeth with a Rapunzel themed brush can easily be bored of both—the princess and the brush. A child's negative attitude towards the toy will also affect her perception of the brushing regimen.

Throughout history, the people of my country have always been very rigorous and educated in terms of hygiene. According to a very prominent proverb in my native folklore, "Successful recognition can only be achieved through a confident smile." This saying has been embedded in my mind since early childhood. I was taught to brush my teeth when I was six. Unfortunately, this is very late by dental hygiene standards. My parents always wanted me to understand the responsibility of brushing teeth and the importance of oral hygiene. Instead of playing a "tooth fairy game," I was given a bunch of interesting books about the mouth being the beginning of the digestive chain; thus, only cleanliness would filter a zillion unnecessary bacteria while eliminating unwanted odors. Apparently, that worked. Since the age of six, I have almost never skipped brushing my teeth twice a day.

I was the mother of a two-year-old girl when I moved to the United States. Even though I was brought up differently, many local traditions made me rethink my approach to brushing teeth. Even though I still think that this process

should not be considered a game, I do not agree with starting brushing late. Sometimes you hear an uneducated person say a phrase like “Why brush baby teeth if they are going to lose them anyway?” This is a ridiculous way of thinking. After getting a lot of information about American dental hygiene, I started to brush my daughter’s primary teeth and take care of them, as much I would do it with her permanent ones. Gradually, I increased the amount of time spent brushing, especially after sweet snacks, since I learned that very often snacking with sweets might result in caries. Later on, I included flossing and mouth rinsing as additional procedures. With the passing time, it became a required regular practice for her and she got accustomed to it as an essential habit. This radically helped the healthier process of the development of baby teeth by preventing cariogenic cavities and mouth odors. I educated her about various brushing techniques such as the circular brushing method (Fones Method). Her insight into dental hygiene is now very reliable and she refers to it as a vital duty to be performed constantly.

In conclusion, I want to admit that my parents’ tactics were based on the fear that usually kids would push away significant things which were forcibly imposed on them or before they would understand its importance. This type of liberalism is a great tool in many cases but not in ones concerning hygiene. Thus, teeth are one of the key parts of our bodies that should be cared about from the very beginning and any late intervention could lead to irreversible consequences. Some people may call it an obsessive tendency but I call it Dental Hygiene.

# Should The GPI Replace The GDP as a Measure Of Economic Health?

Matthew Wong

Global climate change is rapidly becoming one of the most important global issues of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. There isn't a single person on Earth who can escape this quandary unscathed. Besides getting the attention of the media with flashy headlines, what can we actually do to shift towards truly caring about global climate change? Scholars have been discussing another method of calculating the post-World War II system (known as the Gross Domestic Product or GDP) for more than a decade; this alternative known as the Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI) incorporates value for natural resources, the well-being of individuals, and accounts for harm done to the environment (such as pollution), as well as the overall wealth of the nation. I believe that in order to further our discussion and demonstrate genuine care for finding solutions for the serious challenge ahead of us, we must account for our environment and natural resources in the calculation of the health of our economy.

We have grown up with a market economy that places immense value on supply and demand, but we have totally neglected the fact that we are severely destroying our own habitat and depleting our natural resources. There is only one earth to live on, and if we continue this imprudent behavior our future will be quite grim as many scientists have pointed out. By incorporating the components of GPI into the GDP we can change the psychology of the government and individuals when thinking about protecting our surroundings. This new perspective emphasizes the idea that neglecting the environment and depleting natural resources directly affects everyone in monetary terms—thus creating a greater incentive to prevent further harm to our planet.

In my research, I have come across two opposing perspectives on implementing the Genuine Progress Indicator. The first comes from Tim Worstall, a senior fellow at the Adam Smith Institute and a well-respected writer for esteemed papers like the *New York Times* and the *Guardian*. Worstall argues that although he is aware of the many faults of GDP, he believes that it is still the most accurate way to calculate and put our economy into numbers so that we can quickly react and reform when necessary. He also argues that using a system like GDP can be very useful as long as we truly understand what it calculates. He clearly expresses both what the GDP can be used to measure as well as the many flaws that the system fails to measure:

It's not a measure of all economic activity, nor is it a measure of the good life. And it doesn't measure the distribution of income, another complaint. But it does do what it says on the tin: it's a good measure of the value added in the economy. Given that more value added is generally a good

thing, as that means that there's more value to split among everyone, as long as we remain in touch with its limitations it's a perfectly good measure. It's not a God nor a goal to be pursued beyond all else, but it's still a useful measure. (Worstell, 2014)

Worstell also makes the point that countries with higher GDP per capita tend to be nicer places to live and people have better lives in comparison to places with low GDP per capita. He then goes on to talk about the faults of using GPI as a measure. He notes that GPI insists that the loss of wetland decreases the well-being of people. He makes the argument that the loss of farmland isn't necessarily going to result in the fall of wealth or income for the nation. He uses the example of building houses on top of the farmland to increase the value rather than deduction of value for the economy. His main argument is that GPI codifies certain ideas and turns them into the measurement by which everything will be judged (Worstell, 2014). But this view isn't agreed upon by everyone and the premises are highly contentious amongst scholars.

Mark Anielski, for example, thinks very differently about the use of GPI. Anielski is a professor at the University of Alberta, School of Business and a founding faculty member of the Bainbridge Graduate Institute where he taught ecological economics. His belief is that GDP is too money-based and fails to measure what really matters in our lives. He points out that our current economy is solely focused on spending, consuming, and producing which increases the GDP but has very severe consequences for the individual, the community and the well-being of our environment. Anielski makes a succinct distinction between what the word "economy" actually means relative to the perceived meaning we have of it in a capitalistic society:

In the art of economics it is critical to understand the origins of the language we use. The word "economy" comes from the Greek *oikonomia* meaning "the management of the household" (*oikos*). Economics should thus be concerned with the quality of the lives of families and households. Aristotle made a clear distinction between *oikonomia* and *chrematistics* – the science of the wealth of nations, as expressed in terms of money. The word "wealth" comes from the Old-English "weal," meaning "the condition of well-being." In principle, *economists* should be concerned with measuring the conditions of the well-being of the households of a community or nation as well as the conditions of the natural environment that contribute to human well-being. (Anielski, 2001)

He believes that modern day economics is neglecting the conditions of well-being in pursuit of money and that GPI accounts for "sustainable development" that measures both the "physical conditions of living and produced capital." He also explains the Alberta GPI Account Blueprint, which has five different criteria to measure well-being. These include produced capital, financial capital, human capital, social capital and natural capital. He adds another layer to measure

quality of life values, which include social well-being, economic well-being, spiritual well-being and environmental well-being. Anielski believes that it is possible to devise accounts for all of these categories of measurements in order to then create a balance sheet to analyze all the data.

I believe my research unravels a much more complicated picture on the implementation of GPI. There is much discourse by intellectuals arguing the pros and cons of GPI and GDP. Although there is much disagreement, the discussion is needed. My paper attempts to be an addition to the growing conversation about changing the way we behave economically in order to save our planet from global warming and the degradation of our environment. We need to shift away from the old model of calculating growth and look towards the modern day economy—an economy which no longer puts primary value on producing the maximum amount of goods. By only focusing on producing the maximum amount of goods, we overlook the importance of other measures of wealth.

Although many economists argue that the measurement of GPI (Genuine Progress Indicator) is highly subjective in its premises (which are certainly legitimate points of concern and I agree perhaps too aggressive in its undertaking when considering it as a commencing initiative), there are much more grounded data and statistics produced yearly by the government that can serve as a starting point today. These statistics are already in use by the government but they serve only as a reference. Traditional GDP measures have not extended the application to numerically incorporate GDP to represent the well-being of our economy. Some relevant data produced by government sources include data on income distribution, higher education, crime rates, resource depletion, pollution, long-term environmental damage, dependence on foreign assets and public infrastructure. These categories are unequivocally indispensable to modern day life and few would argue that these categories are immaterial to the wealth of our society. By analyzing the data from these sources in depth and using the application of these statistics to find correlations between GDP and these measures of social and economic well-being, we will potentially have additional tools to create better and more prudent measures of economic well-being.

This paper attempts to continue the discourse on whether we should implement GPI on a national level; ultimately, I hope it leads to us beginning to take serious measures to experiment with practical and accurate data that the federal government already has. Only by making decisions based on statistical data instead of those based solely on monetary considerations and by reckoning with social and human activity that affect the well-being of our economy directly can we begin to save our planet from environmental degradation and even improve our economy.



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# An Unexpected Journey to the Culinary Olympics

Ayako Hiratsuka

Tuesday, October 25, 2016. It is 6:00 a.m. in Erfurt Germany. The sky is cloudy with a damp chill as we carry in the multiple boxes to the table. As I gaze everywhere, there is a sea of chefs hard at work on their culinary displays. On their white jackets are flags from around the world. I'm working with my professor to finish setting up the table and those last minute touches. The spotlights are casting a beautiful color on the ten plates. The menu card is up front, and I check for smudges or fingerprints. A quick wipe and all is set! Across the table are several Japanese chefs working at a feverish pace. At 6:20 a.m., a woman in a long, white coat with clipboard stops by the area. She checks the entry form to ensure we're in the right area and asks if there is anything we need. At 6:40 a.m., with so little time left, a man in a lab coat stops by to remind us we have to leave at 7:00 a.m. We continue to arrange the plates and make final adjustments. The clock doesn't seem to stop until 6:55 a.m. Suddenly time seems to stop as my professor says we are done. "Let's quickly get the final pictures and head out," he says. A couple of pictures are taken and then I turn around again. This is what passion and dedication look like. You could feel and see it in all the tired eyes just below the toques. "It's 7:00 a.m., you have to leave now," says another judge as he motions us towards the exit. We head towards the exit, and I continue to observe all the creative works. This is the second entry that I have assisted with. This one is even better than the first—I am sure we have done something great!

You might be wondering, how did I get to the Culinary Olympics? A year in the making, the seeds for this study abroad experience began in Fall 2015. I volunteered to assist with the City Tech Garde Manger Team as they presented at the 147<sup>th</sup> Annual Salon of Culinary Arts. There was a lot of intense work that went into their beautiful culinary exhibition. Much of this appeared as a continuation of what I was learning in my culinary and pastry classes. When Fall 2016 registration opened in April, I signed up for Garde Manger, an advanced culinary class. A little later in the spring semester of 2016, I learned about this unique opportunity to participate in the Culinary Olympics with Professor Walljasper. Filled with curiosity, I asked for more information. I learned the competition is endorsed by the World Association of Chefs Societies (WACS), and occurs every four years. There would be regular practices, and it was hosted in Erfurt, Germany. I knew being an assistant would require dedication, hard work and that I expand my horizons. With excitement and hesitancy, I completed and submitted my application. "Approved"! I was so excited to hear that I was approved and could start the next part of this journey.

As part of the program, I began building a foundation for the trip with guided research. This would be my first excursion to Germany, Europe and an international culinary competition. I wanted to learn about who hosted this event, why it was significant and what it might be like to visit and work there. One of my first resources was *Kochkunst in Bildern: Illustrated Culinary Art 5*, a book that presents the entries from the 2004 Culinary Olympics. The Verband der Koche Deutschlands (German Chef Association) have held this event since 1900. The Culinary Olympics is considered the highest competition in the world. WACS is a global chef association with 100 member countries representing 10 million professional chefs worldwide. Additionally, I utilized library and online sources to understand more about German culture and the host city, Erfurt. When I saw the pictures of the national teams' cuisine in a book, it was hard to imagine how the chefs made these beautiful plates.

Preparation and practice are fundamental to success. In August, I began weekly eight-hour practices with Professor Walljasper. I knew how important the project was for the professor and I was nervous and uncertain about my culinary strengths. These regular sessions helped me to connect past class experiences and the current Garde Manger class to our preparations. Each session was building on what we prepared in the previous lab. There were so many advanced techniques we practiced: dehydrating vegetables, sous vide, curing, plating and glazing with aspic, which is a liquid made with gelatin. For example, I made savory tuiles multiple times to create the spoon shape. I tested all-purpose flour with granulated sugar, cake flour with granulated sugar, all-purpose flour with powdered sugar and more. Each batter's texture was different. These processes reminded me of chemistry: repetition of testing, observing, thinking, creating a hypothesis and improving. It was similar to what I had done in my life already. This was a great boost for my confidence, which was further enhanced as I worked with my professor on numerous components for the twenty different plates.

Traveling to Germany for a culinary competition is a unique experience and requires adaptability. The procedure for traveling as part of a school trip is different from a personal one. This was the first time I registered with a government agency as a traveler, and it was great to receive alerts or updates about local occurrences. My suitcase had my knife set and additional kitchen utensils. The organization was crucial and I helped with the final packing of perishable and fragile items. In my research, it appeared like English would be commonly spoken in Erfurt. I worked on learning basic German phrases, such as *guten morgen*, *wo ist*, and *dankeschön*. Participating in the culinary competition meant we needed to shop and purchase a variety of items. I was able to utilize technology and ingenuity to help find needed groceries and kitchen equipment. The Germans were so helpful and hospitable; I think this was partly due to my chef jacket and IKA pins. They recognized I was part of the Culinary Olympics.

The culinary competition requires a very high level of dedication and deep commitment. From the practices, I knew there would be a substantial amount of items to complete. All of the effort prior to my arrival in Germany had

prepared me for the intense week. I was ready to step into the unknown with a strong sense of self-confidence. We prepared based on the practices and the plan. We competed twice in the Individual Culinary Arts category, and each entry was ten different plates. On the first day at 7:00 a.m., the judges said it was time to leave the competition floor. I took one last look at the table that I helped to create and finish. Now, it was time for the international jury of judges to score the entries. The first entry earned a diploma and after that day we understood better the high level displayed.

We repeated the process again two days later, adapting based on feedback we received for the first entry. The second entry was improved over the initial one; you could tell it was a higher level. Wow, so much effort went into this presentation and can you imagine the plates looked like ones in *Kochkunst in Bildern: Illustrated Culinary Art 5*? It is hard to put into words the feeling of assisting in this final preparation and exhibiting in the Culinary Olympics. That evening, we were at the award ceremony and they announced Professor Walljasper was awarded a bronze medal. I am so proud to be his assistant.

A trip of a lifetime creates a bigger world. On the second night, I met the President of the Japan Chef Association and officers. As they asked me about how I came to be here, they were truly amazed to learn I traveled from New York to help my professor compete. Among the group was a journalist who edits a Japanese magazine, *Weekly HotelRes*. He was so impressed that I was asked to be an interviewee for his article the next time I visit Japan. I couldn't believe this opportunity. Even though I am a student, it amazed me that a journalist was interested in my career. The return to regular routine in New York and classes was great, but something was different. Moreover, I could see the changed atmosphere and attitude of my friends, fellow students and faculty after I came back. They congratulated us on the bronze medal and told me that they were proud of us. When I saw their smiles and the sparkle in their eyes, I felt like, "Yes, I made it!!!"

After I came back, I applied what I learned in the Olympics at the first edible buffet competition held here at City Tech. I checked many pictures which I took at the Olympics to create my team plate. I tested most of the menu at least once in my house by myself to see how they looked and the overall taste balance. The size of each menu is smaller than other teams because the smaller size was a trend in the Olympics. Furthermore, I checked the timeline very carefully because finishing on time is extremely important for a public competition. As a result of my journey, you could see the global influence on my team's work. The judges reviewed the four entries and gave valuable feedback. When the scores were tallied, my team won a gold medal and the best of the show as determined by the five professional chefs who came as guest judges.

As you have read and learned about my journey, I hope you now understand what an unbelievable experience this was for me. There were moments of doubt during the process. One step at a time, I found my answers and so much more. My initial research helped to me to appreciate culinary arts on a global level. Uncertainty faded with the extensive practice, personal growth and

mentorship from this experience. This was a unique opportunity to witness firsthand the professional creativity, organization, and commitment of passionate culinarians. In the future, I hope that more students will pursue opportunities to participate in such an unforgettable event. My world is so much richer for having participated in this chance of a lifetime.

# Restaurant and Dessert Review: Tocqueville Restaurant

Meisa Richards

Tocqueville

1 East 15<sup>th</sup> Street

New York, NY 10003

Pastry Chef: Armando Mendez

Name of Dessert: Goat Cheese Dulce de Leche Napoleon with Caramel Sea Salt and Mimosa Sorbet

Price: \$15.00

What's the best way to describe how I felt walking down 15<sup>th</sup> Street towards Tocqueville restaurant on Wednesday March 29,<sup>th</sup> 2017. Was it a fusion of scared and nervous, "*scarvous?*" Could it have been anxious and excited, "*anxited?*" Oh, how I wish that I could give you the many made up fusion words that come to my mind, but in reality I was just tired and wanted the day to be over with, being that I had been up since 5 a.m. and it was now 6:30 p.m. and I hadn't sat down. I was exhausted. Because I was fiddling with my purse as I walked into the restaurant, I actually ended up walking into a glass wall—did it hurt? Well, yes, of course it did—but it did illuminate to me that the glass that surrounds the vestibule of the restaurant is so clean, transparent and pristine, one thinks that they're in the lobby of the restaurant before they actually are.

The L-shaped lobby is small. At the far right is a high black-lacquered desk for the hostess; behind her desk is a computer where she checks guests in as they arrive. Across from the hostess desk was a small glass table with decorative vases. Two high-backed, grey velvet chairs were tucked under the table. This is where guests can be seated while they wait for their party to arrive. A modern chandelier dangled above the guest waiting area, casting an amber glow in the room. As I had emailed previously to explain that I was doing a school project and that I would like to take pictures of the restaurant, they seated me by the door, where I got a full 180 degree view of the dining room, staff interaction with guests and the food. Tocqueville's thoughtfulness in doing this impressed me. My meal arrived promptly and after each course the silverware was repointed.

For dessert I decided to try the goat cheese napoleon because I wanted to push myself out of my comfort zone. My server, Ignacio, stated that it was his favorite and that I should give it a try. I'm so used to the square napoleons that we make in class that it never occurred to me that they can be made in the shape of a circle. The napoleon was presented on a large white circular plate with the dessert consisting of three layers of a wafer and two layers of piped goat cheese.

The wafers were thin, brown and buttery in flavor. The thinness of the wafer was reminiscent of a communion wafer. On the top layer of the napoleon was a thin layer of dulce de leche with dime-sized piped dollops of goat cheese mascarpone interspersed between pear jam and small, candied orange discs and topped with edible leaves. Beside the napoleon was a champagne quenelle sitting atop graham cracker sand. Strategically placed around the plate were dollops of goat cheese with edible leaves tucked in and candied orange slices.

My knife cut through the napoleon, it cracked slightly, then shattered, leaving jagged pieces scattered all over my plate. The only thing that stopped the momentum of the pieces flying was the heavy viscosity of the goat cheese. The buttery wafer played well against the sweet, slightly tart, goat cheese. It was reminiscent of Greek yogurt in its taste and texture—the only difference is that for me, Greek yogurt has a chalky aftertaste and the goat cheese filling did not. The softness of the goat cheese and the crispy chip like texture of the wafer was delightful.

The Champagne quenelle has no discernible taste. Being that it was a sorbet, I had expected it to be sweet, but it was not. The Champagne sorbet tasted like a frozen Korbel Brut champagne that one could purchase from a neighborhood liquor store. The graham cracker sand that provided the base for the quenelle was an unnecessary addition to the dessert. Thinking deeply about this, I suppose that the reason this was added was because the quenelle needed something to sit on and it would slow down the melting process.

I did not like the dulce de leche that was placed a top of the napoleon because it had salt sprinkled on top of it. I do not like desserts that are both sweet and salty. Additionally, the dulce de leche had an intense burnt and nutty flavor to it that I found nauseating. The flavor of the dulce de leche compounded with the salt was overwhelming to me. Although I did not care for the dessert, it looked absolutely stunning.

# De ser Humano a Axolotl

## *From Human Being to Axolotl*

Leonardo Castillo

Tarde o temprano cada ser humano piensa en su realidad existencial. En este proceso nuestra mente y particularmente nuestra imaginación se convierte en el vehículo que nos llevará a nuestro destino final donde aceptaremos cada una de las verdades que nos identifican. La narrativa “Axolotl” de Julio Cortázar, nos ilustra con palabras la inevitable metamorfosis que resulta de nuestro proceso de introspección.

*Sooner or later, we become existentialists. In this process, our minds, and particularly our imaginations, become the vehicle that takes us to the place where we accept each and every truth that identifies us. The narrative “Axolotl” by Julio Cortazar illustrates with words the inevitable metamorphosis that we experience from this introspective process.*

El narrador se muestra familiar con algunos animales del zoológico, pero no encuentra en ellos nada especial que le sirva para identificarse en un plazo más trascendental. En el acuario descarta a los peces de conducta predecible e inmediatamente fija su interés en los Axolotls. El narrador expresa que llegó a ellos “al azar”, pero esto me resulta contradictorio, dado que pudo elegir y prefirió a los Axolotls en lugar de a los otros animales. Se establece una conexión directa y una fascinación por las características del animal y su conducta apacible y casi carente de vida.

*The narrator appears to be knowledgeable about some of the animals from the zoo, but he is not able to find anything special in any of those animals that could be helpful in his process of self-determination. At the aquarium, he dismissed most fish for being predictable and he fixes his eyes on the Axolotls. The narrator expresses that he got to them “by chance” but I find this a little contradictory since he consciously chose the Axolotls over the rest of the animals. A direct connection is established between the two as he is fascinated by this strange animal’s features and its peaceful, almost lifeless appearance and behavior.*

El narrador visita la biblioteca para investigar acerca de los Axolotls y así comprender aún más tan peculiar criatura en la que él mismo comenzará a transmutarse poco a poco. No sorprende identificar estas ideas un tanto metafísicas del narrador.

*The narrator visits the library to do some research on the Axolotls so that he can learn more about this peculiar creature into which he will end up transmutating, little by little. I am not surprised to identify these ideas so metaphysical in nature in the narrator.*



El proceso de conversión de hombre a Axolotl se desarrolla en un lapso de tiempo relativamente corto. El narrador no tarda en aislar una de esas criaturas tan peculiares. Las describe y las compara con elementos vivos y humanos, así como con elementos sin vida tales como las “estatuas chinas de cristal lechoso”.

*The transformation from human being to Axolotl happens in a relatively short timeframe. The narrator does not take long to isolate one of these peculiar creatures. He describes them and compares them with elements of human nature as well as with lifeless entities such as “Chinese statues of glossy crystals.”*

En su metamorfosis espiritual el narrador comienza a preguntarse ¿Qué podrá sentir esa criatura fascinante en ese espacio tan reducido? ¿Cómo sufrirá y qué pasará en su día a día miserable?

*In his spiritual metamorphosis, the narrator starts by asking himself: How does this fascinating creature feel being confined in such a reduced space? How much is this creature suffering, and what goes through the creature’s mind in its miserable daily life?*

Otro elemento importante de la narrativa del Axolotl es la necesidad del protagonista de expresar las similitudes más profundas en el contexto espiritual entre dos criaturas de apariencia muy diferente, el hombre y el Axolotl. Usando toda analogía posible para convencer al lector de que las semejanzas son más notables y la distancia entre ellos es menor de lo que pudiera parecer.

*Another key element of the narrative of the Axolotl is the need for the main character to express the most profound similarities in a spiritual context between two creatures that appear very different: a man and the Axolotl. He uses every possible analogy to convince the reader that the similarities are more obvious than we think and that the distance between them is shorter than it seems.*

La metamorfosis de hombre a Axolotl se completa de forma muy sutil y casi imperceptible. El narrador se convierte en aquel animal fascinante que en principio aparentaba ser una criatura insensible y casi sin vida. Sus palabras escritas en el texto expresan cómo el Axolotl se observa a sí mismo en la figura del hombre que solía venir al zoológico a contemplarlo. Cuando el narrador en la forma de Axolotl expresa que el observador ya no viene a visitarlo, deja al lector con más de una posibilidad de interpretación. Una, el observador ya no lo visita con frecuencia porque sabe lo que quería saber. La otra, el narrador simplemente ya no es el observador del Axolotl, sino el animalito mismo. La metamorfosis se ha completado.

*The metamorphosis from man to Axolotl becomes complete in a very discrete and almost imperceptible way. The narrator becomes the fascinating creature that seems to lack sensitivity at the beginning and is almost lifeless. His words in the narrative express how the Axolotl observes himself in the figure of the man who used to come to the zoo to observe his behavior. When the narrator talks from the Axolotl’s point of view and says that the observer no longer comes to visit him, he leaves us with more than one possible interpretation. Either the observer does not come to visit him any longer because he already knows what he need to know about the creature, or the narrator simply is not the observer*

*anymore because he has indeed already transmuted into that peculiar creature.  
The metamorphosis is complete.*

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# Academic Potential in Studying Live-Action Roleplay

Nikka Rosenstein

Live-action roleplay, or LARP, refers to the unique experience that straddles the gap between playing a role in a game and playing a role in a theatrical performance. Despite being a popular pastime for thousands of participants worldwide (“The rise of live-action,” 2013) and having existed in codified form since at least 1977 (Tresca, 2011), there exist very few academic perspectives or studies, and those that do exist rarely take advantage of what is truly unique to the hobby. This paper will examine several examples of the discourse that does exist, and then offer some opinions as to the many further topics that could be of value to the academic community based on my own extensive experience as a LARPer.

Though the term “live action roleplay” is sometimes used to refer to any situation in which one or more persons act out a fictional role in a theatrical manner, this paper will use the acronym LARP as it’s most often utilized within the roleplaying game community. Specifically, a LARP requires a pre-determined set of rules and fictional context, through which a group of players each takes on the role of a character, and they interact with each other as those characters. For a true LARP, this interaction must take place in person: this distinguishes “live action” from its better-known tabletop counterparts such as Dungeons & Dragons. This definition also distinguishes LARP from improvisational theater, which is arguably a live-action playing of roles, but demands that its participants supply rules and context as part of its process and thus creates a dramatically different experience.

The key to this difference is the creation of a shared and mutually affirmed fictional reality. In a formal context, such as a theatrical performance, the reality is set by the playwright, but so are the actions and reactions of the characters within that reality. The actors step into those roles in order to convey that reality to an audience, and every performance will follow the same sequence of events. Without a preset context, participants rely on each other to invent the world around them, and anyone who’s ever participated in short-form improv knows well how quickly participants must alter their own assumptions about their fictional reality and incorporate the assumptions of their fellow participants to maintain continuity and logic. In contrast, the world of a LARP is well established beforehand. Every player enters the game with an awareness of the world they are pretending to inhabit, and how the rules of that world inform their interactions with each other. This allows for each player to act as they feel their character would without scripting, but also keeps players focused on the story

and conflicts of their roles and reduces the burden of maintaining a consistent universe. It's due to this focus that LARP can be considered a form of shared storytelling (Schick, 1991). Because conflict is thus neither scripted nor trivial,LARPs are referred to as games, and utilize gaming nomenclature, due to the rulesets required to govern conflicts the players encounter or create.

### **Literature Review**

The most focused papers discussing LARP concern the community or the sociological aspects of its subculture. Since the foundation of roleplaying games is to assume a role other than one's own, it makes sense that this would be a fertile topic with many angles of interest. However, very few authors take advantage of these angles.

### **Manhood in Dagorhir**

A strong example of the potential of LARP in academic study comes from an observational study of one of the oldest formal LARP groups, Dagorhir. Ironically, Dagorhir and its members often reject the LARP label, since their participants are often more concerned with their mock battles than truly taking on and acting out a character role (Martin et al, 2015, p. 311). However, this study showcases the unique perspective offered by observing a community of people dedicated to assuming fictional roles. Dagorhir is a "boffer," a LARP in which participants strike each other with replica weapons made of foam or other soft, minimally harmful materials (Graham, 2010). The emphasis on physical training and skill makes boffers more akin to contact sports than improvisational theater. As a roleplaying game involving fantastical elements such as orcs and elves, Dagorhir attracts "nerds" who are "less institutionally valued than individual students who engaged in group athletics" (Martin et al., 2015, p. 295). As Charlotte Moss, a LARP photographer, stated in an interview, LARP still carries a "nerdy stigma" and is "not very cool" (Blistein, 2014). Through a careful analysis of the players and the community they've formed, the study's authors demonstrate how the male participants utilize the fictional world of the game to achieve, as they term it, "epic glory" and other status marks of manhood. By forming a shared reality in which their fantastical battles are worthy of glory and adoration, Dagorhir players can experience achievement that they might not find in their normal lives.

There are, however, downsides to this fantasy. For a shared reality to contain victorious champions, it must also contain members of lesser importance and distinction. Martin et al found a significant lack of female participants (p. 289). Of those women who did participate, many took on roles that offered no opportunity for glory or avoided battle altogether, sometimes due to their own reluctance and sometimes due to the lack of respect afforded to them by their male peers. Despite increasing acceptance in the academic community that women engaged in combat in medieval times (McLaughlin, 1990), fictional portrayals of these time periods often retain the biases against women imposed by writers and historians in more sexist eras. A female Dagorhir participant, in

relating her experience with sexism in the community, says casually, “I am completely ready to accept the fact that in the past women didn’t fight as much as men did” (Martin et al., 2015, p. 307). According to Martin et al., women who do take up combat in Dagorhir tend to take on masculine roles, or the roles of very masculine women, to avoid being treated differently.

Both of these major points, and many minor ones, are strong examples of the unique environment of study presented by LARP contrasting the real-life identity of the players and their fictional identities, which are either strengthened or weakened by the shared reality supported by the community.

### **Vampires as Context**

One direction from which to approach LARP is through literary analysis of the fictional contexts that serve as game premises. One particularly popular and long-running context codified in the *World of Darkness* book series, provides a fantasy world in a modern setting but with supernatural elements such as vampires, werewolves, and wizards. In Milspaw and Evans’ *Variations on Vampires*, the many elements of this context provide many fascinating topics of discussion that are beyond the scope of this paper. Milspaw and Evans give an in-depth examination of how this particular LARP genre functions, why it draws participants and what those participants gain from their experience.

Perhaps the best paper on the subject of LARP, *Variations* examines what makes a LARP a “satisfying story” (p. 230). In particular, the setting of the supernatural, much like the gothic genre from which such vampiric tales originate, offers players a chance to be transgressive without real-world consequences. While the players in their real lives “are seen (and see themselves) as marginalized, smart, and geeky outsiders” (p. 215), in the escapist roleplay they can become monsters marginalized due to their incredible powers who socialize with each other in an intimate, positive way. Despite the darkness of the setting, or because of it, the players’ successes feel emotionally empowering. Their double life gives them community and a chance to explore the elements within themselves that make them feel isolated in their larger peer communities.

While much of this discussion is applicable only to this one form of LARP, thirty-five pages of discourse on a single fictional context certainly suggests that the broad range of LARP genres and communities could provide many more equally interesting pages. If a gothic setting provides an environment for transgressive monstrosity, one can only imagine the implications of a high science fiction setting, or a dark Lovecraftian setting, both of which are also extremely popular LARP book series.

### **Group Identity in Russian LARP**

Another attempt to study LARP groups was somewhat less successful in offering unique perspective. Ol’ga V. Vorobyeva studied several groups in both Moscow and St. Petersburg and presents an analysis of how these communities are divided into four levels of subgroups. First Vorobyeva begins with the broad nerd culture subtype in these cities, whose members share the interests that

would lead some of them to gaming and LARP. Next is the subset of those who participate in role-playing games, including LARP, tabletop, and other variations. Only at the third level does Vorobyeva reach the subgroup of actual participants in LARP; the fourth and most specific subgroup is united by the shared experience of having participated in a particular LARP (Vorobyeva, 2016).

While these observations are well defended and seem fairly accurate, they seem equally applicable to a multitude of hobbies involving organized activity and shared interest. One could easily apply the same framework to, for example, little league baseball in Chicago: level one would be athletic children in general; level two, baseball participants; level three, participants in little league baseball; level four, participants in a specific season. The same sense of shared context and shared experiences can be assumed to be present by mere speculation. It's difficult to see how Vorobyeva's study has any bearing on LARP at all, except as context for the assertions.

### **Conclusions**

Though there are a handful of academic stabs at the subject of LARP, there are clearly whole swaths of the pastime that have yet to be examined. As a LARPer of more than seven years in a range of games with different player groups, I've seen incredible potential for study. In my opinion, the greatest of these lies in the psychology of the relationship between player and character. LARP provides the most intense experience of playing a role that still allows the flexibility of making one's own choices. Player agency in more limited gaming media have already been shown to create a more enjoyable experience (Moser & Fang, 2015, p. 156), but these studies haven't yet been extended to games in which these choices are organic and physical. Furthermore, there are notable patterns in individual playstyles that seem to speak to the psychology of each player and are present across that player's interactions with multiple LARP games. I believe these patterns are highly indicative of player identity, and that the meta-experience of literally choosing one's own role within a social group can give insight into the relationship between individual personality and group dynamics.

In conclusion, I strongly encourage academics of any field to consider LARP as an area of interest that has yet to be explored to its fullest potential. At the very least, perhaps, one could justify spending academic funding on a highly engaging and thoroughly enjoyable pastime.

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# Playing at a Career

Denise Claire Calungsod

Growing up, one of my favorite playtime games was disassembling old electronics and fitting them together again. But, according to the world we live in, little girls like me were meant to play with Barbies, and the demolishing would be left to the boys. The girls played with the elevation cut of a pink, three-story Barbie Dreamhouse—equipped with a garage, kitchen, dining room, bathroom, den, bedroom and an elevator. All the while their male counterparts played with LEGO City Demolition Sites, equipped with LEGO storefronts, construction workers and crane with wrecking ball. While seemingly harmless, these play sets are teaching children very important lessons. The Barbie Dreamhouse for the girls and the LEGO Demolition Site for the boys teach submission and control respectively, ultimately influencing each sex's decision-making in their future careers.

There are very specific cultural norms indicating that the Barbie Dreamhouse is meant for young females. Aaron Devor, author of "Gender Role Behaviors and Attitudes," writes that "dominant persons of either gender tend to use influence tactics and verbal styles usually associated with men and masculinity, while subordinate persons, of either gender, tend to use those considered to be the province of women" (506). The color pink is an obvious indicator as to the gender the play set is meant to be marketed to. Culturally, pink is synonymous with "girl." But why? Pink is a tertiary color, not as confrontational as a pure primary red, yellow, or blue. It agrees with the idea of female subordination because pink is not a strong color that demands attention. Instead, it is watered down and remains in the background, meant to be seen, not heard. Another sign that the Dreamhouse is for a female audience is the domestic setting. An individual within a domestic setting is not dominating a boardroom or influencing others. Instead, the domestic setting creates a passive and subordinate character—a female, according to Devor. The Barbie Dreamhouse, therefore, is clearly made for young girls.

Drawing from the same ideas presented by Devor, we can then see that the LEGO City Demolition Site is for young boys. The colors of this play set, much like the Barbie Dreamhouse, become an indicator of its audience. Primary colors are present in the red bricks of the building fronts, yellow in the color of the demolition equipment and blue in a male construction worker's overalls. As established earlier, primary colors are more aggressive and assert themselves in one's field of vision and dominate over secondary and tertiary colors. The dominant "nature" of a male individual is also mirrored in the action of demolition. The child is dominating a building with force and ultimately destroying a structure that would be, in real life, immovable by a sole child. The



assertiveness encouraged by the LEGO Demolition Site is obviously marketed to little boys.

With its intended audience of young girls, the Barbie Dreamhouse also carries with it the subliminal message of submission. This message is obvious in the fact that the Barbie Dreamhouse is already fully furnished. It is not just a house, but a home. This toy situates playtime in a fully decorated and fully furnished space, giving Barbie—and the little girl controlling her—no choice of customization. They do not have control over the wall colors, the furniture, or the type of appliances and cannot control these factors at all with their own decision-making. With everything already decided for the player, there is no other choice than for the girls to lounge and remain subject to outside forces' decisions for the Dreamhouse. Furthermore, the space represents a house that the ordinary person cannot easily afford. Yet, Barbie occupies the space without a roommate for aid and no visible job to support her lifestyle. There is no such thing as “Hard At Work Barbie” or “Struggling Professional Barbie.” Therefore, Barbie is relying on another outside source of money—a benefactor of sorts. This makes her a more submissive character who does not actively seek to support herself, but rather relies on another more dominant force to take care of her. In turn, this lesson of passiveness and submission is passed on to the little girls playing with the Barbie Dreamhouse and conditions them to follow suit.

If the Dreamhouse promotes female submissiveness, then the LEGO Demolition Site teaches the opposite lesson of control to young boys. The field of construction is a perfect place to practice the art of control. Even in demolishing a building, there needs to be great care and precision. Blasts and wrecking ball releases are carefully timed so as not to destroy surrounding buildings. Introducing a young boy to the field of construction imbeds in him a sense of control and precision in handling all of his surroundings. The freedom of choice and control also comes with the medium of LEGOs. Even though the set gives instructions for the construction of a crane or bulldozer or storefront, it does not limit the player. Instead, a child could choose to build his own mechanism. Unlike the prefabricated and preorganized Barbie play set, the LEGO demolition set can transform into anything a little heart could desire. Giving a young boy a demolition set promotes not only his creativity but also a sense of control over his environment.

The lessons we teach our children at young and impressionable ages are carried far beyond childhood playtimes. Female submission and male control carries on to the careers that each sex ultimately chooses. In “I Want To Be A Scientist/A Teacher: Students’ Perceptions Of Career Decision-Making in Gender-Typed, Non-Traditional Areas of Work,” written by members of the research department at the Zurich University of Teacher Education, it states, “worldwide gender segregation of the workforce perpetuates inequalities between women and men: To this day, male-dominated occupations are better paid and perceived as being higher in status than female-dominated occupations” (Buschor 743). When thinking of stereotypical female occupations, positions such as secretary and nurse come to mind. Even though all occupations are respectable in

their own right, these positions are still subordinate to a higher authority. All the while, their male counterparts dominate in jobs like CEOs and surgeons. The same principles impressed upon young boys and girls through their childhood toys ultimately reflect in the standards they set for themselves as adults searching for careers. The Barbie Dreamhouse's world of submission and the LEGO City Demolition Site's lessons on control help create a rift and imbalance in what society perceives as the proper occupation for each sex.

The influence of toys reaches far beyond playtime; it becomes a driving force for society's standards and expectations for men and women. Masculinity and femininity have been taught to us as natural forces, almost as natural as the seasons or the rotation of the earth. However, when stripped back to the core, our notions of boys and girls, and girls and boys, is a social construct. The time-honored tradition of dictating behaviors for the sexes, thankfully, is slowly losing its edge in today's society. A new era of the non-binary is slowly rising and, hopefully, the coming generations will no longer be burdened with the unfair standards set for men and women.

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# Writing from the CUNY Language Immersion Program (CLIP)

## When My Mom Was Young anika

Sometimes when I was a teenager, I laughed at my mom. Even though this was cruel, it was because I was uncomfortable. But now I will share her story with you because my mom gave birth to me and I don't laugh at her anymore.

My mom spent her childhood in Bangladesh, in a district called Comilla. This is where my story begins. It was a Monday. My dad, who was 40 years old, wanted to marry. He had been searching for a girl for a long time. He went to my mom's house and told my grandma. My grandpa wasn't home, so my grandma decided to make a decision without his advice and agreed that my mom would marry him. She set a date for their marriage. My mom would be forced to marry my dad because he was rich. She was twelve years old.

My grandma didn't think it was important to tell my mom about her upcoming marriage because girls' opinions weren't important. My grandma just told her they were going to travel to my aunt's house for a visit. That was the first time my mom met my dad and they were married there. My mom didn't understand what had happened. She didn't understand she would start a different life with an older man.

After my mom moved to my dad's house she cried and wanted to know, "Where am I?" After a few more days she still didn't understand what had happened and demanded to go home. However, my father's family didn't allow her to visit her family and my grandma didn't want her to return home either. They believed that after marriage my dad's family should be my mom's only family.

My mom always told us she would only agree to marriages for my two sisters and I when we were older. She would never let what happened to her, happen to us. I feel proud of my mom now. I know her decision changed our lives and the lives of our future children.

## Writing from the CUNY Language Immersion Program (CLIP)

### Many People Don't Have Enough Food Ali Hossain

Once upon a time when my friends and I were celebrating my birthday we were eating special dishes and gossiping with each other when suddenly I heard children's voices begging for food. I looked outside and saw a little boy and girl, sick and wearing ragged clothes. I called them over. "Why are you begging? Where are your parents?"

The little girl was crying, and tears came to my eyes as I listened. "Our father died. Our mother is sick, and she stays home. We live in a shanty-town. From morning to night, we beg for food and money on the street. At midday and at the end of the day we give our mother everything." I shouted for my friends to bring food, *biryani*, *roti* and birthday cake. "What about our mother? She hasn't eaten today," they exclaimed. I packed enough food for everyone.

Later, I asked my friends, "What if we give our money to the poor so they can buy food?" One friend answered, "We could donate 1.15% of our income." For the last five years, my friends and I collect our money, and during Ramadan, we give it to people who don't have enough to eat. Doing this helps us believe that, someday, poor people will have enough.

# An Expanded Definition of Contextualism

Ann L. Jean

Modern architectural design encompasses style and aesthetics. There are as many viewpoints as there are architects. Following the modern and postmodern era of architecture, the idea of a contextual architecture is at an all-time high; society has turned to the romantic ideals of preservation of our history, culture and environment. Nevertheless, not all architects exude an acute sensitivity to context, and this trend affects students of architecture even more in the studio today. But how can we be faulted for being easily distracted by the physical characteristics of architecture when 90% of all information processed by human is visual? It would be naïve to ignore the many constraints imposed on the conception of a piece of architecture which affects its final product.

Anything made is born out of a framework or context. Context is defined as “the interrelated conditions in which something exists or occurs” (*Merriam-Webster*). It is important to retain a broad definition when considering architecture because context, site, and environment are often used interchangeably in architectural jargon, but the definitions of these terms only marginally intersect. Moreover, the definition of context derives subjectively from our own definition of architecture since it is very difficult, if not impossible, to imagine architecture devoid of context. Consequently, two extremes exist: architecture as an altruistic duty or architecture as an art stripped of its responsibilities to its users. All architecture resides somewhere on this spectrum. The ideal is the middle ground where both views are seamlessly integrated.

Over 2,000 years ago, Vitruvius conceived a critical guideline to review architectural work. It revolved around three principles: *firmistas* (strength), *utilitas* (functionality) and *venustas* (delight). The topic of functionality can be further subdivided into three categories: people, site and function; therein lies contextual design as demonstrated in the Saratoga Avenue Community Center.

The Saratoga Avenue Community Center is located in Brownsville, Brooklyn, home to the now extinguished criminal organization Murder Inc., and a proliferation of public housing complexes and tenements. During its colonial years, the area was a farmland, as well as a manufacturer of slab stones used for construction. Later the area became a disposal site for factories, built around 1880, to encourage Jewish immigrants to move to the suburbs. Ample space with open lots for recreation made it an attractive alternative to the dire living conditions on the Lower East Side. During the 1950s, after World War II, the city viewed the area as a testing ground for its housing development. African Americans began to move to the predominantly Jewish community of

Brownsville; what ensued was a palpable racial tension that lasted for the better part of the history of the city, until its original occupants moved out of the area, leaving behind the poor working class who couldn't afford to move. In the 1960s, the population, which was largely African American, suffered staggering rates of unemployment. In its current constitution, the neighborhood has been labeled at times as the most dangerous in New York City—plagued by poverty, crime and drug addiction.

Eastern Brooklyn is part of Mayor Bill de Blasio's plan to create more affordable housing in the city. Incentives such as giving rights to construct bigger buildings in exchange for a percentage of affordable units would encourage private developers to build in the area with the goal of attracting a more affluent crowd, thereby increasing the wealth of low-income neighborhoods. Brownsville has resisted this trend for some time simply because of its remoteness to fashionable neighborhoods, but as adjacent neighborhoods like Crown Heights, Bed-Stuy, Ocean Hill and East New York are increasingly gentrified, a growing fear plagues the community as the current residents are often the ones left with the worst end of the deal; Brownsville seems to be next in line.

In 2007, the South Bed-Stuy zoning changes were adopted. Subjected to progressive rezoning programs, the neighborhood is constantly being reshaped. Consequently, Brownsville is an architectural amalgamation of identical row houses with a speckle of traditional and charming brownstones, short-lived bodegas, and bland public housing complexes—which make up a significant portion of the neighborhood's landscape.

Closer to Ocean Hill, many limestone and brownstone townhouses have been rehabilitated. However, blocks of multi-family semi-detached row houses are more common in Brownsville. The Nehemiah houses of 1987, red-brick houses with a modest 1,150 square feet of living space, were a joint project between local churches, community organizers, and the City of New York. Several residents of these houses enjoy a gated driveway and a lovely, albeit small, garden. The program was conceived to engage committed homeowners, and stands ironically against the towering forest of public housing.

If one lives in New York, bodegas are a common sight. Small shops with corrugated metal awnings (covered with bright-lettered signage and ads concealing every square inch of windows) occupy almost every corner. Those local grocery stores have become important members of the architectural library of the city: Brownsville is no exception. The word "*bodega*" means grocery store and is closely associated with the Hispanic community, but the model has mutated since its original incarnation. Ownership of these stores changes rather quickly, while the buildings remain somewhat permanent with the signs simply painted over rather than undergoing a full-scale renovation.

Today, the area of Brownsville is a hotbed of public housing complexes, the largest in the country. Midway through the Depression, NYCHA (New York City Housing Authority) was created. Since then, the city has embarked on a long fight to provide affordable housing to impoverished residents. (Historically, these communities lived below modern standards of living, and were surrounded by

high rates of disease, such as tuberculosis, diphtheria and cholera.) The projects, as they are called, were meant to be temporary homes until the residents found their footing and financially migrated upward and out of the public housing system.

Built during the 1960s, Saratoga Village is a 16-story high rise mixed-income housing complex with only 50 years under its belt in contrast to its predecessors. With its dull brick facade and complementary stainless steel/aluminum window frames, the complex betrays no exceptional qualities to distinguish it from any other housing built throughout the city. At first glance, Saratoga Village provides no framework from which to derive creative and original additions to the neighborhood. However, public housing developments originate from a 20<sup>th</sup> century planning model. Decentrists popularized the concept of the ideal town, where houses were turned inward, away from the streets, toward sheltered green spaces. Saratoga Village, like most housing developments, is designed around that concept.

The Saratoga Avenue Community Center is a building with a minimal footprint of 3,500 square feet that abuts the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) complex: Saratoga Village. The structure is a modern design with hints of tradition, obtained mainly through its material palette. The heavy use of masonry in the project confers a dignified aura to the neighborhood. This alone gives stature to the remarkably small community center. The selection of warm-colored Roman bricks, an uncommonly used brick that is longer than its standard counterparts, along with mahogany trim, contributes to this decorum. George Ranalli, the architect, subscribes to the idea that architectural design incorporates design at the smallest scale. This project is no exception: copings and lintels are integrated in the design. Against the neighborhood's backdrop of dreadful regularity and austerity, the community center displays a cohesive irregularity in its form. Recessed windows and protruding panels on the interior walls make for an interesting play of light and shadows. This syncopated geometry is maintained all through the interior where window sizes are varied and walls are punctured, featuring labyrinth-like patterns. All this is done without disorienting the occupants. The result is a dynamic reading of form and spaces, which accentuates the massing. The Saratoga Avenue Community Center delights the viewer through a balanced but irregular rhythm.

The recreation center is attached on one side to the housing tower by a corridor, and, on the opposite side, to a commercial building. Ranalli purposefully set back the community center to create inviting public spaces. The main entrance, located on Halsey Street, opens up to a beautiful courtyard that welcomes its neighbors, a contrast to the cloistered green space of public housing. Furthermore, the center provides a multipurpose room for all sorts of community gatherings. The 23-foot high main hall is used for wedding receptions, graduation parties, and so on. In terms of functionality, the community center fills a void that existed in the neighborhood. No other building satisfies this particular need: social gathering.

The Saratoga Avenue Community Center is a successful project because it accomplishes the three criteria of functionality: people, site and function. In blighted neighborhoods, residents often feel indifference from local governments. The success of Giorgio Ranalli's center is in part due to the fact that it taps into the most basic of psychological needs: significance. The people were included in the design process by reviewing the materials used in the construction. *Harvard Magazine* quoted Ranalli as saying, "They said, 'We're actually going to get a building that's made of this?'" This provides further proof that architecture not only acts on a physical level but in a more intimate realm by giving significance to the people who live in it.

Ranalli's center also performs fairly well in the context of its site. The architect achieved this primarily by taking inspiration from the natural and traditional material palette of the neighborhood. The use of masonry allows the center to seamlessly blend with adjacent buildings. Subsequently, the center is frequently described as fitting in the site. Yet the Saratoga Avenue Community Center is elevated on a platform that distinguishes it from its neighbors. The design itself is a rebuke to other buildings in Brownsville that have been designed with less attention and care. A thoughtfulness towards the finer points of the design reflects a dichotomy in modern architecture that tries both to fit its site and distinguish itself from it; in this case the result is successful. George Ranalli said in an interview with Chatham Press that a building becomes iconic when it responds lovingly to the specificities of a site, which implies its physical context, people and functional need. Brownsville lacks places of gathering, and the architect perceptively identified this need in the community.

Brownsville suffers from a shifting identity. Saratoga Avenue defines the border of two localities after the South Bed-Stuy rezoning, which makes it difficult to pinpoint the neighborhood one belongs to in this particular area. Dull NYCHA complexes dominate the architectural landscape of the neighborhood. Given the success of the Saratoga Avenue Community Center, the building is in a singular position to create a new and solid identity in which the locals can take pride.

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# Falling in Love with Monster Prime Numbers: A Response to a TED Talk

Armando Cosme

I want to start off by saying that I love TED Talk videos. I feel like every TED Talk video I've ever seen has hit me in some fascinating way. And this was the case when I viewed the TED Talk by Adam Spencer, who talked about why he fell in love with monster prime numbers. I think the concept is absolutely fascinating. I find it so cool that the simple expression  $2^n - 1$  can be such a focal point in the life of many mathematicians. It's funny because these mathematicians strive to find the biggest possible number that is prime knowing that when they do find this number, it will never be the biggest. I really connected with the speaker when he said something along the lines of "It wasn't hard to do, it just took a lot of time and dedication." I feel that all the time with math. Math is extremely simple, you just need to give it time and really try.

It is beautiful to hear that mathematicians all over the world are competing to accomplish the same goal: finding the largest prime number. The largest prime number that we know of to date is 23,249,425 digits long—this is absolutely astonishing, and I totally want to help in this continuous journey to find the largest prime! The fact that humans can code a computer to compute a prime number in such a relatively short time is fascinating. Spencer said the great developments and discoveries will no longer occur in academia, but in people's homes on laptops and desktops—as regular, everyday people manipulate technology to uncover new facts. It's beautiful to see the impact a computer and a human mind can have when working together. It was also intriguing to see the connection between Mersenne primes and perfect numbers. The fact that every even perfect number has a factor that is a Mersenne prime is enthralling. It makes me think, "Do mathematicians also try to find the largest perfect number with its factors as well?" I would love to be in a room where mathematicians talk about their strategies in calculating this.

After watching an interview with Professor Curtis Cooper, who is one of the many thousands GIMPS (Great Internet Mersenne Prime Search) volunteers and found the 49<sup>th</sup> largest Mersenne prime on January 7<sup>th</sup> 2016, I want to download the software and instructions and help out as well. I would love to contribute (even just a tiny bit) to the goal of finding the largest prime, and I can see myself getting wrapped in this project in the future. It was kind of funny to me when, during the interview, one of the mathematicians mentioned that the computer had known about the 49<sup>th</sup> largest Mersenne prime since September, 2015, yet because of a bug in the email notification system, the mathematicians had no clue until January, 2016! As my final note, I beg schools all around the world and people who run GIMPS *not* to print out the whole number! Please don't waste paper! I think  $2^{\text{whatever}} - 1$  is just fine.

# Visualization in Bioinformatics

Kiara J. Esteves, Ushar Jaikarran & Shelley Luong

## **Abstract**

In Biomedical Informatics, there is a constant need to represent large amounts of data, and visualization is used for this purpose. Formatting visualizations requires a series of strategies: the composition and layout of the presentation, as well as the choice of colors, must be superb. Additionally, the elements of a figure play a vital role in broadcasting the message. Without each of these components, the overall message will be misinterpreted by the audience and ultimately be useless. A collection of the “Points of View” articles in *Nature Methods* provides advice and tips for visualizing scientific data. Here we present a breakdown of these techniques for creating visualizations that will intrigue your audience, helping them to understand the message you are trying to convey.

## **Presentation**

When designing anything, one must have a well-thought-out plan. When there is a well-designed plan, there will be a well-designed object. This object should not require instructions, but should be understood clearly by the audience based on the cues from the presentation. The author of “The Design Process” (one of the “Points of View” articles) believes that the “effectiveness [of the design] determines the user’s ability to decode visual cues logically and finds the best solutions for objectives within given constraints” (Wong, 2011d). Producing a good structure requires the utilization of mathematical concepts since the placement of items relies on the ratio of the space to the rest of the page. Typically, our gaze lingers in densely clustered areas of an image. When lines are present, our eyes will follow these lines to connect objects. Additionally, our vision can detect the patterns in our work. For example, in a PowerPoint presentation, if image are placed in the same location on every slide, our eyes will look to that area first when the slide changes. *Therefore, putting the relevant information in that same spot manipulates the audience into reading it first.* To get them to look at another critical section, one can make that part larger to draw their attention. In this essay, each page has a margin with the same amount of white space. The margins are an example of utilizing layout to maintain uniformity.

## **Shapes**

A series of principles can further define the placement of the objects. The “Gestalt Principles offer useful guidance to describe relationships between objects based on certain cues” (Wong, 2011b). These principles help explain how

people group information based on how the information looks. We tend to group objects that look alike, are connected by lines, or enclosed in a common space as belonging together. When things are similar, people tend to formulate patterns out of the objects. Additionally, our mind needs conformity. When we see an object with an incomplete portion, our mind automatically fills in the space to make a shape that is familiar to us. While our minds automatically complete an object, our eyes can ignore certain elements. When reading this essay, a person will not notice every single period, comma, or quotation mark. We will be busy reading the surrounding words and glance over the periods because our minds acknowledge the pause.

### **Frame**

The portions of the page that are unmarked by content are the negative space. Negative space increases visual appearance, and the effectiveness of posters, slides, and figures. The space between paragraphs tells the mind to take a break before continuing to the next section. The gaps and margins also provide a frame around the section, so the reader knows that everything within that frame describes the same thing. In presentations, the creator's first instinct is to fill the negative space because of their perception of it being expendable, or an indication of insufficient content. However, if we were to fill every blank spot with information, it will be difficult for the eye to focus on one particular aspect, and the reader is likely to miss information and miscomprehend the data. Overall, the contents of the page should take on a familiar shape such as a rectangle. This space helps our eyes focus on reading in a hierarchy. If words are sticking out at the end of a sentence, our eye will go to those words. By creating flat sides, we will read from top to bottom because that's the way we learned to read, and there will be more emphasis on the content within the frame.

### **Inconsistency**

Inconsistency can make people pay attention to remote regions of an image or irrelevant information. "Salience is the physical property that sets an object apart from its surroundings" (Wong, 2011c). When looking at an excel spreadsheet, for example, not all of the information is important all of the time. In such instances, we can highlight the rows or columns that contain the most relevant information. Without highlighting, our eyes are overwhelmed and may focus on the data that isn't pertinent to our study. With posters, information that is enlarged will be more easily seen and therefore read first. To get the audience to notice a particular image first, we can display this picture in color while the rest are in black and white.

### **Colors & Fonts**

When we want to differentiate categories of information, color is utilized. Applying the rainbow of colors to represent broad ranges of values is usually the conventional approach. However, this isn't always accurate because one color cannot represent a numerical value. Additionally, a person's eye can

have difficulty recognizing color changes then the data is subsequently misinterpreted. According to the article in “Points of View,” “every color is described by three properties: hue, saturation, and lightness” (Wong, 2010a). In a color picker software, a color wheel arranges hues with saturation decreasing the outside inward. Changes to all properties provides an endless selection of colors. With small datasets, we can afford to create a large variety of colors to represent the data. Large datasets cannot employ considerable variety because then bias can be built. Preference controls whether the viewers ignore valuable information. Arranging the font artistically and technically requires skills of typography. The quality of how we arrange the letters on a page can impact how people respond to our messages. There are two original letterforms known as serif and sans serif. Serif letterforms tend to be thinner and easier to read in long lengths of text, whereas sans serif is less readable in long stretches of text, so they are more appropriate for headings and labels.

### **Annotations & Symbols**

Complex figures rely on labels to identify components and define terms. Labels are annotations, so they should be subordinate to their data points and not to other labels. Keep labels simple and easy to read. It is important to choose symbols that communicate relationships in the data. Symbols that have similar appearances can be easily missed, especially in regions where symbols overlap. It is best to use the first letter in the category name as a plotting symbol. Decoding figures are thus easier because the reader doesn’t have to refer to the legend constantly.

### **Arrows**

In the July 2011 issue of *Nature Methods*, there are nearly 300 arrows and more than half of the figures contain arrows. Arrows are guides for complex information. For example, an arrow with a right angle in molecular biology is a transcription start site or promoter. Arrows can have multiple meanings even if used in the same figure. In a study, college students were asked to evaluate diagrams with or without arrows. The results showed that participants who saw a chart with arrows included twice as much information in their description than those who had diagrams without arrows. Therefore, arrows focus the attention on the functional relationships between the elements. Arrows shouldn’t be too big to distract us from the content they intend to emphasize.

### **Plots**

Creating a successful plot requires you to understand the data. Bar charts and box plots are typically used to visualize quantities associated with something. But you have to choose the appropriate plot to represent the data accurately. Bar charts are used for counts, whereas box plots are used to visualize distributions. It is preferable to summarize with a box plot because when the numbers are too large for us to see them correctly, we can set a box plot with a range.

## **Diagrams & Pathway Diagrams**

Sets are a general concept in scientific data analysis. An example is a set of discovered bacterial species located in a soil sample or variants found in a genome. A single task is the examination of the commonalities and differences of multiple sets by intersecting them. Junctions of assemblages are commonly illustrated using Euler or Venn diagrams. An alternative is to use ellipses, which produces an area-proportional solution. Adequate visualization of intersections for more than three sets requires a more scaled approach than Euler diagrams. One solution is to encode all intersections in the columns of a matrix using a binary pattern and to render bars above the matrix columns to represent the number of elements in each intersection. The bars can be logged to accommodate significant variations in junction size. Pathway diagrams describe the connectivity and flow in biological systems. The diagrams must depict patterns in connectivity, and they must show both direct and indirect relationships with the viewer to understand the pathway. Visual grouping creates a hierarchy for the flow of information in a channel and alignment emphasizes node relationships. Edges should connect to a fixed number of points on node shapes. Neural circuit diagrams show connections between neurons and brain regions. Simplification leads to greater clarity. The best way to simplify is to reduce the number of elements on a figure. When you show less on the screen, it demonstrates a greater emphasis on what is shown.

## **Heat Maps**

Heat maps represent two-dimensional tables of numbers as shades of colors. It's a favorite plotting technique used in biology to depict gene expression and other multivariate data. Heatmaps are well suited for the presentation of high-throughput data and rely on color encoding and reordering of the rows and columns. When either of these is compromised, then the visualization will suffer. In heat maps, clustered rows and columns create blocks of similarly colored cells that are easy to spot. One should avoid using red-green as a color combination because it limits accessibility to information for colorblind individuals.

## **Patterns**

Time is unidirectional. It provides a natural order for events and has a semantic structure. Temporal data is cyclic and exhibits repeating patterns. The only challenge is that humans can not directly perceive time. There are approaches to visualizing temporal data; time is encoded using position, brightness, or animation. Consider the position first: time is mapped on the horizontal axis. When dealing with recurring patterns, compare the individual models in the data by breaking the time dimension into equal intervals and then aligning the intervals to emphasize the recurring pattern. If the cycle length changes over time, break the data into intervals of variable lengths and normalize them to a uniform cycle length to emphasize the recurring pattern, or you could leave the intervals unchanged to illustrate the difference in cycle lengths. A single plot scale showing all the data will most likely look like a jumble of lines

with no patterns visible. Variable combinations can be distinguished using colors, dashed lines, and symbols. In a tight space, it can be challenging to find encodings that are readily distinguished. Figures of this type are confusing because many features are battling for emphasis, which can inhibit our perception of any pattern.

### **Dimensions**

Three-dimensional data (3D) data is more complicated than two-dimensional (2D) data due to allowing another data dimension for space. It is challenging to understand the data since quantitative, relational and categorical data are difficult to represent in spatial relationships. When electing to use it, there will be partial occlusions, indications of depth and “perspective created by converging parallel lines, which enable us to estimate distances of objects from a certain vantage point” (Gehlenborg, N. & Wong, B.,2012). Unfortunately, gene expression and biological networks, such as a biological pathway, does not benefit from 3D spatial visualization; therefore, we would revert to 2D. Using 2D visualizations combined with multivariable data is efficient and reliable. This could be achieved by using plots such as parallel coordinate and scatter plots while applying color, sizes and shapes to it. As the complexity of the data increases, the difficulty in designing the appropriate figure also increases; this especially rings true for multidimensional data. The ideal figure would contain the structure and the value of the data but since there are too many variables, choosing to focus on the meaning of it would be a better alternative. In other words, the user should decide to concentrate on the relevant biology instead of the methodological aspects of it as it would provide a more efficient presentation of the data.

### **Sketching**

Often, we do not pay much mind to one of the most basic forms of data collection—the utilization of pencil and paper—but we use it almost daily, whether it is to sketch or take notes. The strength of using pencil and paper to jot data down is the immediacy. By using a graphical representation, we take advantage of the ability for the human eye to track patterns, infer connections in the data and refine the hypothesis, whereas with tabulated data this would be almost impossible. When dealing with high dimensional data sets, it is imperative to avoid displaying too much data; the solution being to either leave some of the data out or provide a subset of the sample. The goal is to find the behavior amongst multiple components and the strategy is to restrict one plot per component. But what happens when it’s a network, such as interactions between DNA, RNA, and small molecules, that needs graphical representation? Applying restrictions may work, but the audience won’t get the full picture. Therefore, hubs and clusters may be used instead. When dealing with node-link diagrams, there are edges, which are the lines that connect the nodes; nodes could be directed and undirected meaning that the edges are asymmetric and symmetric respectively. This is very useful for complex interactions.

## Networks

For large undirected networks, adjacency matrices could be used: these would show every node in a row and column; better yet, there are no data occlusions. Unfortunately using these also increases the difficulty in understanding relationships. When applying diagrams to represent the human genome, it would be challenging since the length of it is approximately 3 billion bases. Therefore, the genome would be divided into chunks to make the data more manageable. Then the genomic data would be displayed in either the accordion view, Hilbert-Curve display or as stacks of the region with a center combined with a statistical plot. Genomic data could also be represented structurally even when the DNA sequence has a deviation of one kilobase from the reference sequence. To depict the structural difference, the variant and reference sequences are needed as well as the utilization of breakpoints by using arcs in a linear layout. Although the components are necessary to display the data structurally in a straightforward manner, the design could just as easily fall victim to over-plotting. With all of these designs available to view genomic data, it is important to remember to make the design both excellent and effective in concisely telling the story. It is also up to the researcher's discretion to choose which design to use to display their data, keeping in mind that the design should emphasize the biological features of the data—making them the most obvious.

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# Visit to the Drug Store

Elizabeth R. Brunetti

For many people, taking a multivitamin or herbal supplement is part of their daily routine. We may take vitamins to feel better, prevent a cold, to gain energy or even improve our memories. Choosing the correct vitamins is important to our overall health, and may even be part of preparing our bodies for the health of a new life. For this assignment, I chose to investigate prenatal vitamins.

Prenatal vitamins are designed to help your baby get the nutrients essential for growth and healthy development. Prenatal vitamins consist of a variety of vitamins and minerals including folic acid, DHA, iron, calcium and Vitamins A, C and D. During my visit to a local CVS, I noticed that the prenatal vitamins were grouped together and were at eye level on the shelves. Approximately six brand names were displayed, in several forms (tablets, gummies, etc.), and I noticed words such as “ultra,” “pure,” “natural,” “gentle,” “supports,” “provides,” and even “OB/GYN recommended” were used to promote the product. Though a prenatal vitamin wasn’t listed specifically in the *Drug Information Handbook for Dentistry*, I did break down the main ingredients, specifically folic acid and DHA, as they were prominently listed on the packages.

Folic acid is the naturally occurring, water-soluble vitamin folate and is integral to the synthesis and maintenance of DNA, metabolism of amino acids, production of red blood cells, and growth of the fetus and placenta. Folic acid is used to treat megaloblastic and macrocytic anemias due to folate deficiency. Folate is found in many foods and is most readily acquired from green leafy vegetables (or foliage), which gave it its name. As listed in the *Drug Information Handbook for Dentistry*, the Recommended Daily Allowance (RDA) for folic acid during pregnancy is 600mcg/day and during lactation is 500mcg/day (Wynn).

The adverse reactions of taking folate include the following: slight cardiovascular flushing, general central nervous system malaise, rash, erythema, pruritus, bronchospasm and even allergic reactions. In addition to its FDA approved use, folic acid also has an off-label use for the prevention of neural tube defects. There are no cited precautions to dental procedures.

Omega-3 Fatty Acids, specifically Docosahexaenoic acid (DHA), is another primary supplement in prenatal vitamins. Omega-3 fatty acids are essential fatty acids that must be consumed in the diet. Adequate consumption of omega-3 fatty acids is vitally important during pregnancy as they are critical building blocks for the development of a fetal brain and its retina. Omega-3 fatty acids may also play a role in determining the length of pregnancy and in preventing prenatal depression. The RDA for DHA omega-3 fatty acids in pregnant and lactating women is 300mg.

Some possible adverse reactions to DHA are fatigue, skin-rash, diarrhea and nasopharyngitis. Omega-3 fatty acids also contain fish oil which may result in adverse reactions for those patients with shellfish allergies. There are no significant effects or complications regarding dental treatment.

From watching the documentary “Supplements and Safety” and from my research, I have learned to be weary of vitamins and supplements. It seems that the RDA is usually surpassed on these products, which is truly concerning. As mentioned in the documentary, the consumer does not know the truth about the composition of their supplements unless they are thoroughly tested. Without FDA regulation, our daily vitamin routine is very risky, and we as consumers should always take caution when ingesting daily vitamins.

In conclusion, prenatal vitamins may not be a “one size fits all” type of supplement. According to the Centers for Disease Control, “preconception care must be tailored to meet the needs of the individual.” Given that prenatal care should occur throughout the reproductive years, some recommendations will be more relevant to women at specific stages in their lives and with varying levels of risk. Though there are RDAs for these supplements, other factors such as diet and weight play a contributing role to how much additional nutrition is needed in order to sustain the health of a mother and her child. All women of reproductive age should be assessed for nutritional adequacy by a health care professional, and only if the the health care professional deems it necessary should a woman consider taking a prenatal vitamin supplement.

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# East River State Park

Emilio Cazares

Located five minutes from the Bedford Ave Station on the L line is a park named the East River State Park. When I think of a place in New York City where I truly feel happy, it's got to be this park. About a year ago, my friend and I were exploring Brooklyn along the water. We're both from the Bronx, so Brooklyn is uncharted territory to us. We came across this spot by the water on a whim. At first, I thought it was some sort of lot or parking lot because of all the concrete and street lamps. But, upon further inspection, it turned out to be a whole park with benches, a soccer field, and even a beach. It was really surprising; you couldn't imagine such a place in that neighborhood. All around it are warehouses and old buildings converted to hipster style restaurants. But this place has something special.

Before finding this place, I didn't think there was a place where you could feel big and small at the same time. There's an area to sit at picnic tables, a small beach, a grass hill to lie down upon to watch the sunset. But, the one thing that makes it my favorite place is the view of Manhattan. It truly is a view like no other. I come here to clear my head, work on my photography or just spend time with somebody special. This is why the East River State Park is my favorite place.

# Coney Island

Jiaxin Liang

## Coney Island

It is morning and the warm sun hangs in the azure sky. A breeze blows gently over the sea, as he rubs the sleep out of his eyes. Burst by burst of surf rolls onto the sandy beach and each collision with the sand makes a noisy rustle. The waves dash strongly against the huge rocks that sit at the edge of the coastline, like a drummer strikes a drum. Several seagulls flap their wings, whirling over the waves, as the whole beach resounds with their amused scream.

Coney Island-  
is like a sleepy baby,  
keeping a slight silence.

Now it is afternoon. Many people wander slowly along the long wooden road, and the restaurants are full of people. The amusement park fills with the sound of excited screams, cries, and laughter as echoing laughter carries to the sandy beach. A gang of children chases each another on the beach; the sound of clip-clop spreads around my ears as I lay on the sand. Under the rays of the sun, people lie on the beach, and they murmur to each other. Approaching the edge of the coastline, the cool seawater dissipates all the heat from my body and the water is like a dependent kid who always sticks by my feet. From the distance, I hear the crashing sound of the roller coaster, sharing its joy with all the people, all the ocean, all the Island.

Coney Island-  
is like a naughty baby,  
bringing laughter and happiness to people.

At night, Coney Island is a tired baby. A sliver of moonlight slowly comes out. I grasp a fistful of sand, and the soft sand slides through my fingers, which are like good-quality, slippery silk cloth. I lay on the sand as I would lay on a comfortable bed. The ocean is completely dark without a glimpse of light. I smell a flood of sea salt that is too strong. Floods of water fight each other. It is like a tired baby. The sky watches over the tired baby while he sleeps in his mother's arms, as he waits for the morning to come tiptoe-ing into his bed and kiss his eyes.

Coney Island-  
is like a tired baby,  
sleeping deeply into the embrace of his mother.

The sleepy baby is he, the naughty baby is he, and the tired baby is he. He always brings us the surprise and happiness. Such a beautiful baby I have never seen.

# “Any direction might as well be forward”: An Examination of the Science, Technology, Linguistics and Philosophy of Ted Chiang’s “Story of Your Life”

Jessica L. Roman

Science fiction explores a wide breadth of science and technologies from the Galvanism in Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley’s *Frankenstein* to time travel in H. G. Wells’s *The Time Machine*. The genre’s development from the Pulp Era to the Golden Age focused on science and physical laws, but the New Wave revitalized the human element with the soft sciences such as psychology, anthropology, and linguistics. By combining hard and soft sciences to tell human stories, science fiction holistically explores humans’ relationships to each other, our technology, and our universe. The interdisciplinarity of science fiction makes the science, technology, and social commentary of its stories accessible to its readers. I argue that one such example of science fiction’s interdisciplinarity is Ted Chiang’s “Story of Your Life” which is enriched by its use of linguistic technology and philosophy to tell a compelling story about a mother, child, and free will.

“Story of Your Life” begins with Dr. Louise Banks, the narrator, explaining that she is upon the most important moment of her life. The moment when her husband asks, “Do you want to make a baby?” From here the narration is an amalgam of Louise recounting first contact with the seven-limbed so-called “Heptapod” aliens, and future memories of her unborn daughter’s short life. We discover 112 heptapods ships landed on Earth, nine in the United States. Louise’s journey with the heptapods begins when she gets a call from the government shortly after their arrival. She is a linguist and a representative of the soft sciences. Louise is teamed up with physicist Dr. Gary Donnelly who represents the hard sciences. They are part of a group of experts recruited to establish communication and obtain information from the aliens.

Following their recruitment, Louise begins the arduous process of deciphering the heptapod language with assistance from Gary. This collaboration is the beginning of interdisciplinarity within the story—combining physics with linguistics to learn the alien language. Early in the process, Louise discovers that the heptapods have two variant or diglossic languages they use to communicate. The oral Heptapod A does not have the same bound word structure we use but still utilizes nouns and verbs. Their written language, known as Heptapod B,

is semasiographic in that it conveys its meaning through signs and is unrelated to speech. As Louise improves her understanding of Heptapod B, she begins to suspect their written language is nonlinear and that Heptapods may perceive time differently than humanoids. In the years the heptapods spend on Earth, the linguists make steady progress in learning their language. The mathematicians and physicists, however, find themselves at a standstill in their discussions.

Eventually, there is a breakthrough between the heptapods and the physicists via Fermat's principle of least time. Gary explains it is a variation principle in calculus that states a ray of light will take either the minimal or the maximum amount of time to run its path in a given medium. While Fermat's principle starts the discussions between the heptapod aliens and the human physicists, it also aids Louise in her theory of the heptapod's language and perception. As these discussions continue to advance, he begins to realize heptapods perceive, as in Fermat's principle, in extremes, or along a path to a known destination. In other words, heptapods know their future, which further supports their unique writing system. Heptapod B's complex semagrams and their intricate meaning requires Heptapods to know how an entire statement would be laid out before it is initiated. Louise comes to understand their written language is performative. Even though heptapods know what will happen, they must actualize it through its performance. Eventually, Louise's study of Heptapod B begins to restructure how she thinks. She explains:

With Heptapod B...my thoughts were becoming graphically coded. There were trance-like moments during the day when my thoughts weren't expressed with my internal voice; instead, I saw semagrams with my mind's eye, sprouting like frost on a windowpane. As I grew more fluent, semagraphic designs would appear fully-formed, articulating even complex ideas all at once...The semagrams seemed to be something more than language; they were almost like mandalas. I found myself in a meditative state, contemplating the way in which premises and conclusions were interchangeable. There was no direction inherent in the way propositions were connected, no "train of thought" moving along a particular route; all the components in an act of reasoning were equally powerful, all having identical precedence. (Chiang 21-22)

Like human writing, Heptapod B is a writing technology. Louise learns Heptapod B during her work to decipher the heptapod language and enable communication between heptapod and human. The result is a change from a cause-and-effect based consciousness to what she calls a simultaneous mode of consciousness.

Walter J. Ong provides an analogy for how the written Heptapod B language changes Louise's thinking and perception of time in his work "Writing is a Technology that Restructures Thought," which examines how written language is a technology that affects human consciousness. Ong explains that being literate is something we take for granted, especially in highly developed

technology cultures, but it actually has tremendous influence on the way a literate mind functions. Ong states:

Such views of writing as simply a mechanical skill obligatory for all human beings distort our understanding of what is human if only because they block understanding of what natural human mental processes are before writing takes possession of consciousness. These views also by the same token block understanding of what writing itself really is. For without a deep understanding of the normal oral or oral-aural consciousness and noetic economy of humankind before writing came along, it is impossible to grasp what writing accomplished. (Ong 23)

Ong further supports this by describing the differences between the literate mind and the oral mind. When we functioned as an oral society, we had to utilize mnemonic sayings and qualifiers since the only way to share information and knowledge was through memorization and recitation. Orality did not allow for thinking beyond what was established as our minds' resources were devoted to maintaining what we had learned to keep our society from regression. Being literate provides a technology enabling peoples to record and share knowledge. They in turn acquire more knowledge than their ancestors and can pass on the information more permanently. When we use the technology of writing, we are using a tool, and as we hone that tool, we become more proficient. Ong explains that technology does not just serve as a support but as mechanisms to allow us to grow and evolve in our thought. Writing allowed us to analyze, as we were not able to before. For Louise, Heptapod B allowed an evolutionary jump impossible outside of science fiction.

Connected to the story's emphasis on writing technologies and thought, is embodied, subjective experience. Thomas Nagel's "What it is to be a Bat" helps untangle this point raised in "Story of Your Life." Nagel's argument centers on the idea of subjective character, which he describes as what it is to be any particular organism. While we could endeavor to behave as another organism, it cannot provide an authentic experience. To illustrate this, Nagel uses the example of being a bat: we can imagine or even try to simulate what sonar might feel like but we still would not know what it is to be a bat. Additionally, to be born with the brain of a bat would be very different from being born with the brain of a human. A bat brain perceives the outside world through high frequency sound waves and not light which is radically different from how our brains work. Nagel expounds, "Even if I could by gradual degrees be transformed into a bat, nothing in my present constitution enables me to imagine what the experiences of such a future stage of myself thus metamorphosed would be like. The best evidence would come from the experiences of bats, if we only knew what they were like" (3).

Louise describes this same experience when she begins to think like the Heptapods do, remarking, "Even though I'm proficient with Heptapod B, I know I don't experience reality the way a heptapod does. My mind was cast in the mold

of human, sequential languages, and no amount of immersion in an alien language can completely reshape it. My world-view is an amalgam of human and heptapod” (Chiang 29). No one other than a heptapod can truly know what it is to be a heptapod. Even to the extent that she has experienced their consciousness, she can only experience it as her brain allows. Louise clarifies that her newfound perception does not help her mind process any faster, and she cannot immerse herself in moments as they do. Nevertheless, the Heptapod B language changes Louise’s perception of time and ontology, which leads to the question of free will.

Determinism and free will are the central problems interrogated within “Story of Your Life.” In particular, this is the struggle that Louise grapples with after Heptapod B has restructured the way that she thinks by empowering her to see the future. When the heptapods eventually leave Earth, they do not bestow any radically new advancements and the reason for their visit is never explained. However for people like Louise, life is forever changed. She contends with her perspective, questioning if it will bring her happiness or devastation. In the novella’s conclusion the story comes back to its beginnings. Louise must perform her future, despite the heartache it will bring: she answers her husband in the affirmative and the actualization of her daughter’s birth and future is committed.

The question of having free will is unresolved within the story, but Chiang explores what it might mean depending on one’s perspective on the passage of time. Free will is rooted in individual agency to make choices from an infinite number of possibilities, while determinism, according to Shirley Ogletree, “is defined as only one possible nonrandom outcome of any choice...Even though only one ultimate outcome is possible, however, the individual choosing does not know what that outcome is at the time they are deliberating” (1). When Louise realizes she is seeing the future because of learning Heptapod B she posits the paradox it creates. If our future is already written then one could never know it. If one did, they could change that future, no longer making what was known about the future true. With her new perspective, Louise knows she will have a daughter, she will divorce, and she will outlive her daughter. Nevertheless, Louise is presented with a choice. She could act to change this future, or she could play her part as do the heptapods to realize this perceived future.

However, perhaps because of her altered perception she concludes differently. Maybe knowing the future and having a perception of what is to come make her want to realize that future and make it true. Louise may have accepted her future (and by extension, her daughter’s) but she still questions what this path will ultimately mean for her. She admits at the end, “From the beginning I knew my destination, and I chose my route accordingly. But am I working toward an extreme of joy, or of pain? Will I achieve a minimum, or a maximum?” (Chiang, 32) While Louise’s experience turns on a philosophical question built on the interdisciplinary connections between linguistics and physics, her decision, which is admittedly one-sided, as we do not know what it



might ultimately mean for the free will of her daughter, is a human response to a difficult situation.

Aliens, first contact, and prophetic abilities can be the basis of any science fiction story, but the interdisciplinarity of "Story of Your Life" makes it a stronger example of the genre, because its thought experiment can help us better understand what it is to be human by exploring the deep connections within our knowledge of ourselves and the universe.

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# *True West* and the Toxic Sibling

Lorelei Gesse

Brotherhood is complex. The relationship between siblings is rather delicate, a strange sort of love, a love that is not romantic, a love that is neither maternal nor paternal. One has no need to pretend that all sibling dynamics are uniform. For the purpose of this piece, I will refer to the relationship between siblings in “dark” terms. It is not platonic. It is resentment. Envy. Hatred. Siblings compete for attention. They compete for praise. Sibling rivalry is a natural phenomenon, a rivalry born of what I personally cannot seem to be able to put into words. It has existed since (the stories of) Cain and Abel. Those familiar with the verses of scripture know of the hatred that Cain held in his heart, how Cain coveted what was not his. “Cain who was of that wicked one, and killed his brother ... because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous” (*King James Bible*, John 3:12). *True West*, a rather prescient play written by Sam Shepard in 1980, manages to showcase a Cain/Abel dynamic between two brothers, Austin and Lee. Austin is the quintessential golden child, the Abel to Lee's Cain. The parallels between the biblical figures and the play are too obvious to ignore. Lee is the eldest brother, whose own resentment and bitterness towards his younger sibling's supposed perfect, structured life and general ability to maintain a sense of normalcy leads to a rift (in the Bible, this “rift” is murder) between the two. Austin is successful, to a degree. He is a family man and a writer. He is a “good” brother, or tries to be, and shows this by allowing himself to be toyed with by Lee. Lee exploits Austin's kindness. He is twisted. Manipulative. He lies. He cheats. Steals. His lifestyle has no sense of direction or purpose.

Throughout *True West*, we see Lee exhibit what some may identify as sociopathic tendencies. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, the term sociopath is literally defined as “relating to, or characterized by asocial or antisocial behavior or exhibiting antisocial personality disorder.” In direct contrast to this vague, and quite frankly, incorrect definition by Merriam-Webster, the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM IV-TR) defines sociopathy as the following:

Pervasive pattern of disregard for and violation of the rights of others occurring since age 15 years, as indicated by three or more of the following: Failure to conform to social norms with respect to lawful behaviors as indicated by repeatedly performing acts that are grounds for arrest, deception, as indicated by repeatedly lying, use of aliases, or conning others for personal profit or pleasure, impulsiveness or failure to plan ahead, irritability and aggressiveness, as indicated by repeated physical fights or assaults, reckless disregard for safety of self or others,

consistent irresponsibility, as indicated By repeated failure to sustain consistent work behavior or honor financial obligations and lack of remorse as indicated by being indifferent to or rationalizing having hurt, mistreated, or stolen from another.

Lee displays at least three of these behaviors and traits. As mentioned before, Lee lies, cheats, and steals while taunting Austin to “call the police” (Shepard 29). He deliberately screws his brother over with Saul, the Hollywood producer Austin is writing for, and commits myriad other sins too extensive to list. Lee is a textbook sociopath. How does this affect his relationship with Austin? How does Lee’s behavior eventually destroy his relationship with his brother and “destroy” Austin?

In Genesis 4:1-17, Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain, a tiller of the ground. Cain brought the fruit of the ground as an offering unto God. Abel brought an offering as well. He brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. As scripture has it, God accepted and respected Abel’s offering, but did not accept Cain’s. There are many theories that exist as to why, one being that Cain did not bring the best offering that he could, and another being that God had already seen blackness in Cain’s heart. We do not know why. What is known, however, is that because of this rejection, Cain’s “countenance” has fallen and God says “If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? And if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him....And Cain talked with Abel, his brother and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him.” Cain is jealous of God’s approval of Abel, and rather than make another offering, the solution is to eliminate the competition. Lee sabotages Austin and manages to unravel the neat man that he is by the end of the play. We are not told if a brother dies in the play, only that Austin tries to strangle Lee with a phone cord, and Lee survives this attack. The play ends with the brothers facing one another, forms tense, with only their shadows seen, alluding to an imminent and inevitable death. Lee foreshadows this much earlier in the following dialogue:

Austin: You’re my brother.

Lee: That don’t mean a thing. You go down to the LA Police Department there and ask them what kinda’ people kill each other the most. What do you think they’d say?

Austin: Who said anything about killing?

Lee: Family people. Brothers. Brother-in-Law. Cousins. Real American-type people. (Shepard 29)

Cain and Lee see murder and disarray as solutions to jealousy. Lee’s (chilling) statement is almost an admission of future intent or guilt. Who but a sociopath believes that such an extremity may be possible or even necessary? Austin dismisses this, saying, “We’re not insane. We’re not driven to acts of violence like that. Not over a dumb movie script” (Shepard 29). Lee’s counterpart is

essentially, “Why not?” With this, Lee pretends to give up on the script Austin would be writing for him, effectively guiltting him, and allowing Austin to shoulder the effort. He attempts to soothe his “wrongdoings” as a brother by talking to him about a home he could buy if the script is successful. Lee plays an ever so reticent, passive-aggressive participant in this pep talk. It’s blatant gas lighting, faux victim style. It’s genius. But yes, the intent or the possibility of murder is first mentioned by Lee, over something as trivial as a script. Just as Cain brought Abel to the field under false intentions, Lee displays skills in deception, which is one of the symptoms of sociopathy. Cain brings Abel to kill him and Lee guiltts Austin into doing his work and later cheats him out of the deal with Saul, the producer, sans regret.

Another symptom of sociopathy is lack of remorse as indicated by indifference or rationalizing having hurt, mistreated, or stolen from another. Cain feels no remorse for killing Abel. After killing his brother, seemingly undisturbed, God said unto Cain, “Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not: Am I my brother's keeper?” “Am I my brother’s keeper?” is a line that when applied to the two stories, holds different meanings. Cain could not give a damn about his slain brother. Abel is out of the way and being questioned about him irritates Cain. His use of the line shows callousness. He feels nothing. On the flip side, Austin *is* his brother’s keeper. Austin allows Lee to use the car and offers him money. Lee uses this as an opportunity to steal toasters from the neighbors, because he can and to irritate Austin. Later, Lee meets with Hollywood hotshot Saul Kimmer, whom Austin is writing for. Saul drops Austin’s script in favor of Lee’s idea. Kimmer is more plot device than anything, bringing the simmering animosity between brothers to an explosive peak. Lee has done all of this to his brother, and yet Austin still maintains a sense of idolization, letting himself be convinced that Lee’s lifestyle is a desirable one. Lee still finds ways to manipulate Austin for his own benefit. It’s fascinating.

Sam Shepard, author of *True West*, says of his play, “In essence, the play explores the ideas of the insider and the outsider, identity, family and America's idea of itself, examining the point at which the new west of civilized, suburban America meets the wild and uncontained old west” (qtd in Barton). One of Shepard’s themes is identity and the idea of what it means to be an insider or an outsider. Austin was clearly meant to be the insider, following all the rules and doing things the “right” way. Austin is the righteous brother, as Abel was. Lee is the outsider, the Cain, the brother who covets what is not his, manipulating those around him and lashing out when he isn’t praised. He quite literally tried to take over aspects of Austin’s life. Perhaps he believed that without competition from his brother, whose own life is a constant reminder that he is a loser, he would be the better man. Perhaps Lee believed Austin didn’t deserve his “fancy life with fancy words.” It is my belief Cain believed this as well. Cain and Lee are sociopathic brothers who relied on their brothers’ love for them to gain their truth and essentially ruin them. Abel is dead. Austin is not the same man by the end of the play. He steals, he attempts to strangle his brother. He is no longer “neat.” He has unraveled. This is the impact of a sociopath. The righteous brother loses in

the end. Power is transferred. The sociopathic, envious sibling now has control of the situation because they are willing to destroy and manipulate to gain what they believe is rightfully “theirs.” For Cain, this is God’s praise. For Lee, this is stability. He wants praise from Austin’s peers.

Cain and Lee effectively destroy their siblings. This is what it means to have a brother that is a sociopath. They destroy their brothers at will, if threatened. It is a dark, unfortunate reality.

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# How Math is Infused in Fashion and Technology

Kyla Byam-Ramsay

Math is a versatile subject that can be applied to every aspect of life and is very much applicable in the world of fashion design and technology. Fashion and math complement each other because of symmetry and geometry. Symmetry occurs when exact parts correspond to each other on opposite sides of a plane, and geometry is the branch of mathematics concerned with the properties and relations of points, lines, surfaces, solids, and higher dimensional analogs (Merriam-Webster, 1828). When considering a design, it is important to look at the proportion, pattern, and lines because a designer can be delivering a message to the viewer using those same mathematical segments. Math is a crucial element of fashion design. Rei Kawakubo, one of the most inspirational fashion designers of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, shows us math throughout her collection “Comme de Garçons: Art of the In-Between,” including in her design “Self/Others.”

Rei Kawakubo is a Japanese designer who entered the industry taking a job at a textiles factory. In 1967, the designer then became a freelance stylist (Smith). After two years, Kawakubo started creating her own clothes with the name Comme des Garçons. Interestingly, Kawakubo never trained to become a designer; in fact, she studied art and literature at Keio University (Kawakubo). Her background in art and literature may have influenced the creativity within her designs. The designer is now “known for her avant-garde designs and ability to challenge conventional notions of beauty, good taste, and fashionability” (Kawakubo). “Rei Kawakubo/Comme des Garçons: Art of the In-Between”—which was featured in The Metropolitan Museum of Art’s Costume Institute Spring 2017 exhibition—examines nine expressions of “in-betweenness” in her collection. “Self/Other” is one of the nine collections where math is discreetly designed inside of the clothing.

“Self/Other” is among the favorite collections because it clouds the conventional thoughts of culture, gender, and age. The symmetrical balance of the blue and pink color in dress 7.3.1 aids in the representation of the male and female illustration, where blue represents the male and pink represents the female. Without the balance of color with the use of math, this collection could have gone a completely different route. If the colors had no symmetry and the blue had the dominant look, the dress could have implied the male is superior to the female, which would destroy the statement “blur the boundaries of conventional definitions of [gender]” (Rei Kawakubo/Comme des Garçons: Art of the In-Between, 2017).

Also, regarding the culture and age inspiration, dress 7.3.1 was a blue dress with a pink silhouette sewn on top of it. The pink dress was designed with a shorter and tighter fit, which I feel is intended to attract and be worn by the younger, modern generation. The blue dress was clearly designed with the same outline of the pink dress; however, it was longer and wider. The blue dress was designed and intended for a more mature generation. Although the two dresses have a completely different fit, Kawakubo designed them as one to create a statement of equality in culture and age. The proportion of measurements with fabric in this design is extremely important, especially since there are two generations of dresses on one figure—fitting them together is a task that can only be done with the use of math.

Math is a versatile subject that is critical to fashion design. The talented and brilliant fashion designer Rei Kawakubo proves that math can enhance the look of any piece of clothing; she infuses math in her designs as clearly evident in her collection “Self/Other.” Kawakubo’s work stands as testimony that math knowledge is critical to fashion design; without it, many designers would not know where to put certain patterns or items on a piece of their collection. The symmetry would be off. Fashion and math complement each other.

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# Penile Consequences: A Short Story

M. Carrillo

If I move from this spot, my life will change forever. You see, I've spent countless evenings standing here on the Brooklyn Bridge. It is my favorite place in all of New York City. I look up to the sky and see tall metal poles that are thick and look like they weigh a ton; they have steel cables throughout, safely securing the bridge. The poles are angled, so as you look farther away, they get smaller until they end. It almost looks like musical notes on paper where the symbols go up and down the page. This spot is where both sections of poles on either side of the bridge meet. When you're standing far from the opening, the sky looks smaller, but as you get closer to Manhattan, the poles somehow open and let you see more light in the sky.

Under my feet is a boardwalk, almost like in Coney Island. It's sturdy and looks like it can handle millions of people walking on it daily. Next to me is a light pole that hasn't been lit yet for the night. Hundreds of tourists are around me taking pictures, speaking in different languages, and enjoying the beauty that is NYC, or, more precisely, Brooklyn. Behind me is one of the Bridge's towers. This massive piece of limestone, granite and cement is where the American flag is placed on the bridge. I can always tell the weather by the flag. Even a flag can look hot and sweaty on a humid day. It clings to the pole for dear life, begging for fresh air, or maybe that's just how *I* feel on a hot and humid day.

I've always wondered how tiny things look from the top of the Brooklyn Bridge towers, although I would never venture to find out. Heights and edges are not my kind of thing. I do remember some people going up the poles to the top of the bridge tower; they were arrested by the police. I wonder what makes someone do that? But, then again, what makes us do the things we do? We are doing the best we can to navigate life. It's never easy and challenges arise all the time. Just like the one I'm going through right now. A week ago, you could not have told me I would be in this situation, having to make this decision...

I am a married mother of two children, and I have lived in New York City all my life. I work as a dance teacher at an elementary school. I live in Dumbo, so walking on the bridge is a great way to get back and forth. I do take the trains but not recently. Instead, I have walked over this bridge every single day for two years. I use it as my exercise and meditation. Coming to this spot on the bridge always makes me feel safe and secure. The poles around me with cables, the huge towers made of stone, the sturdy boardwalk—all make me feel safe to enjoy the beauty of life around me. This is where I stop thinking and inhale the scent of life. This is where I center myself and try to find peace in the chaos that is being me and living my life. I always wonder how I get myself into



situations, and I remember that I'm only human so I'm entitled to make mistakes... lots of them!

This one is a doozy though... you see because, well, I'm pregnant. Yay! Right, except that the father is not my husband. Yes, you read that right. The father is my boyfriend. Yes, I have a boyfriend and, yes, I got my 45-year-old self pregnant with his child. Now what am I to do? Ruin my marriage? Abort the child? Break up with the boyfriend and don't tell him anything? I have no idea. I never meant to hurt anyone. It obviously wasn't a smart idea to have unprotected sex with another man, or even have a boyfriend, when I am a married woman.

All the steps that led to this moment make me think of the bridge and why it's my favorite spot. You see, nothing happens quickly, everything takes time. So, as the poles get higher up, that's you piling on to your decisions until you end at the top of the bridge. One decision leads to the next that leads to the next. I try to remember how I got here and get lost in my thoughts searching for the reason. I clearly made bad decisions because of my desire to love more than one man.

I met my husband in college and we fell in love. He promised when he had money and things were right we would get married. We finally got married in 2008; it was a simple wedding on a sunny beach in Vieques, Puerto Rico. It was a small wedding, only immediate family and friends. We had a huge cookout-style dinner, and I was happy as can be. It was the happiest moment in my life. So how could I cheat on my husband?

Lust is a powerful emotion, almost a living being, and you won't know what it's capable of until you experience the rawness of it. It is visceral and honest to the core, and this was the first time I ever had a connection like that with someone. It was soulful— he spoke to my soul. So we met up once, then a second time, then a couple more times. Then I lost count, and here I am two years later with no idea what the hell I'm doing.

How could I do this to my husband? To my children? To my boyfriend? (He wants us to be together, and a baby would only make him want this more.) I'm stuck on this bridge in this spot with no idea how to move forward with my life...

# Let's Talk

## Devan Rose Casey

Every year over 44,000 Americans suffering from mental illness commit suicide according to the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. This figure equates to roughly 121 suicide-related deaths a day. Whether you realize it or not, everyone in this room interacts with a human being living with some form of mental illness every single day. A handful of those living with a mental illness choose to speak out about their condition, in hopes that their experiences will take away the stigma of mental health conditions. Speaking openly about mental illness may also encourage others to speak up and get help for their disorders. However, for many people there is still a taboo around mental illness. Individuals may be embarrassed or afraid to speak out in order to receive the treatment they need. Some of these people may not even realize they need help in the first place. Illness can show up in the form of addiction, depression, anxiety, or eating disorders, just to name a few. These conditions can impact a person's life in a variety of ways. Homelessness, the inability to get out of bed, physical strain on the body, or, in the most extreme cases, self-harm and suicide are outcomes of untreated mental illness. With the side effects of mental illness being so serious, we must begin to incorporate information about mental illness in health class curriculums in high schools, so the stigma of mental illness is reduced and those affected are able to speak up and get help at the first sign of a mental disorder.

High school is already a difficult time in a teenager's life. On top of dealing with more responsibilities and pressures both socially and academically, adolescent bodies are undergoing a massive hormonal shift. With so many big life changes happening, it may make it harder for teens to determine whether the sad or anxious emotions they are feeling are just the result of puberty or something more serious. The National Association for Mental Illness states, "Half of individuals living with mental illness experience onset by the age of 14, and one in five youths live with a mental health condition. Yet less than half of these individuals receive needed treatment."

Unlike so many of these teens, I was able to get help. I have been living with depression and anxiety disorders for most of my life. I was placed in therapy in third grade and have been visiting therapists on and off for the last fourteen years. My depression began to hit its peak in 2011 when I was a junior in high school. Every morning I'd wake up achy and sore even though all I had done was sleep. Moving myself to an upright position and slowly putting my feet on the floor to get out of bed took almost all of my energy. It became more and more difficult for me to concentrate on—or even care about—my schoolwork, friendships, family and even myself. My anxiety let minor criticisms set off sharp stabbing feelings throughout my chest, where they began to bury themselves into my being, chipping away at my confidence. Tears would flow freely and

frequently for no apparent reason. Embarrassed and scared, I isolated myself in these emotions, and thought I was doomed to live a sad, hard, and anxiety-filled life. If you were to talk to my classmates at the time, however, no one would have believed I was going through this. I was too embarrassed to tell anyone how I was feeling. I thought I would be seen as weak or, even worse, crazy. I often wondered what was so wrong with me? Everyone else could get through school with ease, but I was struggling to even get myself inside the building. Finally, after a particularly bad week, my mom sat me down and asked me what was wrong. Months, and possibly even years, of depression and anxiety-induced self-doubt, criticisms and thoughts poured out of me. My mom and dad quickly made arrangements for me to visit therapists and psychiatrists so that I could get treatment.

Teenagers and young adults spend a majority of their time in a learning environment, and this is why the Teen Mental Health Organization states that “school is one of the best places for both educators and students to become increasingly aware of mental health, mental health problems and mental disorders.”

According to the World Health Organization, depression is the leading cause of illness and disability worldwide: 300 million people are affected around the globe. Yet only a fraction of these people receive treatment. One organization actively trying to get rid of the stigma attached to mental illness is The Young Minds Organization in the United Kingdom. Young Minds has started a campaign to make mental health education mandatory in all high schools and middle schools, stating: “Since beginning our campaign of providing mental health education in schools which normalizes and opens up a discussion about mental disorders...thousands of adolescents have come forward to receive help.”

It’s imperative for mental health disorders to be openly discussed, and for there to be no stigma associated with a mental health condition so that those affected feel comfortable reaching out to receive help instead of taking drastic measures like suicide. By incorporating information about mental illnesses into a school curriculum, adolescents will grow up knowing that having a mental health condition is nothing to be ashamed of and that there are many channels for help. I’d like to invite you all to sign a pledge with me that states you will support and not pass judgment on those with a mental health condition. NAMI’s pledge is a huge step in raising awareness and erasing the stigma of mental illness: <https://www.nami.org/stigmfree>.

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# Looking Past the Glass

Shashendri C. DeSilva

Motifs in life have odd ways of showing themselves. An escape can show up in the same environment as a cage. The stars are my escape; my balcony allows me to venture into an abyss of the unknown. At night when I feel alone or lost, I always find my way through the stars. Although, when I was kid, I wasn't allowed onto the balcony, so the only solitude I was granted was in my sleep. As a kid I was very naïve, I had my rose colored glasses fastened tight to my face, and, to be fair, most kids did. Most of us started life without a need to grow up quickly; we learned the world can be cruel at our own pace. For me, I never wanted to see the world at its worst; I never wanted to think people could be so cruel. To this day, I like to believe that I'm still the same in a sense— that I don't see people the worst in people. I see people for their struggles and how they have come out of it. Admittedly, when I was a kid, I was much more of a pushover and accepted everyone; people saw that, and they took advantage of it.

I can remember days when my mom would bring me to school, when the streets were so calm and quiet, and the cool breeze brushed my hair across my cheeks. Yet no one would ever know what I was going through within the walls of that school. There were days that I wouldn't even eat in the cafeteria. I would take my food and sit on top of the radiator that was tucked behind the rows of stalls in the bathroom. I felt so big, being able to climb on top of the radiator—I would perch myself between it and the window. Finding a 45-minute heaven for myself, away from all those people who claimed to be helping me. These 45 minutes allowed me to escape the names they gave me. This time allowed me to forget what bullying was doing to me.

Bullying is an academic epidemic and it is constantly spreading. A study “involving more than 15,000 U.S. students...found that 17 percent of students reporting have been bullied... more often during the school year” (American Psychological Association). And it is not just spreading through the victims. The individuals who are the direct cause of bullying are also growing in number. As technology advances, the ways to hurt and mistreat people advance with it, allowing this virus to spread, allowing people to hide behind a text—words that, to them, hold no meaning. Their harsh, thoughtless phrases created on impulse. These thoughtless words may then become the backbone to a child's development. One article stated that “The long-lasting psychological impacts stem directly from the short-term impacts that children experience as the result of being constantly bullied” (Steele). This same article goes further into the aftermath of bullying, stating that a victim of bullying could potentially cause a battle in which normal life activities become taboo. It can force people into a state of constant self-doubt, where it makes it seemingly impossible for these victims to even maintain a healthy relationship (Steele).

Most kids are shaded from the brutal truth of reality, and then suddenly go into school, where the cover of a parent's wing is lifted. This is where my story begins. It begins in the same place where I started to understand who I was. This story is the one that has been told a million times and each time I tell it, someone else is also telling it to another person. This is how I became trapped in a belief—this is when I was bullied.

Growing up, I was fixed into the idea that I wasn't worth the time to be fixed— that I was born too broken to fix. All that was pent up in a three-foot, two-inch child. At the age of five, those who bullied me had laid down the groundwork. First, came a cement layer of harsh words—I quickly became mute, unable to speak up for myself; this broke the connection I had to myself. Then, came the bricks to weigh me down into the bullies' belief of who I was, knocking out any ideas or opinions I had. Then it repeated: cement, bricks, cement, bricks, until it became like clockwork. They built a house so high, I didn't think I could find a way out. As a child growing up, I felt like a house in progress, never complete and never good enough to be presented. Things did not seem to work themselves out; the words got harsher and the phrases got longer. Ultimately, school was the last place I wanted to be.

They believed that I was a failure and in turn I developed the same belief. You see, that's the destructive nature of beliefs, they hold the power to tear a person apart, just as they share the power to bring many together. Beliefs are what eternally change us. My belief was that those who bullied me knew me better, and they "made" me into who I was. At a young age, I stopped caring about success. I'm not saying I stopped dreaming, I'm saying that that's all I believed it was—just a dream, something I created to make myself feel safe. Everywhere I went, I dragged this house around with me, for it was the only home I truly knew.

I found the house they built everywhere I went. Everywhere I looked, the house the bullies built was there. To this day I can see it in pictures from my childhood. Distilled into a moment: fear locked into their beliefs. In pictures of my birthdays or school events, I could see the fear in my eyes, as well as in the eyes of those children, those who I called my "friends." I only realized years later that this house was built into each of those kids as well; the ones who built the homes were also victims along with me. Yet no one could have guessed. Our gleaming smiles kept our parents happy, the school board unaware, and, more importantly, allowed us to open our mouths but still be silent. There is a concept known as the Looking Glass Theory: "The looking-glass self is a social psychological concept stating that a person's self grows out of society's interpersonal interactions and the perceptions of others"<sup>1</sup> (Boundless). Simply, the bullies thought that we were meant to act a certain way, and so we did. The beliefs sunk into our skins.

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<sup>1</sup> "In 1902, Charles Horton Cooley created the concept of the looking-glass self, which explored how identity is formed"

I must admit—I was one of the lucky ones. I was allowed a freedom, almost as though it was granted to me. I was given a family. One that listened. One that I made, by keeping the people who loved me close to me. I was lucky enough to find people who didn't have to go through the same exact thing as me to understand. I surrounded myself with these people, day in and day out, they motivated me into become something more. They listened and from this, I learned who I was. I wasn't a basket case. I wasn't someone to be forgotten. I wasn't an empty vessel that couldn't be filled. I was a building in progress—one that needed to be demolished and rebuilt. During this time, I learned to stop trying to be someone I wasn't, and started to become someone that the bullies did not know. I became proud of who I had become, challenging the belief of "you're not good enough" made me realize that I was more than just "good enough." I started to work more at who I was as an individual, becoming someone who could, and, honestly, would be able to do anything. My battle isn't over and I know that, but surrounding myself with people who simply love me is a step in the right direction.

My motif was this: the sleeves of books mean nothing until the book is opened. You have to roll up the sleeves in order to see one's scars; you have to open your eyes, for there are people all over with a story. My mantra is to learn their stories. Being bullied and feeling silenced taught me how to listen—not just hear. I am able to understand that someone's hurt runs deeper than what their mouth can say. Being bullied forced me to understand that everyone has a story, and everyone wants to tell it. I found friends who want to listen to the thoughts that flow out of my mind. My experience has allowed me to let other people leave a piece of themselves with me; I have come to believe that in learning about other people, I have found an open door to a balcony where I can watch the stories of the stars unfold. I have found my escape.

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# In Mourning for Loss

Irina Mashuryan

In 1991, our country ceased to exist. Why and how this happened, no one then understood. Large, rich and well armed, the USSR had been heading for a "bright future," but it disappeared in one day.

In J. D. Vance's *Hillbilly Elogy: A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis*, he describes his life and the history of people who have surrounded him since childhood. He examines the "crisis of culture" in the Appalachian community and the difficulties that he faced personally. His book covers three generations, beginning with his grandmother and grandfather, continuing with his mother's generation, and then, his own. He describes two types of Appalachian people: one group who believes in hard work and never give up, for example his grandmother, and others who do not take responsibility for their own actions. He skillfully interweaves historical facts and scientific research in the narrative to show the depth of the cultural crisis. My country also has the experience of going through a crisis or, I would even say the death of culture. Economic decline, the loss of work, and more importantly, the idea of socialism, led to a psychological transformation of the Soviet people. Many people could not stand these changes. They lost faith in themselves. The destruction of the economy leads to a cultural crisis and a loss of motivation in life and work.

At the heart of both of these crises lies the economic decline that the working class has encountered because of the closure of industrial enterprises and businesses. Vance describes this by comparing the center of Middletown in the past and in its present state:

In the 1980s, Middletown had a proud, almost idyllic downtown: a bustling shopping center, restaurants that had operated since before World War II... and a few bars where men like Papaw would gather and have a beer (or many) after a hard day at the steel mill. My favorite store was the local Kmart, which was the main attraction in a strip mall, near a branch of Dillman's—a local grocer with three or four locations. Now the strip mall is mostly bare: Kmart stands empty, and the Dillman family closed that big store and all the rest, too. The last I checked, there was only an Arby's, a discount grocery store, and a Chinese buffet in what was once a Middletown center of commerce. The scene at that strip mall is hardly uncommon. Few Middletown businesses are doing well, and many have ceased operating altogether. Twenty years ago, there were two local malls. Now one of those malls is a parking lot, and the other serves as a walking course for the elderly (though it still has a few stores). (46)

We see how much love and pride Vance puts into his description of the city in the past. In this city, after hard work, you could get a blessed rest in bars and buy whatever you needed in different stores within two malls. He sadly talks about the closing down of big stores, which means that there were no more people who could afford to go there. We can understand how much disappointment he feels when describing the places of his childhood that have disappeared forever.

I can understand Vance's feelings—the feelings that emerge when you see that what you loved has died—because my family has experienced events that are very similar to what he describes. Only with us, it happened in a shorter period and the economic decline caught us off guard. My parents, like other people of the Soviet Union, could not believe it at first, and then they seemed to plunge into some kind of trance, in mourning a lost country. They worked their whole lives honestly for the sake of a "bright future," and then one day, this future was taken away from them, stolen, and there is nobody to ask and no one responsible for their loss.

My father was a military engineer for the Ministry of Internal Affairs. He was always well organized, confident in himself, and I thought he could do absolutely everything. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, even he lost faith in state power and looked forward to the day when he could retire and only have to deal with the affairs of his family, the only reliable union in life. My mother worked as an engineer in a technology bureau, which carried out various orders for Soviet industry. Naturally, with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the organization of the new state of the Republic of Uzbekistan, there were no orders and the bureau was closed.

My mom's bureau was not the only company that closed. In the Soviet Union, there was an industrial complex in which all factories were interconnected. For example, steel for machine building was supplied by Russia, cotton for the textile industry by Uzbekistan, grain and flour for the food industry by the Ukraine and Kazakhstan. All these connections were destroyed in one day; many manufactories went bankrupt, and those that remained were on the verge of bankruptcy. In addition to the factories and enterprises, all other establishments also began to decline. Educational institutions, sports centers, theaters, were as if suspended because they all acted in accordance with communistic ideology, and now this ideology was recognized as incorrect, and the new one was not yet there.

Ordinary people lost everything they believed in and lost confidence in the state, which had previously claimed that the public is more important than the personal. All Soviet people worked for the good of society and put the welfare of the country ahead of personal well-being. Then, the opposite occurred: people ceased to be so actively interested in public affairs, and many people lowered their expectations to meeting their basic physical needs such as food, home, and clothes. People realized that they had no influence on the state, that all decisions had been taken and would be taken without them. The lack of opportunity to change anything has led to a lack of responsibility for people for anything other than their own individual lives; many have lost this responsibility too.



One of my neighbors was a very successful woman in Soviet times. She worked at the Higher School of the Communist Party, was well provided for and always looked good. The workers of the party schools were a kind of elite of the Soviet Union. They often received trade-union trips to resorts, deficit goods, and were the first to know the important news. Her life was almost cloudless, except that she did not have a family and children, but she was not particularly worried about it as her work was the main focus of her life. After the collapse of the union, like all party workers, she was left without work and without any of the benefits to which she was accustomed. Since she was a convinced communist, she refused to work for the enemy, for the capitalists, as she thought that it was below her dignity. Only now, she considered everyone to be capitalists. Having no income and unable to withstand such changes in her life, she began to drink alcohol. Gradually, she began selling off all her valuables and ended up selling her apartment and left to an unknown destination. Many neighbors were happy about this because she was constantly drunk and often yelled at the whole neighborhood calling all of them scum and traitors who sold themselves to the West. But some regretted what had happened to her, because they remembered her as honest, constantly fighting for justice for all, and helping people. She was always a maximalist and not only losing her job, but witnessing the mockery of the ideas she believed in, made her absolutely indifferent to her own life.

Vance shows the reasons for the lack of agency among the poor people of Appalachia. He asks questions for which the answers are complex. Describing two books on social policy and the working poor that had resonated with him, he writes,

Though insightful, neither of these books fully answered the questions that plagued me: Why didn't our neighbor leave that abusive man? Why did she spend her money on drugs? Why couldn't she see that her behavior was destroying her daughter? Why were all of these things happening not just to our neighbor but to my mom? It would be years before I learned that no single book, or expert, or field could fully explain the problems of hillbillies in modern America. Our elegy is a sociological one, yes, but it is also about psychology and community and culture and faith. (145)

Degradation among relatives, acquaintances, and neighbors prompted Vance to write a book about it. He wanted to show by personal example that survival and growth are possible even in such a difficult economic situation and during a crisis. But a condition for this survival is that there must be at least one person (for him it was his grandmother) who will love, care about you, and teach you how to manage life. Many Appalachians did not have such a person. When Vance asks all these questions, he does not provide answers. The answers are not in one or more paragraphs, but are the main motive of his book. I think that the answer lies in the problem of economic failure for many generations of Appalachian people, which resulted in the loss of motivation in life and work.

We see from Vance's book how generation after generation tried to get out of poverty, yet not many succeeded, especially from Vance's generation. Therefore, most surrendered and live without thinking about the future.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, many former Soviet people also began to live one day at a time with no thought for the future. The main problem for them was the provision of food, clothing, and shoes as everything was in short supply. In addition, many lost their jobs and it is not surprising that after so many losses there were many alcoholics and drug addicts. People tried to escape from reality. Union laws no longer functioned, crime flourished. In such conditions, the older generation proved to be the strongest; younger people could not stand it. Out of ten friends who were neighbors and whom I had known from childhood, three died from drugs, and one barely survived after an overdose. Two others went to prison after being caught by the police in a highly drunk state and signing for crimes that they did not commit. The police at that time were more concerned with improving their statistics than on justice. Many of them took bribes for closing cases if relatives could pay. I do not know the official statistics, but I think that we lost more than 50% of my generation. Some of their parents became chronic alcoholics or stopped taking care of their children or themselves. The main reason for this behavior was the loss of motivation necessary for life and work. For many people, with the collapse of the USSR, life had stopped.

I remember the story of my neighbors, who were quite happy, an intelligent family before the collapse of the USSR. The father and mother worked in the main theater of the city of Tashkent, the capital of the Republic of Uzbekistan, which was one of the three leading theaters in the USSR. He worked as a director; she was a Human Resources Officer. They had a very clever and well-read son, and he had high hopes for the future. When the union broke up, they both lost their jobs, or rather they were still among the theater employees, but there was no work as performances were closed, and there were no salaries either. They began to live off of temporary jobs, and they did not even have enough for the essentials. The father began to drink a little, then every day. The mother tried to persuade him to stop, then gave up and started drinking with him. It is not surprising that seeing his parents drink, their son began to join them. At first, he drank alcohol with them. Then, someone "treated" him with drugs. He could not return to normal life anymore. When I saw him for the last time, he told me, "You are very lucky," meaning my sister and me, "you did not get into the swamp, and I was sucked in." In 2010 or 2011, I found out that he had died. Teenagers who are just starting their lives are losing every chance for a future if their parents lose their responsibility. Parents no longer see any opportunity to get out of the situation in which they were driven. Alcohol and drugs are ways of avoiding the reality that one cannot endure. If this becomes a mass phenomenon, we must ask ourselves questions about the real causes of these events.

Many studies focus on how individual people lose responsibility and become addicted to alcohol or drugs, but no research focuses on what happens when a state gives up their obligation. Vance's book shows the first but does not show the second, the main reason. The economic crisis in a country or in a

certain region is always a mistake of the leadership and, unfortunately, no one takes responsibility for such mistakes. Economic recession always leads to cultural decline, and mass loss of motivation is a symbol of irresponsible management. For example, the steel industry became unprofitable in the USA, as in the case of Armco, due to the fact that the owners did not switch to modern technology in a timely fashion and therefore lost in competition with other countries. They simply sold everything possible, leaving their workers, their families and entire cities to die. In the Soviet Union, the elite (formed from communist leaders) were unwilling to work on restoring the economy, and dissatisfied with the limitations of the socialist society, they decided to share the "union pie" among themselves, leaving the people to their fate.

Perhaps, despite all the achievements of world democracy, large enterprises and monopolies that make mistakes in management begin to act for the benefit of ordinary people only under strong pressure. Unfortunately, in America and in the USSR, there were not such forces that would cause those responsible for an economic decline to correct their mistakes.

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# Bent But Not Broken: A Case Study

Bethany Vazquez

## **Biography**

The person I decided to interview is Georgina. Georgina was born in Ponce, Puerto Rico in the 1940s into an upper middle class, Roman Catholic family. Georgina has five siblings and was raised with both her mother and father. While reading, you should note that all identifying information has been changed to protect the identity of the participant and her family. Georgina comes from a wealthy Puerto Rican family and grew up with financial stability. However, Puerto Rico in the 1950s was extremely oppressive towards Puerto Rico's darker-skinned residents. Georgina and her siblings were all fairly darker in skin tone.

Georgina lived in a wealthy neighborhood with fair-skinned residents; having this minute difference in complexion from her community meant that she and her siblings had to deal with racism. Many neighborhoods and shops would deny access to her and her siblings, and they would be followed, ridiculed, and verbally abused. Georgina stated that she and her sister Rose had objects thrown at their heads while walking home from school one afternoon.

Throughout all the oppression that Georgina went through, she managed to meet her soulmate. He was 17 while she was 14, and Georgina was clear that their love was forbidden. Her soulmate was a next door neighbor, and through secret meetings and his charm she managed to fall in love. At 16, Georgina married him and because she was so young, she was exiled from most of her immediate family. She and her husband moved to the South Bronx. Two years later, she gave birth to her first child, José; the couple then had two daughters.

A definitive part of Georgina's life was when she had a miscarriage in 1973. Georgina was a very religious person and this was the first instance that made her question her faith. She couldn't understand why this would happen when her faith in God was so strong. The doctors also discovered a small mass in her uterus. After a biopsy, the doctors found it was early stage uterine cancer, and performed a hysterectomy on Georgina at the age of 27. This was a very dark time for Georgina, and her husband did not take it well. He became verbally abusive, which ultimately led to physical abuse. Georgina felt trapped as she noticed her husband was becoming more verbally abusive towards their children. As a woman who knew very little English, had very little education, and truly nowhere else to go, Georgina felt scared and confused. Georgina told me that even though this was one of the darkest times in her life, her faith and beliefs helped her persevere.

In July of 1978, Georgina's husband was shot right in front of their apartment building. The most traumatizing factor of this event was that he was

shot directly in front of their kids. The children had to undergo many years of extensive therapy to move past seeing the death of their father. Georgina also had to move past many hurdles. She quickly learned English, and she entered a trade school and became an accountant so she could provide for her family. Her love life flourished, as she entered the dating pool for the first time. In 1984, Georgina remarried and then divorced in 1990. She told me that she rushed into this marriage to feel “complete” again. Georgina noticed her new marriage going the way of the old marriage with constant verbal abuse. Georgina realized she was now a skilled, independent woman and no longer needed a man to feel complete or safe. While the marriage to her second husband did not last romantically, they remain close friends. Georgina has not remarried since. At 48, Georgina took an early retirement due to a heart attack. As Georgina grows older, she deals with many serious medical conditions both physiologically and mentally.

### **Story**

When prompted for a story, Georgina became very somber and quiet before saying anything. She told me that she wanted to tell a story that would help her relieve some of the guilt she has held her whole life. Georgina began to discuss her sexual abuse by an uncle when she was eight. Georgina stated that the abuse happened when her parents would allow him to babysit when her parents worked late. He would wait for her to get ready to shower for bed, and during that time he would make his attempts on her. Georgina went through this until she was 14 years old. Georgina said that she never said anything because she was afraid of getting in trouble. A young girl and her “purity” was a big deal during that era, so she didn’t want to be deemed a “puta” or “whore.” She also stated that her abuser was very well trusted in the community, and was the source of the family wealth because he helped create multiple businesses within the community.

Georgina said that he abused all of her sisters during that six-year span. Georgina stated that this was her biggest regret: she felt that since she was the oldest, she should have done something to protect her sisters. She felt like there was no escape from the abuse and things would never get better. Georgina said that she never told her parents fearing that she would be reprimanded for not being a virgin. As she reflects on her life, she feels that nothing would have changed if she had said something about the abuse. The abuser provided so much wealth for so many that her story would have done nothing but shine a negative light onto her family. God was used as a mask to shield people from things they didn’t want to see or experience. Georgina states that her faith is still strong in God, but her belief is different from that of her parents. She states that God allowed her the will to get out of that situation and made her the woman she is. God also allowed her to forgive the abuser in order to move on with her life. She no longer has to live in fear because of her strong faith and the belief that God had a plan for her.

When Georgina and her sisters got older they discussed all the things that happened to them during that period of life. The meeting was an eye opening

experience because she discovered they all felt guilty for what happened to them. Each and every sister felt like they could have prevented or stopped the abuse in some way. And although all her sisters shared this horrid experience none of them had spoken about the abuse. Georgina told her sisters about her suicidal thoughts and discovered she wasn't alone. She told me that she was astonished that all her sisters felt the same way. Georgina said that if she had taken her life, she couldn't imagine how that would have affected the trajectory of her sisters' lives.

I asked Georgina if she could remove that part of her past, would she? She said that she wasn't sure that she would. Georgina was clear that although this experience was traumatic and caused her so much heartache, that incident led her to be the woman she is today. At 14, while trying to leave the house to avoid her uncle she met her future husband. Without that incident she would have never found her "soulmate" or have any of her children. Georgina also mentioned that because of her experience, her faith is stronger than ever.

### **Personality Analysis**

When assessing Georgina's life, Freud's view on psychoanalysis gives an interesting perspective on how her experiences affected her life. Freud believed that many of your childhood memories and your unconscious mind mold you into who you will become in your adult life, and in many aspects this is true for Georgina. Many of the traumatic experiences Georgina had as a child had a profound impact on her adult life, whether she was conscious of the event or not.

Many of the decisions Georgina made in her lifetime reveal aspects of her personality and mind that directly correlate with some of her life's occurrences. A great example of how Georgina's experiences have affected her life directly is her marriage. In Georgina's childhood, she was molested by an older man who was trusted by her family and community. She was fearful that her family would discover the incident and kept quiet. According to Freud, this incident would've been pushed into her unconscious mind. The unconscious mind can make a person make irrational decisions because it allows the id part of the personality to take control. An example of this would be a 16-year old girl getting married to a 19-year old (whom her family despised) and moving to New York, instead of dealing with the abuse she suffered from an older man who was loved by the community. This is exactly what Georgina did. She never admitted what happened to her, thus letting her instinct speak for her. She permanently escaped the abuse without ever having to face the issue head on. As a survivor of sexual abuse, Georgina had to deal with many battles between her id, ego, and superego early on in her childhood. Since Georgina was the oldest, she always felt her duty was to be the most responsible and to handle the situation. Georgina's conscience gave her immense guilt for not going into action. Georgina's superego was the reason for all those thoughts. Deep down, Georgina truly wanted to hurt her abuser and tell everyone what he did to her and her sisters. Georgina wanted to take matters into her own hands and make sure he

couldn't hurt anyone again; she was willing to do anything. Georgina's id was on full display during those emotions. Ultimately, Georgina decided not to take the risk and kept her mouth shut. Although that wasn't an easy decision, she felt that at the end of the day her choice would benefit her and her sisters the most. Georgina wanted to be sure that change would happen, and exposing the abuser couldn't guarantee that. Georgina's ego allowed her to make these rational, but tough, decisions.

Georgina also displays many of Freud's ego defense mechanisms. Georgina suffered a lot of heart-wrenching trauma in her life, and ego defense mechanisms helped protect her emotions. An example of a defense mechanism in action is, once again, her marriage. As a person who suffered severe physical and psychological trauma as a child, Georgina decided to repress what happened to her and attempt to move forward with her life. Instead of dwelling on her difficult past, she tried to escape the situation altogether and get married.

Another example of Georgina's defense mechanisms in play happened after her husband's death. Instead of allowing herself to grieve, she immediately went into "mom" mode. Since her children were witnesses to their father's murder, she made sure they were psychologically taken care of. Georgina also immediately began to learn English, and went back to school to get a financially stable career and support her family. Georgina even went as far as dating and attempting to find love again. When Georgina eventually was able to get her family life settled, and remarry, she realized she married someone who was just as abusive as her first husband. She found all these socially acceptable ways to mask her emotions and ended up being in a similar, unhappy marriage once again.

When talking to a person like Georgina you can't help but remain in awe of the wisdom she displays. Together we discussed many of the difficult and trying times of her life, and she displayed nothing but poise and strength when discussing those experiences. Georgina and I laughed, cried, and reflected in order to understand her and her story better. Allowing yourself to hear another person's life story truly is the best way to understand someone as a whole and is significant to understanding how they live their life.

# I Let Go of My Ego and Mastered the Art of Cooking

Evans Tekper Martey

Cooking was a woman's chore growing up in the nineties in Ghana, West Africa; I still consider those days as dark times. It was the duty of the man to endure the labor of work to provide food and shelter for the family. The majority of the labor included being a farmer, factory worker, miner etc. The woman's sole purpose was to take care of the house, do the chores, and most importantly put delicious food on the table.

A typical day in a man's life involved waking up to a good breakfast, having his bed made and his lunch ready to take to work. That same day ended with a palatable dinner waiting for him upon his arrival. Whether you were rich or poor, the woman played the same role: they waited on you like you were a king. A few rich families had the luxury to hire maids to cater to their every need, but still the kitchen was no place for a man, for the maids were still all females. That had been the mentality for over thousands of years; this was what I witnessed growing up, and I had gotten accustomed to it.

One lovely afternoon, I was summoned to the kitchen by my mom, which was very unusual. On my march to meet my fate, I thought of countless things I had done wrong that week, all of which definitely deserved an ass whooping. I knew for sure there was no way I was getting out of this one. Upon arriving in the kitchen, I was surprised not to see a cane in my mom's hands, which is usually the weapon of choice for all African parents. Since some parents with hot tempers are known to grab utensils and beat their kids, I knew for sure the coast wasn't clear yet.

My mom sternly looked me in the face and said, "My son, today I will teach you how to cook." Within 20 seconds, a million thoughts went through my head. One, why would my mom want to place such a demeaning job on her first born? Two, the kitchen is no place for a man. Moreover, I doubted I was going to be able to cook.

Men are known not to have fear; these are words that had been whispered to me during childhood. This idea helped condition me to be one of the most fearless in my community. When I went hunting for rabbits with my younger siblings, it was the notion that fear doesn't exist that made me step in and scare away the hyenas when they closed in on our hunting ground. I still did not understand why learning how to cook was crippling me with fear; maybe it was the thought I would lose the respect of my friends and peers once they found out about my activities in the kitchen.



It's true when they say a mother can read her child's thoughts like a printout; she definitely saw the look on my face and smiled. She said, "My son, I know what you are thinking, but rest assured that things are going to change. A time will come when a woman's place will no longer be in the kitchen. There is a foreseeable future where we will both be equals, sharing the same responsibilities and, in some instances, the woman will be the bread winner of the family." I dared not call my mom crazy (nor did I want to believe she had acquired some form of sorcery to see into the future), but she sure sounded like she was on some medication.

It wasn't a skill I mastered overnight. I remember vividly it took me 30 minutes to chop a bulb of onion, whereas I had slaughtered a goat in 15 minutes. I went from doing heavy tasks with great precision to struggling with prepping simple ingredients like dicing tomatoes.

The first dish I made "Jollof Rice" wasn't so good—it was bitter and lacked salt. Although I put so much thought and mental energy into preparing this meal, the results bruised my ego. The fact that it didn't taste as good as my mom's meal wasn't the issue, but rather that it wasn't even comparable to any of the maids' cooking.

My instructor assured me I did everything right, and that the only missing ingredient was confidence. At that moment, I came to the conclusion my mom was probably drinking herbal tea from the wrong leaf. As days went on, she continued boosting my morale by whispering, "Repetition builds skills, skills builds confidence." With determination and guidance, my culinary skills developed greatly.

Twenty plus years later, I still vividly remember my first time in the kitchen. It's a memory I hold onto fondly and, weirdly, it puts a smile on my face whenever I cook a meal for my family and friends; the looks on their faces as they enjoy the food fills me with so much joy. They always ask where I learned how to cook and most of all they want to know how the meal is so delicious. Every time I whisper, "Repetition builds skills, skills builds confidence."

I'm glad I let go of my ego and mastered the art of cooking.

# Should have. Would have. Could have.

Jhehannah Perez

In the poem, "God's Early Church," Austin Hummell discusses the complications that can be associated with present and recovering drug addicts. The beginning of the poem focuses more on the addiction phase, when the narrator voluntarily opts to be inside rather than out in the world where the sun is brightly shining. His priorities are questionable because even though he was left by what seems to be his significant other, he still continued to do what drove everyone away. He chooses to stay in the dark, rather than live the life that he was given, which ultimately leads to many consequences, both emotional and physical. "God's Early Church" is a poem that exhibits both the inner and outer struggles that drug addicts and recovering addicts may face.

The structural setup of the poem is quite simple. In total, there are twelve lines, and two stanzas with no obvious rhyme scheme. The way that the words are separated into stanzas plays an important role in the creation of the poem. In the first stanza, the readers can distinguish it as the part of the poem pertaining to more of the external effects that the drugs have on its user. An example of an external effect would be when the narrator says, "Once, a girl from Carolina left me for dead" (2-4). This girl, who can be assumed to be his significant other, has become so tired of his drug addiction that she chooses to leave him because his ways are too toxic for her. Her departure from the narrator's life shows the way drug addiction can take a toll on the people around you. Another example of an external effect is when the narrator says, "Whole months pass without sun" (1). It can be implied that he spends a majority of his days inside in the dark, letting precious time slip away, creating another reasonable factor as to why his significant other left him. His cavalier behavior towards his loved one and failure to prioritize her shows that he is not of sound mind.

The second stanza consists more of the internal and emotional aspects of being a drug addict. When the narrator says, "Years of that until the windows were full/ of a juice called methadone designed I guess to sweep the streets of me. I weighed myself down/ with coats of it," (8-11) the word methadone automatically stands out. Methadone is a drug that helps make breaking the addiction to drugs a little less difficult. The speaker in the poem seems to be taking a whole lot of it, which shows that he is trying to quit doing drugs. Unfortunately, it is too late, being that he lost those who are important to him and is too far in the addiction phase; as he indicates, it has been "years." The narrator also mentions that he can hear voices in his head that he is profusely trying to

“unplug.” The voices that he hears can be linked to the withdrawal period with which recovering drug addicts struggle.

Austin Hummell helps the reader perceive the poem’s central idea more clearly by emphasizing certain points using some aspects of figurative language. Hummell uses both metonymy and apostrophe. Metonymy is used when the narrator says, “I lanced them both with flowers from another country.” The word “flowers” is used in substitution for the word drugs because the majority of drugs are made from plants. The purpose of metonymy in this instance is to somehow humanize the drug. As if describing the drug as a flower will reduce the perception of the drug being evil because we know flowers to be something beautiful. The purpose of this is to show that addicts have clouded judgment and don’t really grasp how harmful using these substances is. Addicts view the drugs as something beautiful because drugs make them feel euphoria, and, due to this, it is grueling to get rid of the addiction. Another form of figurative language that Hummel uses is apostrophe. This is used when the narrator says, “You should have seen it.” The purpose of this is to emphasize the fact that he is truly all alone. This line shows that he is talking to nothing and may even be emotionally unstable due to the lack of human interaction. Hummell’s wordplay by utilizing the word “should” builds on the idea that there may be a part of him that regrets the past decisions he has made. Hummell’s use of this specific figurative language allows the readers to connect back to the idea that drugs can end up controlling its users’ lives.

As these points demonstrate, Austin Hummell attempts to portray the effects that drugs can have on an individual’s life: the way that drugs can drive away those who are most important in your life because of how much of a different person you have become, or the way that even when you are determined to stop, it will be too late—too late to turn back and make up for the lost time because you are too far down that path. Hummell’s use of structure and figurative language allows readers to really think about a line in depth, making “God’s Early Church” a poem that can be really meaningful to those who know or are drug addicts.

# *Crash*

## Shelly Ann Dwarika

The movie *Crash* depicts the lives of various individuals from divergent socio-economic classes who have life changing experiences between their conflicting prejudices and stereotypes.

To begin with, I can personally relate with the role of the immigrants in this movie. When I came to the U.S. my first job was a nanny position. I worked for some wealthy white people. My boss didn't know my background, but her assumption was that I came from a poor, uneducated country. She once asked me, "Shelly, did you ever go to school in Trinidad?" I said to her, "Of course I did." Little did she know that my parents made sure that my siblings and I went to school. My father firmly believed in educating all of his children, whether you were a boy or a girl. He believed that every child should be educated equally. I worked for those people for three years because I had no choice. As a single parent I had to provide a stable environment for my son. My boss constantly made me feel that I was never going to make it in this country. At times, I felt as if I wasted time coming to the U.S. As time went by, I quit my job. I couldn't handle someone constantly trying to put me down. It was the best decision that I have ever made. I went through many struggles in this country, but with faith and perseverance I am still standing strong. My son is all grown up now. We both attend the same college and we are pursuing the same major. This shows that "With God in your life, everything is possible."

In one of the scenes in *Crash*, a Black male and female couple is driving a car similar to the one that is stolen in the earlier scenes. It is obvious by the license plates that the car isn't stolen. Even so, Ryan, the racist cop, pulls the vehicle over regardless of the situation. He pats the couple down; however, while patting the woman down, he molests her right in front of her husband. The husband stands there helplessly. The husband feels terrible, even though he knows that he can't stop the cop because he would be accused of assaulting an officer. This scene demonstrates how the couple was treated unjustly by the racist cop due to their race. Another scene that depicts racism and stereotypes is when Jean, a privileged white woman, is having an argument with her husband right after their car was stolen at gunpoint. Jean is upset because prior to the attack she and her husband were walking to their car when she spotted two Black males. She tightens her grip on her husband's arms, insinuating fear of the Black males. Due to the hijacking, Jean and her husband have the locks changed in their house by a Hispanic male. While the locks are being changed, Jean continues her argument by stating that since the locks are changed by a gang member with a shaved head and his pants around his ankles, he will probably go sell the keys to his "gangbanger" friends. These scenes in the movie are very important because they depict racism.

*Crash* has personally changed my perception of how I view people from different races and other cultures because “we’re always behind a metal glass.” I think that we miss that touch so much that we crash into one another just to feel something. *Crash* is a mirror and reflection of who we are as individuals. The way to learn from and relate respectfully to people of different cultures is by being culturally responsive. Being culturally responsive requires openness to the viewpoints, thoughts and experiences of others. This is not about changing others to be more like you. Instead, it is about exploring and honoring the differences of others. Lastly, I try to remember we all share the same world, regardless of our differences; this world belongs to us all. To be tolerant is to welcome those differences and even delight in them. *Crash* is an amazing film. I will definitely recommend this movie to my friends and family because it is one of the most thought-provoking film I have ever seen about prejudice. It is an ideal film to use in educational programs. *Crash* is able to make you face the stereotypes that are amongst the environment and community.

In conclusion, *Crash* is not only a movie which follows the “in your face tradition,” but is also a movie which emphasizes the significance of the recognition of the “human being” instead of the recognition of the “other.”

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# Enough is Enough

Jennifer Delgado

After giving birth to my son, I returned to work to a few surprises. I was employed by an import/export company. The company made children's book bags imported from China. I was a sales assistant and my job required a lot of follow up with sales orders, design, production, and warehousing. I worked on the computer all day. I would remain working with the same sales executives I had been assisting for the last five years. Since I was last employed there, the company had hired a new sales manager. I was told I would be working with him very closely. Under him, I now had more responsibility; for example, I would manage larger accounts, ones that required me to be very detail oriented. My co-workers warned me about the new sales manager: "He is very arrogant, and a very difficult person to work with." I was told, "Just be careful." My guard was up, but I gave him the benefit of the doubt.

My office was located at 33<sup>rd</sup> Street in Manhattan across from the Empire State Building. The energy in the area was always uplifting and motivating, people talking business while on their cigarette breaks, tourists taking pictures of the skyscrapers, workers buying Starbucks at the corner, and, at night, the lights of the Empire State shining brightly in different colors. It was, unfortunately, also were I once witnessed a man jump off the Empire State Building. His leg landed a few feet away from my building.

Upon entering our office you would see beautiful showrooms with a sea of book bags. Most of the bags had either a cartoon character or some kind of superhero printed on them. I worked out of a cubicle covered with mountains of papers, large binders, coffee, food, cigarettes, shoes, extra clothing and a cell phone. There was no time for breaks due to the amount of work— I lived out of my cubicle.

The extra responsibility I was given was good experience for me. I learned a lot of new skills, especially when I traveled to different cities to learn computer systems for retailers. The systems were needed to set up items in a database, almost like a tracking system. I was involved with working with the buyers directly. I was a liaison between the sales team and the other departments within the company.

While I was very grateful for the opportunities life was giving me, I had a baby that I needed to take care of, and always found myself in a rush. I recall being challenged every day between completing my work and picking up my son by 6:00 p.m. every night from daycare. I was often late to pick him up because of being held up at work by my manager. I felt he was doing it on purpose. Everything started to become stressful, and I was always in a state of worry.

I began to notice the sales manager was very inconsiderate towards my

situation regarding my child. He would give me last minute work. There would never be enough time to complete the task. In addition, his behavior started to become inconsistent. I did not know what to expect anymore. He began to open up to me about his love for wine. In my opinion, the love was excessive and the discussion was creepy. I acted interested because he was my boss. The smell of alcohol reeked out of the pores of this man, and he was often sleeping at his desk. His attitude and mood were very unpredictable due to his drinking. Some days he was your best friend and other days he didn't want to hear anyone else talk but himself. He would shout at me and the owners of the company. His favorite line was, "I have been doing this for a long time and all of you are still wet behind the ears." He often forgot what he said, which led to conflict because he would always turn around and say I was not listening when he gave instructions. He preferably would do this in front of the bosses to make me look bad. It was not me, however. I had done nothing.

I began to feel a lot of frustration and I dreaded going to work every day. I took days off when my child was sick because I didn't have a nanny at home, and my child always comes first. On my days off, the sales manager would bad mouth me to the owners because of the time I missed from work. My coworkers shared with me what they had heard him saying to the owners. He recommended that they hire someone with no kids. I knew very well that was discrimination, but I let a lot slide because I had to support my family. I suggested to the president that he hire a new person to take some of the load off of me. I asked with a lot of conviction and the tone was that of someone who is fed up. "I am doing the job of four people; you know that and so do I." I went into detail about the amount of work I was doing. It was easier and cheaper for him to give me a raise than it was for him to give someone a new salary, but for me it was no longer about money. I needed help and it would be in the best interest of the company to get the help. That way I could hopefully get my sanity back.

My recommendation went unnoticed for a long time. As the company began to grow, I started to feel as if I was being taken advantage of. The owners were penny wise and dollar foolish. One day the sales manager's wife, who also had a drinking problem, came to the office to visit her husband. I had a conversation with him beforehand about how overwhelmed I was. I thought he would help make the situation better. Just wishful thinking, I guess. My cubicle was very close to his office and I could hear everything. He and his wife were making fun of the fact that I was overwhelmed. "How is she is overwhelmed?" he said, "I help her with everything." His wife responded with a chuckle, "She is overwhelmed, that is a joke." Being in that cubicle was a living nightmare at this point.

That is where I drew the line. I reported him to the owners at that very moment. I told the owner, "I am so sick of this fucking guy!" I had had enough, no more holding back, no more trying to get help, and no more asking for things nicely. I was pissed off to the point of no return. I no longer wanted to work there or even in the industry. As I expected, nothing was done about my report. I did not know what to do or where to turn for help. I needed my job, and I saw no

hope in sight. All I could think of was ways out of the situation. Not only was this man putting all of this work on me, he was trying to intimidate and belittle me at the same time. I never met someone so awful in my life. The old man was not going anywhere, and I knew it was either him or me.

I needed a change and an opportunity presented itself. A friend of mine knew a young attorney who was opening his firm. I interviewed and I got the job. With great pleasure I went into work and resigned. I stood my ground, and I let it be known that it's not OK to treat someone that way. I felt this weight and stress lift off of me immediately. It felt good standing up for myself, and I wouldn't change anything about the day I resigned. Finally I was able to move on. I worked for the attorney for three years, and I loved it. My boss encouraged me to finish school, and this is why I am here today, pursuing a degree in legal assistant studies at New York City College of Technology.



# Should Former Felons Have Their Voting Rights Restored?

Karina Herreros

The United States of America is portrayed as the land of dreams and opportunity; the first thing that comes to mind is the American Dream. People from many countries come to the U.S. seeking opportunities to provide for their families and give them a better life. The American Dream is seen as a utopia where people can live in a society that provides equal rights, freedom of speech (including voting rights), freedom of religion, better job opportunities, home ownership, and many more great things. In order for one to take advantage of these opportunities, one must either be a citizen or obtain citizenship. Citizenship is defined as the status of being a legal member of a particular country. A citizen can take complete advantage of all the social and political rights in that country. But what happens to a citizen's voting rights when he or she commits a crime? Are those rights taken away? Or does the felon keep them? This has been a controversial debate for many years: whether or not a felon should be able to vote. People who commit a crime shouldn't be disenfranchised. Those who committed a severe crime should be able to file a petition for the restoration of their voting rights as soon as they're liberated; while others, with less offensive crimes, should have their rights restored as soon as they are released from prison.

There are 28 states that take away a felon's voting rights until the completion of the sentence (in prison, parole, and probation). These include Arkansas, New York, California, Texas and many more. There are also certain states that only restore voting rights by government or court action, such as Florida, Alabama, and Iowa. If felon disenfranchisement were to prove that crime rates decrease, then more states would go for it.

"If the right to vote is as precious as felon advocates claim to believe it is, we should expect people to uphold at least some minimum moral standards in order to keep it—such as refraining from violating their fellow voters' own inalienable rights" (Feser 4). Edward Feser, author of "Felons Should Not Be Allowed to Vote," is very straightforward and bold when making this statement. He's trying to convey that if voting is a privilege, then there should be moral standards which make it a privilege, that way voting won't be devalued. Feser clarifies that disenfranchisement is *not* racist. He states that just because blacks make up a large percentage of the nation's prison population doesn't prove that racism is to blame. His view is that, sadly, they commit a number of crimes and therefore deserve punishment, which may lead to disenfranchisement no matter the race (Feser). Feser also claims that the right to vote is not inalienable, meaning that the right to vote can be taken away. He states that the right to vote is not basic nor inalienable in any legal sense, especially because there have been

laws for a long time pertaining to banning thieves, wrongdoers and murderers from voting. John Locke (one of the many influencers in the founding of America) believed that we can easily lose the rights that we have by “nature,” which include but are not limited to rights to life, liberty, and property. If someone violates another person’s rights to life, liberty, and property, society can automatically remove these rights from the offender. By removing these rights from the offender, society is depriving him of his role in electing his leader. By taking away one’s rights, we disenfranchise felons. Furthermore, if we do not give an ex-convict the right to vote, how will that help him turn over a new leaf? If felons aren’t disenfranchised and instead are given the chance to prove they’ve been completely rehabilitated and are ready to give back to their community, they would do so without a doubt.

In trying to make everything as just as possible, there are people who believe that disenfranchising ex-felons is not the answer. In “State Laws Should be Amended to Allow Ex-Felons to Vote,” Eric Holder makes many valid statements as to why former felons deserve to uphold and practice their right to vote. Holder was the first African American to ever serve as an Attorney General for the U.S. (2009-2015). He argues that the Republic has been held together by its legal system, and thus its values have endured (equality, opportunity, and justice under the law). Holder goes on to argue his main point—that the criminal justice system isn’t a partisan issue and should be concerned with providing legal professionals and law enforcement leaders with 21<sup>st</sup> century solutions to 21<sup>st</sup> century challenges. “It’s about shaping a system that deters and punishes crime, keeps us safe, and ensures that those who pay their debts have the chance to become productive citizens,” says Holder. However, how can they become productive citizens if, once being freed from prison, it is hard for them to reintegrate themselves into society? In today’s society, it is said that roughly 5.8 million Americans are denied the right to vote due to a current or previous felony conviction (Lee). Former Attorney Holder also says, “There is no rational reason to take away someone’s voting rights for life just because they’ve committed a crime, especially after they’ve completed their sentence and made amends.” As a matter of fact, there is evidence suggesting that former felons whose voting rights have been restored, are less likely to go back to prison.

Despite the fact that there are people who believe that race does *not* play a role in disenfranchisement, history proves otherwise. Ever since the “beginning of America,” there has always been that superior-inferior relationship between white people and people of color. White people would do anything in order to stay superior to blacks or other minorities. According to a Leadership Conference article, “Beginning around the end of Reconstruction—about 1870—many southern states significantly broadened felony disenfranchisement and began focusing on crimes believed to be disproportionately committed by African Americans.” This shows that white people were on the constant lookout to see if they could frame a Black person. People of color face these unjust disenfranchisements more than white people do. Race shouldn’t be a factor that

determines whether or not one deserves a second chance in life, just as much as one's past shouldn't depict who one is now.

Isn't going to jail supposed to rehabilitate a person, so that once he or she has completed the sentence he or she can easily reenter society? When the felon is released, he or she continues facing obstacles, such as searching for a job, and finding a place to live. If former felons are already facing obstacles, why make it even harder by not letting them vote? Based on several accounts, former felons are really struggling to return to society. For example, Eric Bates told Huffington Post, "I owned up to my crime. I served my time and I just want my rights back, I want to participate. But it's just as well as if I murdered somebody. It's a life sentence." Bates lives in Virginia, a state in which before 2016, one needed to file a petition for his or her voting rights. Not to mention that the fee for this petition was about \$3000. Where was Bates going to get the money from if he couldn't find a job because of his criminal record? Bates began seeing himself as a second class citizen due to all of these obstacles he was facing.

While many people may believe that felony disenfranchisement is the key to getting justice for the community, they don't realize that they're simply alienating former felons from the community and not giving them a chance to prove that they have changed. I believe in second chances. Everyone makes mistakes in their lives, and people tend to regret their mistakes later on in their lives. Stripping one from their rights is like stripping them from their citizenship. People don't realize or simply don't want to accept that racism is still going on. It's almost as if today's politicians want to go back in time, where white people are superior and people of color are inferior with no say as to how the laws should be. America is the land of opportunity, so why can't people be given a second chance to reenter society and amend things? Once convicted felons have completed their sentences, they should automatically get their rights back, including the right to vote; or they should be allowed to apply to petition for their rights (if they've committed a severe crime). No one should be disenfranchised.

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# I, Too

## Dominique Jones

In American society today, minorities are faced with the burden of abuse, discrimination, and an unjust system. There have been countless number of events that have occurred in which minority individuals have been wrongfully accused, hurt or killed, or simply treated as lesser. In the past, poets have utilized their creativity and art to express their thoughts and ideas about life, societal issues, love, pain, and so much more. Langston Hughes, who was born in 1902, was a well-known poet during the 1920s, a period also recognized as the “Harlem Renaissance” (“Langston Hughes”, par. 1). Hughes’s writing was essentially centered on the lives of African Americans and their frustrations (“Langston Hughes”, par. 6). In a way, Langston Hughes was motivated to focus his work on African Americans because of his father, who did not embrace the struggles of his people due to his own personal frustrations as a Black man (“Langston Hughes”, par. 4). In Langston Hughes’s poem, “I, Too,” he voices his dream to be viewed as an American, as equal, and as a beautiful Black individual who is more than a servant for those of another skin color. The white nationalists who were involved in the Charlottesville protest have greatly degraded minorities, and those who responded have expressed that, “I, too” belong to America.

According to the article published by *CBS News*, on Saturday, August, 12<sup>th</sup> 2017, over 200 white nationalists and supremacists gathered for a “Unite the Right” rally “to protest the removal of a statue of confederate icon General Robert E. Lee” (“Charlottesville attack,” 2017, par. 2). In the article published by *The Washington Post*, Joe Heim mentions that the young white males who took part in this protest marched with lit torches while screaming, “Blood and soil!” “You will not replace us!” and “Jews will not replace us!” (Heim 2017, par.10). Counter protestors, both white and Black individuals confronted the marchers with the intention of standing up for their human rights. Unfortunately, the marchers’ cruel words weren’t enough as this event became very chaotic and dangerous. People were pushed, shoved, punched, injured and killed. In 2017, nearly 200 years post-slavery, we have witnessed a travel back in time. It is remarkably disturbing for any individual to have so much hate for another person simply because of the color of their skin. The oppression of African Americans was not only prevalent over 150 years ago, but sadly it is just as common in today’s society.

Oppression is the first theme that I identified in Langston Hughes’s poem, “I, Too.” The idea of oppression is represented in the situations of both Hughes’s poem and the Charlottesville protest. In lines 2-4 of the poem “I, Too,” the speaker states, “I am the darker brother / They send me to eat in the kitchen / When company comes.” Although Hughes’s meaning represents something

literal, there is a deeper significance to it. African Americans were treated as lesser; we were not thought of as equivalent to Caucasian Americans. Similarly, during the Charlottesville protest, the white nationalists made monkey noises at the Black counter protestors and chanted, “white lives matter” (Heim, 2017, par.12). These individuals were treated as inferior and were degraded. The double standards that minorities have to face in today’s society is still an issue. It was found that law enforcement’s response to the white nationalists’ violence was insufficient, and “that the city failed by not adequately communicating or coordinating in advance” (“Charlottesville protest report,” 2017, par. 2). Had the initiators of an event such as this been of another race, law enforcement would have had a different response. The injustice that African Americans and other minorities encounter continues to be a dilemma in American culture.

Segregation, a pronounced theme in Hughes’ poem, was also very evident in the Charlottesville protest. The white nationalists carried sticks, shields, guns, and chemical sprays with which they charged at the counter protestors in hopes of harming and defeating them (Heim, 2017). These protestors didn’t have any intentions of uniting with the counter protestors to find some sort of peace. In the poem, the speaker discusses that because he is Black, he is not allowed to eat with the white company, and has no other choice but to be separated (lines 2-4). Although the speaker has been shunned, he doesn’t let this sense of alienation deter him from the idea that “I, too, sing America.” Interestingly, the tone of this poem becomes very optimistic. Lines 5-17 states, “But I laugh / And eat well / And grow strong / Tomorrow / I’ll be at the table / When company comes / Nobody’ll dare / Say to me / Eat in the kitchen / Then / Besides / They’ll see how beautiful I am / And be ashamed.” The speaker is convinced and believes that the state he and his “brothers and sisters” are in is only temporary. There will be a time where African Americans will be looked directly in the eyes, instead of being looked down upon. Thus, both Black and white counter protestors (clergy and church members, residents, and civil rights leaders) joined together in Charlottesville, despite the series of events that had occurred, and sang “This Little Light of Mine” (Heim, 2017). They united, and didn’t allow the inhumane acts of the nationalists to break them. Regardless of what we as people of color endured, we continue to push forward with the hope that it will get better.

In Langston Hughes’s poem, “I, Too,” the speaker is very transparent that he takes pride in being a Black man in America. Hughes’s use of language (symbolism, anaphora, diction, free verse) really highlights the meaning behind his poem. His famous lines, “I, too, sing America” and “I, too, am America” (lines 1 and 18) are repeated because he is sure that no matter what the rest of the country says, his blackness defines America. His poem is written in free verse and the diction is very simple and informal. I believe that Hughes intentionally did this because he wanted his message to be clear and easy to understand. The word “sing” in the line, “I, too, sing America” (line 1) symbolizes freedom, and that one day African Americans will be freed from the idea that we are not American, that we are unequal, and that we are not beautiful Black individuals. I

know that what motivated the counter protestors to attend the rally was their pride. Pride in being an African American in a society that continues to belittle them. Pride in being of another race and still supporting their community because they know what's right. It is having pride that keeps us going.

Langston Hughes understood the very same pain that many individuals experienced on August 12, 2017, in Charlottesville, Virginia. His ideas, themes, tone, and language helped express the significance of his poem, "I, Too." Although the white nationalists' goal was to place fear into the heart of any individual who were opposed to their beliefs, the counter protestors along with Langston Hughes still articulate that, "I, Too, am America" (line 18).

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# A Call for a New Courteous Age

Amar Santhosh

The 1920s. Can you picture it? No? Then think of *The Great Gatsby*. Every man sports a suit, a hat, and perhaps a fashionable bit of facial hair. And every woman wears a flashy dress, pounds of jewelry, and cuts her hair short. They form a line at the theater leading up to the ticket booth. What are they going to see? Maybe they want to see the never-before-seen special effects of *Metropolis*. Or maybe they are looking for something terrifying in *Nosferatu*. Or maybe they are taking their children to see Mickey Mouse in *Steamboat Willie*. Whatever the case, they buy their tickets and go to get snacks. Buttery popcorn, sweet chocolate bars and bubbly soda. The audience then walks into the screening room. The lights begin to dim. All the whispers fade out. Complete silence. The projector sparks to life. The familiar countdown plays. Then the music begins to fade in as we see the movie's title and the credits roll.

Thinking about it nearly a hundred years later, this experience seems baffling. "Why would anyone wear a suit to a movie?" you may ask. Well, it was a different time. It was a classier time. A time when people had the utmost respect for the arts. Nowadays, watching a movie is such a casual thing. Everyone has a TV, a computer, a phone, or pretty much anything with a screen to watch their content on. In the hustle and bustle of modern day society, going to the movies is a rare thing. What point is there to a movie theater then? It's simple really: to see a movie exactly how it was meant to be seen. A large silver screen, loud speakers, absolute silence, and darkness to isolate you from everything but the movie.

Now think about a movie theater today. The people are wearing much more casual clothing. It's a Thursday night and the line is just as long as it was in the '20s. The audience members pay for their tickets, then move towards the concession stand. They buy surprisingly unchanged food that's almost exactly the same as it was in the '20s (Friedman). Then the audience moves into the theater, where the circus truly begins. The movie starts and people begin conversing immediately. Other people open up their food in crinkly wrappers. People cough and sneeze. During the movie, people get up and go to the bathroom. But, worst of all, people use their phones.

This is the problem. The theater is for movies and for movies only. So then why do I see people doing the most absurd and mannerless things at theaters? This lack of manners is why we need to have movie theater etiquette. To put it simply, movie theater etiquette is the set of rules that each audience member respects so that every other audience member can have a pleasant movie-going experience. These rules are as follows: arrive early, turn off your phone, don't talk, don't bring your kids to movies that aren't age appropriate for them, don't attend if you have a cough or a cold, and go to the bathroom and

open your snacks before the movie starts. Proper movie theater etiquette needs to be practiced in order for everyone to have a complete viewing experience.

We can't ever go back to what cinema originally was: a classy experience. But it's important we try and maintain what we have left in cinema. Every year, fewer and fewer people go to the theater. Why? Because of the rise of people who won't follow etiquette. Why should they have to deal with the nonsense of other audience members when they could wait a few months for that movie to come out on Blu-Ray, Video On Demand, or any of the various streaming platforms? They can watch their movies in the privacy of their own homes, unimpeded by the problems that may arise when watching a movie with a hundred other people. But I believe a movie should be seen where it was meant to be seen: in the theater.

If you do actually decide to go to the theater, you have to understand that you are paying for the ticket. If you are going to see a regular movie on average it will cost you "\$8.95" (Lieberman). If it's 3D it'll cost you "\$15.95" (McClintock). And if it's IMAX it'll cost you a hefty "\$25.95" not including taxes (McClintock). That's your hard-earned money. If you like to text while watching a movie, go ahead. Just keep in mind, those two hours are not your free time. That's time you paid for to watch the movie. It's up to you how you want to spend your time, but wouldn't you want to make sure you get the most bang for your buck by watching the movie? If not, you could just leave the theater and text. You could talk to your friends and have more money in your pocket. Let the people who actually want to see the movie spend their money while you do something else. Also, the studios have spent hundreds of millions of dollars getting their project out to the viewing audience. Isn't it a disservice to them to not pay attention?

And it isn't just about the money. Think about everyone else in the theater with you. Your constant chatter takes away from their experience. Put yourself in their shoes. They could have been waiting months, even years, to see this movie. They've planned out this visit to the theater meticulously. Personally, I have been waiting two whole years for *The Last Jedi*. Also, most people don't have much free time to watch movies. For these people, the time that they have to see this movie is especially important. That's why it's so much worse for them to start getting into a movie only to be pulled out by a loud "Ooh she shouldn't have gone in there!" or a "That's so fake!" or most infamously "Look! It's Stan Lee!" if you are watching a *Marvel* movie. Or, if you are using your phone, the screen lights up the the whole theater. That person who anticipated this movie for so long can't enjoy what he waited so long to see because of the flashing lights and notification tones that keep pulling him out of the experience. Your phone distracts everyone around you because the light and noises pull people away from what they should be focusing on. To these people, you seem immature and without manners.

But it isn't just at the theaters where this sort of behavior has become widespread. We as a society have become ruder. In my day to day life, I don't hear words like "please" and "thank you" anymore. I see people ignoring their



friends who are with them, so that they can look at their phones. You may say that most people aren't like this, and I agree. For the time being. But people have been getting less courteous over the years. Remember the 1920s? The way people showed each other respect at the theater is heavenly compared to the way people treat each other today at the very same venue. What if the way we act in movie theaters parallels the way we act now? It's an unpleasant thought. But you may ask yourself, how do we stop being rude? The answer is quite simple. Treat others the way you'd want them to treat you.

Although we aren't as polite as we used to be, we can rest easy knowing that this isn't an irreversible change. We can all make a small change in the way we behave to make a great difference in society. In my mind, the movie theater is a great place to start. A place that is a skeleton of what it once was can easily be restored if we just change our behavior, one small bit. We should try to restore what was once a sacred institution where artists showed off their storytelling skills in new and unique ways. Because if we don't, movies leave the theater and permanently make the leap to the small screen, and the passion you felt sitting in an audience with your popcorn in hand will have died out. But that passion can survive and thrive if we all take it upon ourselves to be more courteous. You wouldn't want to lose that passion, would you?

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# Mother's Shadow

Xiomara Machado

For as long as I can remember, I was always my mother's shadow. Every time my mom was in the kitchen, I would serenely observe the way she would pull out the pots from inside the oven, grab all the ingredients from the fridge and pantry—onion, garlic, green and red pepper, cilantro, oregano, salt, pepper, comino—and start dinner. All of my knowledge of cooking comes from her, but not just cooking—also, how to take care of a family.

By eight o'clock, dinner had to be ready to be served. Like I said, this household was run on a tight schedule. My father usually got home at that time. Everyone already knew to start setting the table while he was getting out of his work clothes. We would always eat at the table together as a family, but not entirely. The only person missing was my mother. She was still at work, so I made sure to make enough food so that she could eat once she got home. My father always got served first, then everyone else would follow.

Of course, dinner wasn't dinner without a little bit of entertainment. From Univision to Telemundo, we always watched *novelas* at the table to give us something to talk about. Around that time, *Al Diablo con los Guapos* would play. While I was eating, I never took my eyes off the TV. I would even talk to the TV as if the actors were right next to me. "*Cambia ese canal y ponga mi deportes,*" my dad would always say, "Change the channel and put on my sports." My dad wasn't as interested in *novelas* as I was. He was a huge soccer fan. Me, not so much. He always cheered for his country, Honduras, to win. I guess we all needed a bit of distraction from the fact that our mother wasn't there.

After dinner, I had to make sure the dishes were done before the night was over, and I had to prepare my father's lunch for the next day. Usually, it was just leftovers from last night's dinner. He never liked street food. He always said, "*Ese comida de afuera me hace daño.*"

A few minutes before the clock struck ten, I made sure the young ones were ready to go to bed. Sometimes they would stay up for a while because they wanted to see if our mom would walk in through that door. They just wanted to get a glimpse of her before bed. It was especially hard on Veronica and Chucho. Every night, it was always the same question: "Why isn't mommy home yet?" I had to go from my room to my parents' room to explain to each of them that she worked two shifts. My mother worked in a restaurant in the morning and throughout the night. She explained to me that at night, she got more tips. She felt ashamed of not being able to afford the life of luxury for her children. Jackie and I didn't really ask for much. It was always Chucho and Veronica who would ask her to buy things for them. As much as I tried to get them to understand, it was just not possible since they were so young. I would kiss their foreheads

goodnight, even though I knew it wasn't the same as when she used to do it, to try to give them peace of mind.

Exhaustion consumed my body and my mind completely as I lay down in my bed. It was somewhat of a relief to see the moon's reflection shine off my window. As I slowly closed my eyes, it was finally time for me to sleep.

Mother's Day 2010. Two years had passed since I became the adult in the house. I looked forward to the weekends because some, if not most weekends, both my parents were present. The smell of coffee would permeate the house. Everyone was up by nine or ten at the latest. Each of us had our own coffee cup. My parents each had a little white cup with a blue stripe. My younger sisters and I had plain, solid color cups. Mine was blue, Jackie's was red, and Veronica's was yellow. Chucho always wanted to use his Nintendo cup that had Super Mario characters on it. Each cup was just waiting for the coffee to be poured, so we could scarf down some *conchita* bread.

That particular Sunday morning after breakfast, we all went to my parents' room where my mom sat down on her bed to await her gifts. We each took turns handing her our gifts. I was the one to present the first gift. It wasn't anything expensive, just something that I could afford at the time: a bouquet of red roses with a card that had a small message for my mom to read. I wanted to show her how much I appreciated everything she had done for us.

After I gave her my gift, Jackie gave her a card. To my amazement, when it was Veronica and Chucho's turn, they gave me a card instead of our mother. At first, I was spiraling with a mix of emotions, a combination of euphoria and uneasiness, but then I turned to look at my mother. The anticipated smile of receiving her gifts turned upside down. Her eyes turned glossy, but no tears were shed. She gave a forced smile and asked Veronica and Chucho, "*Porque le diste la regalo a Zio?*"

My heart ached knowing Veronica and Chucho were oblivious of our mother's responsibility to be a mother and provide for us, knowing I was the only one who understood how much of a hard-working woman she was, knowing that they viewed me as more of a mother than her.

"Vero, Chucho, you know I'm not mommy. She's right here, why don't you give it to her?"

"But she's never home anymore. You always take care of us," Chucho said. My voice cracked because he spoke with sincerity. He was only seven.

My mother looked away.

This shouldn't be happening. Why? Just why were they doing this to me? To mommy? At the same time, I wanted to tell my mother off. "Don't you see how much time you're away from them?" I didn't dare.

The remainder of the day, pure silence surrounded us. I kept trying to cheer my mom up, along with my other sister. "*Mami quieres jugar dominos?*" Mom, do you want to play dominoes?

"*No esta bien mija. Estoy mirando la television.*"

Jackie and I kept insisting that she play with us, but we got the same answer every single time. She spent the rest of the day in the kitchen, just staring at the

TV as if nothing was wrong. I would peak my head through the curtain that separates the living room from the kitchen to check on her. She never did like to cry in front of us although, during the night, when she thought everyone was asleep, I could hear her. She would spend minutes, if not hours, crying only to smile the next day as if nothing had happened and wish us a good day.

You'd think that Mother's Day would've ended smoothly, but not this Mother's Day. My mother was the one hurting the most. She would do anything for her kids, even if it meant making sacrifices.

I knew that she wished she could've been there more for us, but I also knew that I, as the oldest, also contributed to making things more secure for her. Whenever she wasn't around, I was. I always made sure that the kids came first the same way she would have. It took some of the weight off of my mom's shoulders because I was carrying half of the load. She trusted me enough to share her burden.

Although taking on the role of a parent did rob me of my social life, I managed to find the time to draw. In my sketchbook, I revealed the hidden emotions I couldn't express in front of my siblings. Some pages would have smudges and scratches of my pencil with a bit of dried tears splattered around. Other pages would be colored with a black background and only a small amount of white space. Art became a passion for me. It was my escape.

My life was and is my family. However, whenever I'm able to go outside, I feel free. I don't have to worry about cleaning or cooking. I don't have to worry about hiding myself when I'm around my friends. I don't have to feel like an adult with many responsibilities. I can just act like a normal kid, happy.

# Course Experience of Graphic Design Principles

Isabella Gomez

Currently, it is more than halfway through the semester and I can safely say that Graphic Design Principles was not the class I expected it to be. I expected to start working on computers immediately, using programs like Illustrator and Photoshop to make basic designs. However, our first assignment was quite different: we had to create a square by hand, with perfect dimensions, draughtsmanship, and margins.

This assignment seemed simple; in fact, it seemed so simple that it was a bit comical. Once I started drawing the square, however, I realized that it was not as simple as I thought it would be. In order to make the square appear perfect, the draughtsmanship had to be flawless. Once the margins were measured (taking into account miniscule measurements such as  $1/16$  and  $1/32$ ) the square had to be precisely outlined with the finest tipped Micron Pen. Then, the square had to be filled in with a Prismacolor marker with enough layers so the shape would appear flat. We had to take precautions and keep aware of the possible bleeding that could happen to the edges of the square. If these steps are all done perfectly and with efficiency, the piece will work well. But if any of these steps are compromised, the piece will not work well. The smallest mistake, such as a bleed on the corner, will seep into the white space and create an illusion that the square is moving in space. This can happen even if the margins and the measurement of the square are perfect. The professor mentioned that if 99.9% of a piece works, the viewer's eye will almost immediately focus on the 0.1% that does not work. The human mind is fickle, and the class realized this while doing critiques. In almost all cases, the piece would have worked if it were not for a minute imperfection— a variable which resulted in a focal point.

This is an important principle I am grateful for having learned. Never before did I take into account that a viewer's eye will focus on a small portion of a piece that does not work. This principle is extremely important to keep in mind when creating a design. The designs we did with simple shapes taught us this in a basic and primitive way, which made the principle easier to understand. Making these designs required all our dedication and involvement if we wanted to do it well. Making the designs taught us how to handle our materials with precision and care, and how to make measurements that work by taking into account every part of the canvas and focal point.

Recently we have been working on color theory. For example, we have been exploring Josef Albers' principles of color theory, which include transparency and the idea that two like tones evoke a third. We have also worked

with gouache, which has been an extremely challenging medium. It takes practice for it to turn out flat and without streaks. Finding what colors work perfectly together also takes patience. This is a new challenge that has to be overcome through practice.

There have been many discussions about advertising and recent trends in graphic design. The critical thinking involved in analyzing why designers make certain choices has made us more knowledgeable about the field. By analyzing designs, we can become better designers and reach out to audiences effectively. This has been a critical aspect of our class and has been extremely helpful and eye-opening. Because we have become acquainted with this type of critical thinking, we are no longer average consumers or viewers. We now think like the designers and can use this to our advantage.

The final project is our first narrative. At first, we were using simple shapes to explore dimensions and tones that worked perfectly. Now, with our acquired knowledge, we are working on a project that focuses on energy efficiency and “going green.” This project is based on simplicity, because simplicity gets ideas across in the most effective way. The shapes must work together and complement one another, and the shades of color must not compete; they must work in harmony. Together these aspects create a piece that works perfectly.

Altogether, these pieces that we have worked on have prepared us to become more skilled and knowledgeable designers. Now that we have a basic understanding of the principles of graphic design, we can continue to build on them by using programs such as Illustrator and Photoshop. The assignments in this class have taught me discipline. The class has taught me to persevere for my art.

# First Design Class

## Jerry Pico

This semester, I learned a lot in COMD 1100 from the instructor, the students, and the class itself. When the class started, I had the impression that it was going to deal mainly with the use of software programs. I did not anticipate being introduced to color theory and other handmade creations. The techniques were beneficial to the overall improvement of visual perception. Before the class, I didn't think about color theory or transparency. I didn't think about an advertisement's cost or how to look at things outside of the box.

As the class went on, it improved. This improvement in the overall quality of student work ushered in new ground for students to display their talents. We learned how to utilize markers and create perfect shapes. We learned how to make squares using precise measurements. My first venture into the shape drawing process wasn't what I wanted it to be. I was not successful with the placement of the square on the sheet of Bristol paper. After showing the class the project during critique, I learned a valuable lesson. When looking at a piece, the artist must display their best work and make sure the observer can read the piece. Our professor instructed the class that in the Western world, everything is read from left to right. My piece was reversed, thus it was not viewer friendly. This observation will remain with me for the remainder of my design career.

Along the way, we also studied the structure of rectangles and curved shapes, such as circles. Then, we tackled the difficult assignment of using perspective for a project. We made a square from a three-dimensional point of view. It was a daunting task to say the least. It proved to be beneficial because now I can make three-dimensional images by hand. I hope this skill will help me in making more abstract pieces in the future. Soon after, we started to use our designer gouache to develop different tones of color. First we used achromatic colors, which means no color. Then we went to monochromatic colors, which means one color. With the monochromatic shapes, we had to use the same color but incorporate different tones to create a well-balanced harmony. Afterwards, we developed the full-color project. I enjoyed creating these pieces from the start. The feedback was positive. The best pieces were displayed in the Grace Gallery exhibition. Currently, we are beginning our "Going Green" final project. The students in the class have to brainstorm ideas and come up with a simple yet powerful message through the use of design. This project will let the students show a conscience and supportive mindset in relation to the environment to support today's needs.

The class itself was enjoyable. I learned a great deal of new and important information. I can say without a doubt this was a good launching pad into the world of design. Every time I get on the train or go out, I see advertisements. I've seen ads before but now I ask myself, what process did the designers use to achieve a quality design? I've come to see everyday things in a new light.

# Copy or Destroy: Two Choices for the Woman Who Has an American Dream

Ana Isabel Tapia

James Truslow Adams defined the American Dream as "the dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement" (XVI). There is the idea that in America, anyone who works hard enough can access better opportunities for themselves. In *My New Gender Workbook*, Kate Bornstein calls this "a good life" (59). In *The House on Mango Street*, Sandra Cisneros uses homes and leaving Mango Street to represent Esperanza's and Sally's American Dream or what they view as a good life. However, Bornstein argues that gender poses an obstacle to any woman's, and therefore Esperanza's and Sally's, American Dream. Bornstein describes gender as "calling the shots of who you can be, who you can love, and what resources you have access to make life worth living for yourself" (59). The girls in *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros are female and feminine and are expected to follow traditional gender roles associated with women, like cleaning, marrying, having children, etc. These components of gender, especially the gender roles assigned to the women in *The House on Mango Street*, prevent Sally and Esperanza from achieving their American Dream. Sally's and Esperanza's American Dream, then, is limited by their gender, leaving them with one of two options: to either try to escape poverty by following gender roles or by rejecting expected roles. Ultimately, following gender roles only leads to the illusion of freedom, whereas rejecting gender roles is the only way to truly escape poverty.

Sally and Esperanza share the same wish to escape poverty by moving away from their neighborhood. Sally's American Dream is first introduced by Esperanza. Esperanza says, "Do you wish your feet would one day keep walking and take you away from Mango Street, far away and maybe your feet would stop in front of a house, a nice one with flowers and big windows?" (Cisneros 82) Esperanza believes that Sally would like to escape from Mango Street and to move into a nice house away from their poor neighborhood. Later, Sally does escape Mango Street and moves into a house, fulfilling the dream Esperanza had for her, and which Sally wanted for herself. Esperanza, on the other hand, is more explicit about her dream. She says, "I lived *there*...I knew then I had to have a house. A real house. One I could point to. But this isn't it. The house on Mango Street isn't it" (Cisneros 5). Esperanza hopes to move away from her poor neighborhood and own a house that doesn't have "bricks crumbling in places" or a front door "so swollen you have to push hard to get in" (Cisneros 4). This shows Esperanza's desire to escape from poverty like Sally. However, Sally and



Esperanza's sex and gender limit the resources available to them to achieve their American Dream, because of inherent sexism in their community.

Audre Lorde states that sexism is "the belief in the inherent superiority of one sex over the other and thereby the right to dominance" (115). One can see this when Esperanza says that, "Boys and girls live in separate worlds. My brothers for example. They've got plenty to say to me and Nenny inside the house. But outside they can't be seen talking to girls" (Cisneros 8). Even as children, the boys and girls know that there are differences between them. Esperanza's brothers don't talk to their sisters in public because they might be thought of as lesser by other people in their neighborhood. Girls here are placed below boys, since it is the boys' reputation that will be damaged if they are seen talking to girls. This is again shown when Sally tells Esperanza that her father beats her. Sally says, "He thinks I am going to run away like his sisters who made the family ashamed. Just because I'm a daughter" (Cisneros 92). The only man in Sally's family is physically abusing her, and also believes that just by being a girl, Sally will shame her family. There is a disproportionate amount of responsibility placed on Sally to live up to her father's expectations of purity, especially since he has already condemned her for being a daughter and not a son. In an environment where there is a clear difference between the way boys and girls are treated and expected to act, there are two things the girls can do in order to achieve their dreams—go along with gender roles or reject them.

Sally chooses to follow the gender roles and expectations placed on her by her society and seems to escape poverty in this way, but is ultimately unable to do so. As a girl who will grow up to be a woman, Sally is expected to act feminine and flirty. Esperanza notices this in the monkey garden: "When I got back Sally was pretending to be mad...[The boys] were laughing. She was too. It was a joke I didn't get" (Cisneros 96). Sally is flirting with the boys and generally acting the way a girl is supposed to act with boys, since marriage is part of Sally's future as a woman. Unlike Esperanza, who does not understand what the exchange between Sally and the boys is about, Sally is well aware of her position as female and feminine. Sally has chosen to follow the gender roles set by her society. She even goes on to kiss the boys and doesn't think much of it, because society expects Sally to be desirable as a woman. Later, Sally gets married, just as girls are expected to, and it is through this marriage that Sally is able to leave Mango Street (Cisneros 101). Sally, however, does not necessarily escape poverty, since the house she lives in belongs to her husband, and her independence is based on how much freedom he gives her. Sally says, "She likes being married because now she gets to buy her own things when her husband gives her money. She is happy, except sometimes her husband gets angry...though most days he's okay" (Cisneros 101). Sally has seemingly achieved her American Dream by following the gender roles set by her society, as she believed them dominant. She married a man and was able to have her home; however, even though it seems like Sally got what she wanted, she has not escaped poverty because nothing she has is truly hers. Sally wasn't even able to escape the physical abuse she experienced with her father since her husband gets

angry and "once broke the door where his foot went through" (Cisneros 101). Sally isn't truly independent since her wealth and her home belong to her husband. Her husband even controls who Sally can talk to and where she can go. Though following gender roles allowed Sally to escape Mango Street, she was not able to escape poverty.

Unlike Sally, Esperanza chooses to break feminine gender stereotypes in order to escape her neighborhood's poverty. Esperanza is able to become independent because she actively goes out of her way to reject the female gender roles she considers subordinate. Esperanza says, "I have decided not to grow up tame like the others who lay their necks on the threshold waiting for the ball and chain" (Cisneros 88). Here, the ball and chain refers to marriage and to having children. Esperanza states that she will not be tame, the way that society expects women to be. Esperanza also does not want to get married and have children, as she feels like these things limit what women can do. The use of the term "ball and chain" in particular is commonly associated with men with regard to their marriages, and has to do with how women tie men down and limit them. That Esperanza uses this term to refer to herself, as female, shows how Esperanza adopts male gender roles, though she still considers herself feminine and does ascribe to some female gender roles. In "Sire," Esperanza says, "I want to sit out bad at night, a boy around my neck and the wind under my skirt" (Cisneros 52). Like women are expected to do, Esperanza wishes to wear nice clothes and have a boyfriend. Nonetheless, she continues her rejection of assigned gender roles when she chooses to leave her plates at the table "like a man" (Cisneros 89). In this way, Esperanza has begun to imitate the men in her family and in her community, well aware that she's following male gender roles, because Esperanza believes that by rejecting certain female gender expectations, she will be able to leave Mango Street. Esperanza calls this rejection of female gender roles her "own quiet war" (Cisneros 89). The use of the word "war" shows that Esperanza understands that there will be people who will challenge her choice. She expects her society to pressure her into marriage or into having children, since that is what society says women must do. In this way, Esperanza's American Dream is also limited. However, in rejecting female gender roles, Esperanza believes that she will one day say goodbye to Mango Street (Cisneros 110). Unlike Sally, when Esperanza does leave Mango Street and its poverty, she will be truly independent because she will not depend on a husband or be tied down by children.

However, Esperanza's strict assignation of male and female gender roles leads her to unintentionally support the gender binary. The gender binary involves the separation of masculine and feminine into two distinct and opposite categories (Woolley 378). Separating male/female and masculine/feminine as the only options for people can lead to hardship for those who do not fit into this binary. In wanting to escape from Mango Street, Esperanza first distinguishes which actions are feminine and which are masculine and then makes the conscious choice to reject feminine gender roles and copy male gender roles. Though Esperanza's intention is to overcome the limitations that come with being

a woman in a sexist society, and to escape poverty, she has participated in perpetuating the idea of the gender binary. Woolley argues that instead of assigning certain roles to males and females, the way to beat sexism and find empowerment is to perform critical analysis. Woolley states that, "critical literacy has served as a tool for women's empowerment and emancipation from patriarchal oppression, allowing women to become active participants in critically analyzing social expectations of women's roles in society and the family" (Woolley 378). A more effective way for Esperanza to escape her society's restrictive gender binary is for Esperanza to question why certain roles are assigned based on gender. In this way, Esperanza can come to see that it is not necessary to call certain roles masculine or feminine, and that she does not need to be "like a man" (Cisneros 89) in order to escape poverty, since she can be herself and still perform the same roles she does now. With critical analysis, Esperanza may challenge the structures that limit her ability to achieve her American Dream without supporting the idea of the gender binary.

In a society that focuses heavily on the gender binary, for people who identify as female and feminine, there may seem to be only two options to achieve the American Dream, to either follow gender roles or reject them. In following gender roles, the women of *The House on Mango Street* seem to escape poverty, but are held back because their means of escaping poverty come from and are controlled by their husbands. In rejecting gender roles, women become self-reliant and can then own their own things without having to rely on men. However, these forms of escaping poverty, even if they are successful, only focus on people who are female and ascribe in some part to society's feminine gender expectations. There is no model for escaping poverty for a person who does not fit into the gender binary. On top of that, people who do not fit into the gender binary experience an additional obstacle in achieving their American Dream, since society tends to fight back against those who deviate even slightly from what society has deemed the norm. Therefore, in order for the American Dream to be accessible to people outside of the gender binary, individuals must first examine whether their own actions uphold this binary and then, seek to challenge the gender norms of society.

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# *Newsical The Musical: A Review*

Sonja M. Goulbourne

*Newsical the Musical* is an 80-minute Off-Broadway musical theatre performance focused on current events mined from politics and pop culture. *Newsical* includes dialogue with elements of humor, song and to a lesser extent dance. The play is an unabashed vehicle for left leaning progressive politics that includes humorous social commentary on various topics such as climate change, gun control and gay marriage.

The author's main purpose is to take both serious and benign news headlines and apply comedic satire during multiple sketches. The play highlights the fact that news can often devolve to a state where it becomes comedy. Since the election of Donald Trump, many comedians have frequently commented that the material simply "writes itself." *Newsical the Musical* reflects this thought process and includes one skit of Donald Trump waxing poetically about an imaginary inauguration crowd size only he alone can see.

The play consists of four actors who portray different characters in various scenes. Performed on a small sound stage in Theatre Row's Kirk Theatre, the show includes live piano that accompanies the actors during songs and plays through brief intermissions. Sketches comprise a diverse mix of characters such as a furious Mother Nature who is sick of being misused by a careless humanity and plots her revenge using floods and hurricanes. There is a portrayal of an 18<sup>th</sup> century Founding Father James Madison tasked with explaining the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment to a contemporary crowd who has lost sight of the original meaning in the Constitution; he must explain the absurdity of applying old world thoughts on guns to fit the modern day practical need for gun control.

In the post-election world we now live in, plays like *Newsical the Musical* are relevant as they mirror the day's headlines while giving us a chance to take a break from the serious and laugh now and again. I especially enjoyed a Melania Trump musical number where she laments her hard immigrant life living alone in Trump Tower and depicting her non-epic struggle to the top in song. Her real story would show her as an immigrant, but that is where all similarities end. The parody underscores the hypocrisy of her being an immigrant herself while supporting the anti-immigrant agenda proposed by her husband. The actors in the play regularly engaged audience participation and in one instance the character of Mother Nature asked an attendee in the crowd, "How long does it take for Styrofoam to degrade?" The actors also used props and did multiple celebrity impressions.

With politics dominating the news cycle, the main theme of this play is to emphasize the fact that you can outwardly laugh and cry inside at the same time. With four more years of the Trump Administration, there will likely be no shortage of source material and inspiration.

# Letter to My Grandson

Mahamadou Diallo

Dear Grandson,

Though you might not exist for a couple of more years or after, I couldn't help but think what a perfect time to introduce you to the very beautiful but at the same time very cruel world you will be entering. You won't realize the bitterness and harsh reality of the world we live in at first. You will spend the beginning of your life basking in awe and taking in your new surrounding environment. As you rapidly mature, you will come to the grim realization that the system was made against us and not in our odds. Someone who said this perfectly was James Baldwin. In his piece "A Letter to My Nephew" he says, "You were born where you were born and faced the future that you faced because you were black and for no other reason" (Baldwin). You will be judged on the basis on your skin and not the content of your character. They will despise and hate your achievements but cheer and rejoice at your failure. They will grin and show you fake smiles but will always wish for the worst on you. They will not expect you to achieve or amount to anything. Like James Baldwin said in his piece, "The limits to your ambition were thus expected to be settled, you were born into a society which spelled out with brutal clarity and in as many ways as possible that you were a worthless human being" (Baldwin).

Even though they will direct all of that hatred towards you, you must not do the same back to them. Instead you must open your arms out and show them love. Hatred against hatred will only breed more conflict, but we can negate this by showing love to the ones that despise us for the color of our skin. "You must accept them and accept them with love, for these innocent people have no other hope. They are in effect still trapped in a history which they do not understand and until they understand it, they cannot be released from it" (Baldwin). These powerful words from Baldwin, my grandson, are the key to our salvation, only love can break the chains of hatred and contempt.

My dear grandson, you will face many hardships that will make you stumble, fall, and even discourage you. However, you must not give up. Always remember to strive and push forward. In your darkest and worst moments, you must remember this quote, "The very time I thought I was lost, my dungeon shook and my chains fell off" (Baldwin). No matter what the case may be, you must never lose hope because you never know when your dungeon will shake and your chains will break free.

Sincerely,

Your Grandfather— Mahamadou Diallo

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# From Fantasy to Fiction

Kyle Brunson

As bizarre as it sounds to anyone who hasn't known me a long time, I went through an emo or gothic phase in middle school. I must have been insufferable. Years later, I'm still not sure how my friends tolerated me. Almost everything was doom and gloom with me. Any creative writing assignment I handed in contained vampires, werewolves, demons or some other edgy creature of the night. As embarrassing as it is to look back on it now, I don't regret that phase at all. I learned a lot about reading and writing. Specifically, I learned how much I enjoyed those two activities. I was largely influenced by the type of media I consumed at the time: young adult fantasy novels.

Middle school was, without a doubt, the peak of my leisure reading. I read a ton of books in middle school. At first, I only started reading because my mom thought that taking away my video games every Monday through Friday would be a good way to make me a better student. She really wanted me to do well on the Specialized High School exam. However, I couldn't possibly study all the time. I would be bored out of my mind after I finished my work. My older sister, who is the biggest book nerd ever, suggested I read to pass the time. Over the years, she had managed to accumulate a collection of literature in our house that could rival a small bookstore. I decided to give her advice a chance and see what was so great about books. I started with titles like *Artemis Fowl* and *The Golden Compass*. I was hooked. I never realized how enjoyable reading could be. I moved onto reading books with more serious tones like *The Inheritance Cycle*, *Harry Potter*, *The Seventh Tower*, and others. What I started to notice about myself was how drawn I was to the antagonists of these books. I was captivated by how they spoke, by what they did, and by what drove them to become the monsters they were.

Eventually, I tried my hand at writing my own monsters. At the beginning of every day in the sixth grade, students would be given time to write a short story or poem about whatever we wanted and then read it to the class. It was during this time that I would attempt to write deep, thought-inspiring poems or heavy, long-winded epics of men battling monsters. I was always eager to share my writing with my classmates. I really thought that they were the best pieces I had written up until that point. Although I'm sure my class grew tired of hearing the same old stories with minor changes, I didn't care. Or, at least, I thought I didn't care. During one of these freewriting mornings, my friend Shaquille brought in a book he had been working on called *Matt's Odd Life*. I was surprised when he got up to share because I didn't know at the time that he was writing a book. The entire class really loved the first chapter of his book. The stark contrast in the class's response to his work and mine really annoyed me at first; but then, after school, I read more of his book and was surprised by how

much I liked it. It was a complete slice of life, vanilla, teenage drama and yet, it was really fun.

At some point, I started to help him write the book. We would alternate chapters. I introduced my own character who was Matt's cousin but whose name I can't remember. At first, I tried to make it similar to one of my dark stories, but after talking with Shaquille, we decided that this book was fun because of the normal, yet wacky, life the main character lived. And so, it was my first foray into the world of fiction writing without superpowered people or monsters. At first, I thought it was difficult. I mean, who could sit through an entire story without a single spooky thing occurring? But I was wrong. Girls, sports friends, bullies, and plain old teen drama were just a few of the many topics that I realized I could write about. It was perhaps at this time that I realized it's not that I strongly preferred dark fantasy novels, but that I preferred the good writing I encountered in these novels. It's the writer that can make any topic interesting if done right.

By the end of the sixth grade, the book was finished and I was pleased with the feeling of accomplishment. All of my classmates seemed to enjoy it and my teacher got it printed. Through this experience, my emo phase was mostly over and I gained an appreciation for another genre of writing. Now, everything didn't have to be dark and gloomy, or contain creatures of the night. This moved me to my next phase, which was equally horrible, as an aficionado of teen drama TV series like *Degrassi* and *Skins*. Ugh, what a time.

# Misunderstood

## Jimmy Guity

S.W.E

Standard Written English for those who didn't know

How we speak shouldn't be how we write but how we write should be how we  
speak

Excluding my block, the whole hood and also me

No, no, no, Jimmy you can't write like that

Why not?

It's not academic

It's I understand

Not I feel you

It's the same?

They won't get it.

But I get it

You "saw" it

I "seent" it

You "want" it

I'm "feening"

We're saying the same shit

Stop acking like there are two different meanings

Your mind's in a disarray

Well, me, I'm buggin

The crips, the bloods, or any sketchy group of 3

They gotta be thugging

These niggas up to no good b

In the streets mean mugging

You ever thought maybe they're just living

Better yet just surviving

Because being Black in America

Is like living on an island

Especially when you drop the phonics

And opt for Ebonics.

But I'm eloquent

Just trapped in an entanglement with this language man

I gotta use big words to showcase my intelligence? Nah b what I speak is hella  
relevant

So I ask you, why am I linguistically irrelevant?