

# Distinctions

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# **DISTINCTIONS**

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*Distinctions*, the journal of the Honors Program at Kingsborough Community College of the City University of New York, welcomes submissions of scholarly work written for Kingsborough courses.

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Tsubasa Berg

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

I'm pleased to note that there are more authors in this issue than there have been in the last several years of my editorship. As usual there is a wide range of topics from a variety of courses, and we start and end with beautifully inspiring personal essays, one by Endri Rustemi about his journey from Albania to Brooklyn, the other by Jade Alibocas about her grandmother teaching her how to cook roti. In between, we have a philosophical argument by Christopher Abdullah about evil; essays on remedying social problems by Briana Beninati, Jillian H. Bevens, Kyle Aaron Reese, Beckie Dugaillard, and Nargiza Zaynullina; and discussions of current health issues by Esther Daklo, Anastasiia Osadchuk, and Ryan Houssein. Aundre Mignott, excited by history, explains the niceties of English stratification. Claudine Brummel, Jaweria Bakar, and Kateryna Dorozhynska focus on the ideas and images in Claudia Rankine's provocative *Citizen: An American Lyric*. Islam Farghaly, in an essay he wrote for a linked class, asks "Am I Naïve?" and receives remarkable answers. Bermeo Xavier and Dakang Chen, students of Professor Valerie Sokolova, have provided this issue with its artwork.

Finally, and long overdue, I would like to thank Tsubasa Berg, who has been designing each issue of *Distinctions* the last few years without official credit. (That's its own story.) If the journal looks good to you, it's because of Tsubasa. He has left the Kingsborough Center for eLearning office and Kingsborough, and I will miss his presence, patience, generosity, and his meticulous attention to detail. I am sure he will do well in his new ventures.

I again express my deepest appreciation to Laura Kates, Karen Colombo, Gene McQuillan, Rick Repetti, Paul Odems, Dominic Wetzell, Eben Wood, Stuart Parker, Jason VanOra, Nicholas Skirka, Kevin Kolkmeier, Carol Carielli, Emily Schnee, Katia Perea, and Avri Beard, the professors who encouraged and coached these students, and to the administrators who have given their support to this journal: Professor Homar Barcena, Director of the Honors Program; Dr. Luz Martin del Campo, Coordinator of the Honors Program; Dr. Eileen Ferretti, chair of the English Department; and Provost Joanne Russell, Vice President for Academic Affairs.

— Bob Blaisdell

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TODAY, START  
BY PUTTING DOWN  
YOUR SNACKS THEN  
PUTTING YOUR FAVORITE  
FRUITS IN THE JUICER  
THEN DRINKING IT WITH  
A GLASS. START BY  
PUTTING DOWN YOUR  
GAME CONTROLLER AND  
FIND SOME  
BOOKS TO  
READ.



Dakun Chen 3/16/2019



A drawing by Dakang Chen for ART 6800 taught by Professor Valerie Sokolova



# I Found a Home, I Found the American Apple

Endri Rustemi

Spring 2019  
ENG 1200 | Freshman English I  
Professor Gene McQuillan

**A**lbania was my house but not my home. I was in my mother's home and in my father's land, but I felt powerless, defeated and angry. A gray cloud had overtaken my home. It was serious and tragic how pessimism took over control of me and my family's life, which had been damaged by the depraved government. Even now, ignorance is the new modern phenomenon and trend in my country Albania. The ignorant have bought a fake diploma and a chair in the Albanian parliament. This phenomenon overwhelmed all Albanian institutions and led to a state that was governed by incompetent people. The youth were immersed in cynicism and depression caused by unemployment. With no hope in my homeland, I had to find a new path for a new home. Leaving my old home was a complicated mission. I had to find permanent residence to ensure my existence, to shape my perspective and to feel fulfilled.

Emotionally, it was easy for me to leave Albania because of many issues. I graduated in Albania in June 2011 in dentistry with great grades. I thought that life would be facile after graduation, because I could find a job easily. I looked for a job for four months trying to find the right place and not to sell myself cheap, but it was hard, even though I had finished college with honors.

I was 24 years old, a young boy, so asking my parents every day for a dollar to get a coffee was ridiculous. I had a friend of mine, Halim, who was experiencing the same problem. We decided to accept any offer and any amount of money for a job, just to pay for our coffee. Halim had heard from another friend, Mario, that to find a city job, we had to offer some money to someone that he knew. Then we met Mario. "The system works like this: Who cares what you have done and how

clever you are?” Mario said.

“How does the Albanian system work?” I asked Mario.

“Five thousand dollars for a job place,” Mario said.

Halim and I borrowed money from the bank, five thousand dollars each. By committing this action, I felt humiliation, mortification, indignity, dishonor, and shame like a bitumen cocktail that we were forced by the Albanian system to drink.

We got jobs as school dentists at Sami Frasheri High School. The way I got the job burned like acid me, my mother, and my father. It was shocking how great students and dentists like Halim and I had to work low-paying jobs that did not cover our bills. Anyway, I would give my check to my parents, because they were my supporters and my defenders in school and in life. I was happy just to pay for my one-dollar espresso with my own money.

Problems were perpetual in my country. I felt humiliated and upset by the bureaucracy and stupidity of the Albanian government. My parents applied for pensions in April 2011, my father at sixty-five and my mother at sixty. My father had taught history and geography in one of colleges of Tirana for forty years. In May, we received a paper, where it was written, “I’m sorry, Z. Rustemi, the social insurance couldn’t provide you full pension, because in 1997 our archive got burned. We don’t have evidence that you have taught in college from 1971-1997. Your pension check will be \$50 per month.” Even though my father had proof and his colleagues were eyewitnesses, nobody cared. My mother experienced the same trauma. She had taught math from 1976-2011 in the same college with my dad. They granted \$40 per month for her. The whole process was astonishingly bureaucratized. These experiences widened my eyes to search for better opportunities. There was no chance in my country.

The next day, after we got the papers, we went to the pension office. My father introduced himself, me, and my mother to an old lady. My father said, “Miss, can you see my wife’s and my pension case?”

“Okay,” she said. “Sir, I see in my computer your and your wife’s cases, but the pension experts have decided unanimously how much you should get. Those papers are gone. We can’t do anything.”

Then I saw that a stream of tears began to trickle from my mother’s and my father’s eyes. The old lady said, “Next please.”

To calm the situation, I said to my father, “Let’s go home, we will come another day.” He laughed with irony, and said to the woman, “You don’t know how I’m feeling. We have served this country for 40 years and you, madame, are saying it never happened. It’s the same as to say to a veteran, ‘You never fought!’”

As my father said that, as a son of a “nonexistent veteran,” I couldn’t control my tears, I started to cry. The floor got wet by our tears and we left.

On June 20, 2014, at Lords Cafe, where Halim and I got our coffee every day, we had a conversation about how terrible our jobs were, even though we had

finished college with honors. We hadn't succeeded. I told him that that month I had saved five dollars. He laughed. I realized that was a sarcastic laugh. "You saved five dollars but I borrowed five dollars. Paying rent and bills I couldn't save anything," he said. With those words, we left the cafe.

Walking and talking with him, I saw a big advertisement on the wall of a small office. It stated: "You can apply for an American lottery if you have finished college—only \$5."

I said, "Halim, Halim, look at that! I want to try that with these five dollars that I saved."

"You are kidding me, but let's go," he said.

When we walked in, a young woman showed up and asked us, "How can I help you guys?"

"I want to apply for the American lottery," I said.

"Okay," she said. I gave her the money and she asked me for my personal information to fill in the form online. After five minutes we were done. She gave me a code for the application. She said, "The results if you are selected or not will be visible after six months online, or you will get an email." She and Halim wished me good luck.

"After a horrible day will come a beautiful day," my grandmother has often said. December 10, 2014, I was at work fixing my office. My phone made a weird sound. "Oh my God, I hope my Samsung is still alive," I said. I took my phone out of my pocket and I saw an email icon. It was the first time seeing and receiving an email. I opened it and I began to read. The first words with capital letters were, "CONGRATULATIONS, YOU HAVE BEEN SELECTED BY THE U.S. STATE DEPARTMENT." I opened, closed, and read the email hundreds of times, because I had forgotten about the American lottery. To confirm my email, I went to the lottery office to double check it. I walked in and I said to the young woman, "Please, can you check my code?" She confirmed that I was selected. "You are the first on the list," she said.

I filled out a form with all my information, and she sent it through email to the U.S. State Department. "After a while they will leave a date for the interview," she said. I felt like I was floating due to my happiness, because it was a chance to chase my dream.

On March 13, I received an email that at 8:00 a.m. I, Endri Rustemi, had an interview at the U.S. Embassy in Tirana. I didn't say anything to anyone. I zipped my mouth because I wanted to see if it would happen. When I was arrived at the embassy, someone called my name: "Endri Rustemi, come to Booth Three." In that booth was a lady in her fifties. She was an American, I realized, because of her Albanish.

"Hello, Endri, I'm a U.S. officer. We will do the interview together. Please introduce yourself," she said. I began telling her my personal information and my family composition. "I'm interested to know why you would like to go to America?"

she asked me.

“I don’t have hope in this country. I feel like I’m in the mouth of a wolf, no chances. The Albanian government is corrupt. But my goal is to taste the American apple. The last apple who changed the world,” I responded.

“American apple? ... What do you mean?”

“Three apples have changed the world. The first apple eaten by Adam and Eve. Second, the apple that fell on the head of Isaac Newton. And the third apple is the American Apple created by Steve Jobs.”



A Steve Jobs tribute image designed by Jonathan Mak



Newton's portrait with apple tree. (source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Newton\\_portrait\\_with\\_apple\\_tree.svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Newton_portrait_with_apple_tree.svg))



“The Fall of Man” by Lucas Cranach the Elder, depicting the first apple eaten by Adam and Eve. Public Domain

Then the U.S. officer came out from her professional demeanor. She stood up and stamped my passport with all her power. The sound with which she did that was so loud it was like a thunderclap. Everyone turned their heads. She pointed her finger at me and with a strong voice said, “He wants to taste the American apple. Congratulations, you have my permission.” Then she turned her head back to her peers and she said, “I’m sorry to everyone for the disturbance, but he deserves this attention for what he said to me.”

For me it was a special moment, it was like a dubbing ceremony where I became a new American knight. I felt welcomed, honored and protected by my new kingdom. At that moment I was in seventh heaven and I left the Camelot castle

flying. It was time to spread this good news. I told Halim and my parents about my U.S. story. They were excited. The next day I went to a travel agency and booked my flight.

On May 10, 2015, my feet were in the promised land. I had left Albania physically. I arrived at JFK at 3 p.m., where a friend of mine met me. Alban knew about my arrival and he had found an apartment for me in Bay Ridge. I was so excited to see and to live the “utopian” life of America. But I had to face America alone, because Alban went back home after two days. His parents had died in a car accident. I was shocked by his leaving, but Alban told me I could find a job at an Italian restaurant in Bay Ridge, because I spoke Italian.

It was complex to ensure my existence in U.S. It was difficult to find a job, but after six months I saw a light at the end of the tunnel. I got hired as a busboy at an Italian restaurant, Gino’s. This job was a success for me, because I was reborn and accepted in American society. It gave me conspicuous support and opportunity. Dea, a Brooklyn friend, knew about my background and my desire to go back to school. On April 2017, she applied online for me to Kingsborough Community College and I got accepted. This acceptance kept my spirit and my determination strong.

On September 14, 2017, my classes began. Kingsborough became my holy place and my temple of happiness. It and its professors were the main contributors of forming and finding my new home.

Feeling fulfilled in my new residence, I video-chatted my parents in Albania. I didn’t need to ask them how they were because the sadness was agglutinated to their faces. “I called to say that in May, I will apply for American citizenship and next year I will apply for your green cards. I cannot come to see you in that damned place, I’m still an ‘active volcano.’ I have no home there. They left us in the crossroads. Even if I die today in the U.S., I don’t care. I’m feeling completed. I am whole.”

“We wish to come,” my parents said.

I was inspired to write about my experience when I read “Child of the Americas” by Aurora Levins Morales. I was fascinated how my story is connected to the author’s and how people get disconnected and connected with their old and new adventures. Separation from her motherland is evident in this stanza. Morales writes of her own complex history:

I am not African. Africa is in me, but I cannot return:  
I am not *taina*. *Taino* is in me, but there is no way back.  
I am not European. Europe lives in me, but I have no home there.  
I am new. History made me. My first language was Spanish.  
I was born at the crossroads and I am whole.

The author points out that the America is a colored country, a melting pot

of cultural identities, including herself. People came to America from different countries and diverse cultures. Associated together, they produced a single culture and a single home, but people feel disconnected, having no pleasure and no sensation for their old homes. The writer tells us how the new American experience and challenges shaped her and American society. People have established the idea who they are and how they feel in a mixed-up culture. The new experiences in the U.S. made them connected, completed and fuller. All of them considered themselves integral and a link in the chain of the American community.

After investigating this topic, I wish to make a few predictions about home, because home is a vital and fundamental shelter of any human being. Home will be my reliable bulletproof vest and my armor that will protect me, my wife, and my kids from outsider disasters and evil forces. Home will be my place of peace and it will be my family oasis.

### **Work Cited**

Morales, Aurora Levins. "Child of the Americas."

# An Evidential Look into the Problem of Evil

Christopher Abdullah

Spring 2019  
PHI 7700 | Philosophy of Religion  
Professor Rick Repetti

**F**or many centuries, man has wondered about God. Many have fought over and done all manner of things in the name of God or gods. God has been the focal point on many topics and concepts of morality, such as the divine command theory to the question whether God exists. This paper will focus on the Judeo-Christian concept of God, which states that God is omnipotent, omnibenevolent and omniscient, and relate this to the apparent reality of massive evil and imperfection in the world. This is the problem of evil, perhaps the greatest problem in the plot of religion.

Let me explain how God is understood in Judeo-Christian theology, and why his nature is thought to be inconsistent with the existence of evil. God is, by definition, thought to be characterized by the following three essential properties:

- Omnipotent: God is all powerful, and thus is able to prevent evil.
- Omniscience: He has all knowledge about everything, and thus knows how to prevent evil.
- Omnibenevolence: He is perfectly good-natured, and thus wants to prevent evil.

If God is all of these things, and according to the Judeo-Christian conception of God he is all these by definition, then how do we explain the existence of evil? Evil, from the monotheistic perspective, is perceived to be the antagonist to good, which makes it the antagonist to the greatest good, God.

The problem of evil may be broken into two separate arguments: one for the logical problem of evil, and the other for the evidential problem of evil. In the evidential problem of evil, some hold that if there is an all-powerful God and a truly good God, then that is factually incompatible with our observation of the obvious reality of massive evil in the world. This argument asserts that since we have the obvious evidence of massive evil, that evidence of evil makes the existence

of God highly doubtful or implausible. The logical problem of evil is the argument that if God is all powerful and all good, then the existence of evil in the world is logically contradictory.

The logical version of the problem of evil is difficult to prove. That is because it is not as straightforward to claim that the very concepts of “God” and “evil” are logically incompatible, say, the way the very concepts of “bachelor” and “married” are logically incompatible. Whereas nobody can be both married and unmarried at the same time, given that the meanings of “God” and “evil” are so complex, we cannot simply demonstrate the impossibility of both being true at the same time. For we can imagine some possible explanation that a being like God could have for allowing evil. Thus, instead of focusing on the logical version of the argument from evil, I will focus on the evidential version of the argument from evil. Whereas in the logical version of the argument the issue is whether evil itself is inconsistent with God, in the evidential version of the argument, the evidence of the massive extent and type of evil in the world counts as proportionate evidence against the probability of God’s existence

The argument from evil has puzzled philosophers for millennia. The earliest account of this argument was seen as early as 300 BCE with the Epicurean paradox:

If God is willing to prevent evil, but is not able to  
 Then He is not omnipotent.  
 If He is able, but not willing  
 Then He is malevolent.  
 If He is both able and willing  
 Then whence cometh evil?  
 If He is neither able nor willing  
 Then why call Him God?

This is the foundation on which atheists build the argument against the God of Judeo-Christian theology. The argument begins with the claim that, if God is all good, all knowing and all powerful, then there should be no evil in this world. There is evil in the world. So, the atheist concludes, there is no God. Let’s break this argument down into more specific premises and a conclusion, as follows:

1. If God exists, then God is omnipotent, omniscient, and morally perfect.
2. If God is omnipotent, then God has the power to eliminate all evil and imperfection.
3. If God is omniscient, then God knows how to prevent evil and imperfection.
4. If God is morally perfect, then God has the desire to eliminate all evil and imperfection.



5. However, massive amounts of evil and imperfections obviously exist.
6. If evil and imperfection exist and God exists, then either God doesn't have the power to eliminate all evil, or doesn't know how to prevent evil, or doesn't have the desire to eliminate evil.
7. Therefore, if God must be all knowing, all powerful and all loving, then God doesn't exist.

The biggest problem for believers is pointless, gratuitous, or unnecessary suffering: Why would a being like God allow any pointless suffering? John Hick tries to formulate a theodicy, a response to the problem of evil, an argument giving the reasons that would justify the claims that God is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent while explaining how evil can exist when such a God exists. Hick's first claim in support of his theodicy is that suffering is a part of character-building and soul-building. This can be seen, for example, when you think about losing a competition, how that helps you to understand humility, and gives you the drive to work harder. Hick also states that God created trials and tribulations to help develop and guide us to be more perfect beings. Another crucial premise of this theology is that of free will, and it claims that God provided us with free will because without it we would be mere puppets of his will and thus unable to freely choose to develop virtues or vices, as per our own freely chosen preferences. This theodicy also claims that if God made us completely perfect, we would be as robots and thus valueless. We would just be puppets, or extensions of God's will that God would have no need for, and we would just do what a perfect being, a robot-puppet, would do: There would be no need for a relationship between God and his creatures. Without the freedom to choose whether or not we prefer to be inclined toward sin and vice or to build virtues, humans would be unable to voluntarily develop critical virtues such as grace, love, compassion, and kindness. Even though this theodicy has valid points, there are some weaknesses to this theory which are unable to be justified in depth.

One of the objections against Hick's theodicy that clearly refers to the evidential version of the argument from evil in terms of how much evil there is in the world was by B. C. Johnson, who pointed out that if God created suffering to help us in both character and soul building, why is there so much evil? This objection emphasizes that God didn't need to allow so much evil: if he was all loving, he wouldn't want to see his creation go through so much pain. This objection asserts that he would allow just enough suffering required for soul making, but no more than that. But there seems to be obviously a lot more pain, evil, and suffering than what is needed for soul making. For example, picture an eight-year-old who was full of love and had a happy disposition. She was young and had not done any bad, when suddenly she was kidnapped, bludgeoned to death and dismembered. Johnson claims that in situations like this there is no way that down the road there would be justifiable positive effects for the recipient of this horrible fate. Johnson

also argues that someone who sees unnecessary evil and does nothing about it would be objectionable as well. This can be seen in the case of a bystander who sees evil happening and does nothing to stop it. In such cases, we would say that this bystander person couldn't be an all-loving person. Johnson emphasizes that God allowing babies to suffer does nothing to maximize any sense of moral urgency that we might otherwise need for our character building, or the moral importance of rectifying the situation, and thus that Hick's theodicy doesn't definitively address the large amount of unnecessary evil that exists.

Another problem with Hick's theodicy is, the evil that is found in nature, natural events that kill many people, such as floods, lightning, and earthquakes, among others. For example, if there is an enormous earthquake that kills thousands of people, why would God, if he is all powerful and all loving, have this happen, and who does it actually help? Hick acknowledges that there is much more evil that far exceeds what is needed for soul making. Hick replies that we need to have faith and hope in the justice of the afterlife to rectify and balance out what appears to be massive evil and injustice in this life.

Robert M. Adams's argument against the argument from evil is that God can do no wrong to a being that is not existent, and in creating a being that's imperfect in an imperfect world riddled with suffering, he is showing the full depth of his mercifulness. He gives a description of a mother who is given the option to take a pill which will make her child cognitively impaired. Suppose this woman has adopted, raised and lovingly cared for children with similar deformities, and wants to have one of her own, but has become so pro-attitude toward the disabled and anti-attitude toward the abled that she would never bring into existence an abled child. The mother takes the pill and the child is impaired. Adams asks, would the mother be morally evil if she still brings into existence an imperfect being or a suboptimal human being in comparison to not bringing the child into existence at all? The idea is that there is something merciful and caring about bringing into existence a being that might not otherwise had existed if it had to be "better" or "normal" by analogy. We might be like that child to God. In this reasoning Adams addresses the omnibenevolence of God.

The second argument Adams addresses is the related idea that our existence would not have taken place if God had to only create a being greater than us. He gives an example to describe this line of thought. Adams points out that if a breeder bred goldfish instead of puppies, the breeder wouldn't be wronging the non-existent dogs, and couldn't turn the goldfish into dogs. Similarly, if God had to only create the most perfect beings and thus starts creating more perfect, angelic beings, humans would no longer exist. So, if we are as the fishes and better beings are as the dogs, in this analogy, then it would be unfair to create a world where we would not even exist for not being the most perfect beings that God could create. This argument supports Hick's theodicy insofar as it calls into question the underlying assumption in the argument from evil to the effect that God must create the best

possible world with the best possible beings in it, which world and beings would lack any and all evils and imperfections.

Adams's contribution is helpful, but there are potential problems with it. For example, in "Must God Create the Best World?" Jerome Weinstock writes:

(1) if a perfectly good moral agent creates any world at all it would have to be the very best world he could create.

Weinstock starts out by defining "grace" according to his understanding of the reasoning he finds in Adams, which is a disposition to love which is not dependent on merit of personal love. Weinstock points out that people who follow Adams's theory believe that God's grace is the reason for our creation and we are undeserving of that. Weinstock states that people who believe this grace theory to be true also regard God's graciousness as an important part of God's perfection. Weinstock also states that Adams suggests that a world with God's grace would be superior to ones that are similar but lack that grace. Weinstock then analyzes grace in three ways:

1. God has a certain disposition which is regarded as perfection.
2. "His Grace" or "being gracious" which is him using said disposition.
3. The world having grace which is a manifestation of God's love. (88)

In Adams's argument, Weinstock states, Adams adds the following similar claims:

1. God's graciousness is a form of perfection.
2. God's graciousness need not lead to a perfect world.
3. God's perfection is due to his grace. (88)

Weinstock claims that Adams does nothing to explain why God's graciousness leads to perfection. Weinstock explicitly questions how graciousness leads to perfection, because Weinstock is trying to question if grace is the only prerequisite for something to be considered perfect. Weinstock argues against the issue of something being a virtue, such as the virtue of grace, yet regarding it as being utilized, to be explained shortly. Weinstock critiques Adams's grace argument by comparing it to being kind. Weinstock replaced grace with being kind, which is another virtue, saying that God's kindness is why he created a less than perfect world, which line of reasoning doesn't hold up. Let me explain Weinstock's reasoning:

1. In God creating a world with supreme kindness the evils of the world would not exist.
2. Evil exists.

3. Therefore, rationally, if kindness was the virtue used, then we should conclude God doesn't exist.

Weinstock adds that a world with the grace of God and imperfection would be the best world if Adams was correct. Weinstock points out that a world without imperfection and the grace of God may be a better world, however. He makes a brilliant deduction by giving an example showing how Adams's argument is misleading. Weinstock says it is misleading to point to a characteristic or ability as a virtue. It is stated that there are characteristics that are virtues that people hope to never be used. One such characteristic, according to Weinstock, is the ability to heal gunshot wounds. Weinstock argues that a world where this characteristic/virtue need not exist would be better due to the condition that needs to be met for it to be invoked. In other words, a world with gunshot wounds is required for that ability to be exercised, but that sort of world is not preferable to a world in which there are no gunshot wounds. Then Weinstock claims that God's characteristics follow suit. God would not need to be gracious if there was a perfect world.

Weinstock argues that God's grace and a perfect world are not mutually exclusive, so God creating an imperfect world would make no sense. So, overall, God's grace has no direct correlation with God not creating the most perfect world. Weinstock adds that God creating an imperfect world may be even a bit immoral because it would be like a doctor shooting a patient to then heal him afterward. In this regard, he says it is better than not being healed, but it is still not the best outcome. It would be better to just not be shot. Weinstock's counter-example is clever, but technically, it is more relevant to the logical version of the argument from evil, than it is to the evidential version of the argument from evil. That is, it does not directly address the issue of how much the existing evil in the actual world counts against the existence of a loving God, but rather it seems more directly concerned with the question of whether a world with imperfections or evils like any gunshot wounds at all is inconsistent with the very concept of a loving God. Since our main focus here, however, is the evidential argument from evil, we can set Weinstock's argument aside.

Rick Repetti addressed another aspect of Adams's theodicy in "If God Didn't Satisfice, We Could Still Exist." The notion of "satisfice" plays a key role in philosophical theodicy. According to this idea, it is enough if a perfect being satisfices, that is, if he brings into existence beings in worlds that are morally/psychologically minimally satisfactory, so long as, overall, doing so brings more value to those beings/worlds than would be brought into existence in their absence. Repetti argues against Adams's implied "non-identity" claim made in Adams's satisfice argument:

We would not be the superior beings God could have created.

This idea was illustrated in the claim that if God had to create better beings than us, like puppies instead of goldfish, we wouldn't be those better beings, just as goldfish cannot be puppies. Repetti argues Adams's theory is inconsistent with the theology behind Adams's claims. Repetti claims that his principle collapses on its own reliance of what constitutes a person as an individual. That is, Adams's theology asserts that what makes us who we are is our soul, not our body, so in theory God could put a human soul into a more perfect body and it would still be the same soul. If so, then it's false that we couldn't be the same being if God was required to make only perfect beings, and thus Adams's non-identity argument fails.

Repetti points out that Adams claims that goldfish cannot complain that God could've made them better, more like puppies, a more perfect creature than goldfish. This is because puppies are so different from the goldfish that the puppies would not be the goldfish. Thus, if the atheist is right that God, being perfect, has to create the most perfect being, then God would have to not create goldfish, and would have to create puppies instead, or not create us, but would create more angelic beings instead, in which case we wouldn't be able to be those very different beings, in which case we wouldn't exist at all. This is supported by the example of one who intentionally gives birth to a disabled child that wouldn't exist if she were only allowed to give birth to an abled child. Adams's argument implies we should be grateful that God mercifully allowed us lesser beings to exist. But Repetti objects if we are souls, as the Judeo-Christian religion suggests, then God could've put our souls in more perfect bodies like the (puppies) and then we would exist, contrary to Adams's theodicy.

Adams's argument is broken into two parts: the first being (a) a non-existing superior being cannot be harmed by not being created and (b) if God must create superior beings, we wouldn't be them. I would like to rebut Repetti's soul argument, against Adams's (b). Repetti points out that within the theology that frames and informs Adams's theodicy, there are many claims that our soul is independent of, predates, and survives the annihilation of the body. Thus, if this soul predates the body, then Adams's theory would be null and void because if the soul/self predates the body, then we are who/what we are, before our physical creation.

The creation of man isn't solely on the physical level, but arguably also on the supernatural level, or that of the soul. In the satisfice argument, to satisfice is to bring about any state of affairs that is minimally satisfactory — to satisfy minimal criteria. These criteria need to minimally satisfy the condition that God could be omniscient, omnibenevolent and omnipresent, within a world that has evil. Let's assume that God has a system, which is such that when the egg is fertilized by the sperm the creation of the soul would happen at that exact moment. This soul, arguably, may be thought of as growing with the developing of the fetus, from conception, through childhood, adulthood, death and then the afterlife, where the body died and the soul didn't. This soul, while being separate, would not predate

the being that it is attached to, or, in other words, it would be a “new-soul” that comes into being with the new embryo, as part of its identity. This concept of the “new-soul” would align well with Hicks’s soul-building theodicy. Hick’s soul-making theodicy states that God purposefully made us unfinished so that we freely develop our own character and this would not be possible if God created us as pets and himself our all loving owner who wants to keep us in a safe world. This soul through life would develop and flourish with the host, or, based on their actions, become evil.

Skeptics against the argument that the soul and body are formulated at the same time could inquire how would this “new-soul” explain how an all-loving, all-knowing and all-powerful God would allow children to be born into horrible circumstances, such as being born malformed, sickly, or into a bad environment full of suffering. One could argue that a soul from its creation doesn’t lack perfection, but rather it is either corrupted, or ascends through the process of life. So, in the case of someone who was born with a malformity and goes through life, or someone facing great loss comparatively, like Job, with countless sufferings and bad luck, how could this in any number of ways be fair? The unfairness of a soul’s environment, or a soul that is placed into a body that has a horrible fate, doesn’t discount the free choices they have, to either do good or bad actions. This could be seen with individuals who are born in environments that are suboptimal and still find a way to be good, while people who have the same environment and circumstances as they, or even better circumstances, find themselves doing bad things, for bad reasons.

Consider those individuals who have been born into those circumstances and end up becoming evil. Let’s say that those individuals choose, of their own free will, to make the wrong choices when provided with the option between right and wrong. People would ask why would God be so unfair to specific individuals and not to others? This implicit claim, that God is unfair, while seemingly obvious, may be addressed. To do so, I think that Hick’s soul-building can be put to use here. These people are not born into unfair lives. From the religious perspective, they are born into opportunities for character-building. What they’re born into is what Hick describes as an opportunity for soul-making, and heaven is the end result for freely made good choices. So, what about babies that are born to soon after die, or people who are born as cognitively impaired? Some may say they didn’t have an opportunity to build their souls, in which case the soul-making theodicy does not explain their suffering. Also, to fully accept this concept of soul-making there has to be a fundamental faith/belief in an afterlife and a heaven and hell, but the believer cannot expect the atheist to accept a claim on the basis of faith.

Suppose that a baby was born and died shortly afterwards. Isn’t there a possibility that there is a world in which, since that baby didn’t commit any evil acts, his soul lacking evil (because good inherently is the lack of evil), God would allow that baby to go to heaven? Some may ask why baby souls have it so easy, whereas

adult souls have it difficult and have to go through a life of potential error. I would suppose that an all-knowing, all-loving and all-powerful God understands that these adult souls, while being subjected to potential error, need a lot more further developing or have a potential to help another soul through their life development. Soul-building would be why God didn't allow all souls to develop the same way. Though there are flaws in Adams's theodicy, I think from the standpoint of the new soul theory, Adams theodicy may be defended.

Repetti poses a counterargument to the "new-soul" theory. The counterargument is that the new soul idea doesn't undermine Repetti's objection to the effect that we can have our souls be the same "starter" soul for the purposes of soul-making, even if put into embryonic bodies if our souls existed in God's timeless universe for all eternity in some inactive state of suspended animation pending our birth or if God creates the soul at the moment an egg is fertilized, either way, our souls are presumably all perfect points of God-stuff or supernatural/metaphysical soul substance that will have all the same soul/mind/body/world interactive opportunities. Since both eternal pre-existing and freshly minted soul can be made to be identical by God. Thus, Adams's non-identity argument, if God made better beings it wouldn't be us, remains invalid.

However, I would argue that within a universe where soul-building and non-identity exists, God wouldn't be obligated to create the best in the first place because it would go against creating a world that allowed us free-will. This would maintain the purpose for him creating us in the first place. Better beings wouldn't even be in the equation, due to God wanting to allow us the benefit of falling in a non-cartoon world. A non-cartoon world, explained by Hick, is an environment that allows us to learn from the consequences of our action. For instance, if we jumped off of a cliff in a cartoon world, we would be able to scoop our body right off the ground and continue about our day. In order to make decisions that have consequence we need to live in such a non-cartoon world.

The skeptic could reply here, taking his cue from Weinstock's example of a world without gunshot wounds being superior to ones with the ability to heal them, that the non-cartoon world is analogous to a world in which gunshot wounds are not only possible but necessary. The skeptic may add that in fact there seem to be way more gunshot wounds than are needed for soul-making. The question for the evidential argument from evil would be: how can you tell or count which evils are not necessary for soul-making? The answer is not decisively obvious either way. Thus, the "evidence" of excess "evil" is weak.

Weinstock points out that an all-good, all-knowing and all-powerful God could have created a world without imperfection, so the idea of this being the best world that he could create gives us no reason for understanding why he created a world that was imperfect, and doesn't answer the question of evil. I believe this to be the biggest flaw in Adams's claim, the idea that God could still be gracious, and create perfect beings. On the other hand, while Hick's argument has flaws,

Hick does a better job of giving a well-rounded idea of how there could be an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent God, and evil within the same world. Hick's theodicy identifies that there are faults with his argument and does a better job of giving the way in which he tackles them. Like the concept of faith, where Hick points out the amount of evil in the world, and that it seems like there is far more than is required for soul building, then he points out natural malevolence like earthquakes and floods. Hick says to these possible objections that we need to have faith that an all-knowing, all-loving, all-powerful God knows best, and has our best interest at hand.

There are many arguments for this theodicy. This paper hopefully made some of these arguments clear, on both sides. I believe that there is a God or entity, outside of the cosmos, that possesses the three characteristics of being, all-knowing, and all-powerful, and that this non-cartoon world and our free will are both necessary for beings like us to experience soul-building and have the opportunity to become the better sort of beings we freely choose to become, by being presented with the challenges that are only possible in a world like ours. In conclusion, I don't think the evidence of evil is conclusive evidence against the existence of a loving creator.

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# How Can Educators Apply Strategies to Prevent Bullying in School?

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I am a future educator who has graduated from Kingsborough Community College with my associate degree in Childhood Education. I believe that bullying is still a big issue today in schools and as I continue to embark on my journey to becoming a teacher, I will see it more and more. When I was in middle school and high school, I was a target of bullying by people that I had been friends with when I was younger. I remember eating my lunch in the bathrooms or eating lunch with a few of my teachers, just so I didn't have to face my bullies, at least for an hour. It was a horrific experience I endured every day, getting bullied about my appearance or just anything I would do or say. I tried to hurt myself many of times and never wanted to go to school, my education was the last thing I was worried about. When I finally graduated from high school is when I got away from the bullies. Nothing was ever done to prevent any of it, so I suffered in silence for a long time. It is so important to me to shine light on this issue because I feel that the education system has been failing in part to this. Our teachers need to stop turning a blind eye to it and do something to prevent it early on, as well as stop it by having a strict policy.

## **Psychosocial Adjustment**

“Bullying behaviors among US youth” is a study from 2001, which is nerve-racking, to think that even from back then that bullying was a major problem on the rise. We can imagine how much that this has risen from the year 2001, which this study is showing the ongoing issue to be linked with psychosocial adjustment. There are so many studies that have been conducted in the world and the similarities of the types of bullying can say a lot about what is going on. In a British study they have found that physical and verbal aggression is more common in the boys, as a lighter, “indirect” form was more common within the girls (Nansel et al., 2001). In a Rome study they have found the same results, so just to think that the same type of bullying is occurring everywhere else, not just

in the USA, is alarming and we, the educators, need to implement policies and procedures when encountering bullying in schools. The children are at risk of their well-being and social functioning, really impairing their healthy development at a young age (Nansel et al., 2001).

This study states, “Those bullied demonstrated poorer social and emotional adjustment, reporting greater difficulty making friends, poorer relationships with classmates, and greater loneliness” (Nansel et al., 2001, p. 2098). When I was bullied, I felt all these emotions and it was hard for me to make friends or even talk to anyone in class. I felt like I did not fit in, and always felt like the odd one out. Today as an adult I do not have any friends, but as a person individually I have come a long way and I am more outgoing and do not care what anyone thinks of me now. Yes, I have suffered emotional scars from it, but I was lucky enough to have strong relationships with my family and a significant other. Not many are as lucky as I am, the loneliness and depression can make its path through adulthood years, causing permanent damage. The children doing the bullying can have greater negative impacts on their lives, that can lead into their adulthood as well. Nansel et al. say, “Persons who bullied others were more likely to be involved in other problem behaviors such as drinking alcohol and smoking. They showed poorer school adjustment, both in terms of academic achievement and perceived school climate” (Nansel et al., 2001, p. 2099). Providing a safe and close school environment can prevent these stereotypical behaviors and teach children how to form a meaningful encounter with other classmates, as well as making close relationships.

### **Authoritative School Discipline Over Security Measures?**

In today’s world we have seen so many incidents of school shootings and school violence, there could be a link to it because of bullying circumstances that have gone unnoticed by educators and school staff. The authors of “Preventing school bullying” conducted a study to see if the authoritative school discipline approach should be prioritized over security measures. When children see security heightened in their schools, it can be very scary and can make the children even more anxious to come to school. This is the negative affect security measures have, which is the reason why it’s so controversial (Gerlinger et al., 2016). The slightest form of bullying can escalate to something more serious when schools are not taking initiative to do something about it. As stated in the article, “Bullying generally includes a physical or psychological imbalance of power between the victim and the bully, and both bullies and victims are likely to suffer from serious short- and long-term repercussions” (Gerlinger et al., 2016, p. 134). This imbalance of power can be a scary thing. I remember feeling powerless against my bullies, scared to turn a corner in the hallway. When creating a structured and controlled environment for students, the chance is less likely that bullying will occur, showing that it will not be tolerated in the school. “Schools could benefit from creating a positive school climate in which both students and staff are encouraged to follow school

rules, treat each other with respect, and demonstrate tolerance and understanding towards one another” (Gerlinger et al., 2016, p. 136).

### **Prevention of Bullying**

As teachers we must work to prevent bullying from happening at an early age, by showing students what empathy and compassion is. The early years in school are so crucial to instill in a child that bullying is not okay, and when there is an issue with another classmate that it is okay to speak to a teacher about it. “A safe and supportive school climate can be one of the best tools in preventing bullying. Whether it’s the classroom, the cafeteria, the library, the restrooms, on the bus, or on the playground, children need to feel safe—or they can’t focus on learning” (Brenchley, 2012). Having a school community that is on top of how to prevent bullying and how to address it as it is occurring is going to create a safe and supportive environment for these children. The targeted children of bullying, as well as the bullies themselves, are at risk of having it affect their lives in ways that can be carried throughout their adulthood years. “Targeted children often suffer from poor performance in school, sleep issues, anxiety, and depression. And let’s not forget the students doing the bullying—they’re at a much higher risk for a whole host of issues that could extend into adulthood, ranging from violent behavior to substance abuse” (Lesley University, n.d.).

As an educator if we are passionate about preventing bullying in our classrooms, then we will teach at an early age empathy and kindness to our students. Everyone is different and we all have our own identities, so it’s important for students to learn their own identity early on, as well as others’ identities. This is to build a sense of who we are and of who are the people around us. Susan Patterson from Lesley University states, “Empathy is the ability to put yourself in someone else’s shoes, and teachers need to embed this skill into their curriculum. We need to do identity work with children early on so that kids know who they are and who everybody else is and what their place is in the world.” Be aware of what happens in the classroom, the hallways, the cafeteria, and make yourself seen throughout the school. Talk to your students daily to see how they are doing and be available to have discussions if a situation occurs. Have a group discussion with all students and make it clear that it’s a respectful environment and they can be open about their feelings (Gordon, 2018). When you see bullying occur in front of you, intervene immediately, stop it on the spot! Do not brush it off and do it later. Bullies need to learn that there are consequences to these actions (Brenchley, 2012).

Have students be effective bystanders, instill in them to make the bold choice of standing up for that victim. Let them know it is okay to tell you, as their teacher, or even another adult because it is a safe environment they are coming to (Brenchley, 2012, Gordon, 2018). It is very important when addressing altercations or issues that occur between students to get all the facts from all parties. Separately talk with the victim first, then talk with the other students involved and find out what

the issue is (Lesley University, n.d.). While listening to all the parties involved and getting the facts, never refer to the act as “bullying” or being a “bully.” Sometimes a child may not realize they are being mean to another child, unintentionally causing that child to feel hurt by what they have said or done. Come up with solutions on how to resolve the problem and how it could have gone differently (Gordon, 2018). Talking to the students individually, as the teacher you should continue to see if the problem still occurs and ask how they are doing. Suggest guidance counseling to each individual because it can be very helpful on both parts. The victim can regain their self-esteem, and the intimidator can work on better ways of communicating (Brenchley, 2012, Gordon, 2018). The parents should be aware of all the strategies and rules for addressing bullying in your school community. Increase awareness by social media, newsletters, PTA meetings, and conferences (Brenchley, 2012, Gordon, 2018).

### Conclusion

As a future educator, I find that embedding these beliefs into my curriculum will be so beneficial in the long run for my students. All future educators should see how much of a growing issue it has become over the years and do something about it, because if not us then who will? Students depend on us, looking at us as role models in their daily lives, learning right from wrong. We must take these preventative steps for bullying to make the environment safe and conducive for learning, because if there is chaos, then let's face it, these students will not learn and will not want to learn. My personal experience has shown me how much this is the truth, and that was many years ago, so just imagining that it has escalated so much is a gut-wrenching feeling. I want to make a difference in my future students' lives and bring the light to fellow educators. We need to take a stand for these students and show them that bullying will not be tolerated.

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# A Crisis of Masculinity: The Pin to the Domestic Violence Grenade and How Interdisciplinary Studies Can Save Us All

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Independent Study  
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**A**t this very moment, someone you know is being abused. Run through the faces of everyone you saw today; On campus, on the train, in your neighborhood and at work. Several of them are being beaten by someone they live with, others are doing the beating. The person you just passed in the doorway was neglected as a child. The student that just handed their assignment late didn't sleep last night because their parents were fighting until the early morning. That girl misses classes not because she wants to, but because her girlfriend doesn't let her leave their apartment. Domestic violence creeps its way into our lives in little bits. The more blatant forms are what you see on TV, like the Chris Brown and Rihanna case. Those are easy to spot and hard to ignore. But sometimes it comes quietly, with charm and a smile. Sometimes it starts as a demand disguised as a suggestion wrapped so nicely that you think it's your idea. It comes with insecurities and misplaced anger and it leaves in handcuffs and body bags. It is the sound of loud noises and even louder threats. It feels the way a fist through a wall looks and the sound of a broken bone feels. It is drowning without the comfort of death. This is what nearly 10 million people a year feel on a daily basis. We know what happens to them, we've done the research, but what we can't answer is why. Why do people do this to each other? Who do we blame? A thing cannot exist if it doesn't have a reason and we are no closer to finding one. At least, none that fully explain all aspects of the problem in their entirety. What we have in place to deal with domestic violence is just that: things in place to deal with it. These are not solutions. A true solution would eradicate the issue, like a vaccine. Is our lack of solutions because we don't understand the problem as well as we thought or because we are unable to face the truth of why domestic violence continues? The toxicity of masculinity rearranges and taints balanced dynamics between people. It purposely puts people on unequal footing and leaves no room to better your position. This ideology dictates not only what is expected of either party, but the consequences of not following the rules.

Domestic violence is a broad topic often viewed through a narrow scope. When the average person thinks of domestic violence, they think of physically abusing one's wife. They think of the (appropriately) scary statistics like "every 15 seconds, a woman is beaten by her partner." Our brains grab onto symbols to try to help us understand concepts, so when we hear "violence" we think of someone being beaten beyond recognition. There is much more to domestic violence than that. There is emotional abuse, sexual abuse, financial abuse/exploitation, and psychological abuse. It includes intimate partner violence, elder abuse and child abuse. In this sense, "domestic" refers to those sharing a home. This paper will be focusing on intimate partner violence.

An abuser will isolate their victims from friends and family to make escape nearly impossible. Threats and intimidation are tactics commonly used but those threats are not always empty or for show. The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (2019) offers the following staggering statistics.

- "In the United States, an average of 20 people experiences intimate partner physical violence every minute. This equates to more than 10 million abuse victims annually."
- "1 in 4 women and 1 in 9 men experience severe intimate partner physical violence..."
- "1 in 3 women and 1 in 4 men have experienced some form of physical violence by an intimate partner. This includes a range of behaviors and in some cases might not be considered "domestic violence."
- "On a typical day, domestic violence hotlines nationwide receive over 20,000 calls."

Many headline-making quotes like these lead with the victim statistics for women. There are two reasons for this: A) We know more about women's struggles with domestic violence than men's, so it's easier to lead with what you know more of. The reporting and research for male domestic violence victims is lacking because men are less likely to report abuse. This will be discussed in detail later. B) There is an established narrative connected with domestic violence that says that it is a women's issue. We see men as being bigger and in more financial control and are therefore the more likely candidate to be the abuser. It is almost inconceivable for us to imagine the stereotypical man being abused, belittled and harassed by the stereotypical woman. That image doesn't make sense to us.

There is a big difference between what domestic violence used to be versus what it has become. We can trace intimate partner violence back to the Middle Ages, where church law "specified that women were 'subject to their men' and needed castigation or punishment. This punishment was made necessary by women's supposed inferiority ..." and was therefore not considered abuse (Dutton 5). It was thought that this "punishment" was the only solution to helping women

overcome the influences of the devil and witchcraft. Throughout the centuries and across country borders, using physical violence against your wife was considered within your legal right as a husband. There were vague limits put in place such as the “eighteenth-century Napoleonic Civil Code, which ... vested absolute family power in the male and as recognizing violence for grounds for divorce only when the courts decided that it constituted attempted murder” (Dutton 6). Anything short of death was A-OK in the eyes of the law. In 1864, the “Right of Chastisement” was cited as the legal reason a husband would do no jail time for beating and possibly strangling his wife. “The court ruled: ‘A husband is responsible for the acts of his wife, and he is required to govern his household, and for that purpose, the law permits him to use towards his wife such a degree of force as necessary’” (Klein and Klein vii). The “rule of thumb” in England and the United States at the end of the nineteenth century held that the rod you beat your wife with could not be wider than a man’s thumb. The list of what was legal for a him to do to a her goes on and on.

Domestic violence in modern times is a little different because the things husbands had a legal right to do in centuries past are now illegal. They still happen, and it was not an easy road to get them to be illegal, but baby steps. The 1950s and 60s were the beginnings of the civil rights movements for several groups. While this was by no means the first time women had tried to have their voices heard, it did set the stage for what would become the feminist movement. Throughout the next few decades, laws and policies protecting women came and went. Some were not helpful at all. In 1962, for example, domestic violence cases were taken out of criminal court and given to family court, where an abusive husband would receive civil penalties only. Fast-forward ten years to the early ’70s, and domestic violence hotlines were being established and clinics catering to women’s issues were being built. At the time however, domestic violence was still largely a women’s issue. The thought that intimate partner violence could affect men was beyond our collective mindsets. In 1994, the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act was passed and under title IV was the Violence Against Women Act. This was and remains to be one of the biggest breakthroughs for protecting women from the dangers of domestic violence. It has been reauthorized and tweaked in different ways by different states to accommodate modern necessities since its passing.

Throughout time, domestic violence has been used as a way to keep someone suppressed and submissive to another person. This struggle for power usually runs along a similar vein to the gendered power struggle. We attribute power to men and by extension, masculinity. The opposite, by default, is that powerlessness is attributed to femininity, whether the powerless person is male or female. There was a time when this was unquestioned and so, intimate partner violence was seen as a solution for the rare case where someone (usually a woman) didn’t go along with the norms that were set. When power became connected to masculinity, so did other things like wealth and strength. The absence of this,

weakness and poverty, became feminized. The struggle to maintain power, in your family or in your kingdom, became the struggle to defend one's masculinity. The two concepts became part of an inseparable whole.

Masculinity is commonly thought of as what makes something distinctly male or manly. It is a gendered ideology that is used to keep certain people (men) in a certain lane and others (women) out of that lane. Masculinity is the set of behavior patterns that are acceptable for male-bodied individuals. We live in an androcentric society (one that favors masculinity over femininity) where one's success in displaying one's gender is dependent on how much masculinity one is allowed to have. Living in an androcentric society means that one's gender determines the kind of treatment a person gets and influences all interactions with everyone else. This also requires women and female-bodied people to trespass on masculinity just a little if they want their fair share of power or respect. The partaking of "masculine behavior" (anything from having a powerful job to making the most money in the family) does not excuse them from their traditional feminine roles (taking care of the house and children); masculinity and its perks are in addition to, not instead of.

Both males and females must use masculinity for their own advancement, but to different ends. For men, true masculinity is a proof of purchase for their Man Card. This ensures that they are in their assigned place on the social hierarchy and have full access to the privileges that come with being a man. Women's "place" on the hierarchy is firmly below men specifically because they are not men. Women use masculinity to get what is denied to their gender. There is no way to get it through femininity, that's just not the way our society works. Women must adapt to masculine traits and ideals to get what men have by default. Not doing this means remaining nearly powerless and in a constant state of lacking and inadequacy.

This idea that masculinity is above all creates a culture where not having its privileges is akin to death. There is nothing more important, we think, than having power. Specifically, power over someone else. And so, when we think we have it, and it is being threatened or questioned, we react as if we are fighting for our lives. It is this culture that weaponizes masculinity as a tool to covet power. Masculinity, while flawed, is not toxic in itself. What makes it toxic is what is done to others for the sake of proving its legitimacy. Social norms dictate that all men are A, B, and C and are therefore deserving or possess power, respect and authority. Social norms also dictate that women are definitely not A, B or C and therefore get nothing and owe this power, respect and authority to men as compensation for having none themselves. We no longer live in a time where only the biologically male-bodied display masculinity and only the biologically female-bodied display femininity; so, it stands to reason that *people* display a mix of masculinity and femininity for various reasons. However, when it comes to people relating to other people and one has some form of perceived dominance or authority over the other, both males and females turn to masculinity to obtain or maintain that dominance.



It is the usage of masculinity as a reason, an excuse and an explanation for why one is above another that weaponizes masculinity and makes it toxic.

Aggression with or against a partner is often used to establish dominance in a relationship. Violence in a relationship is born and dies in the institutions we encounter in our everyday lives. Institutions are not always physical structures like a school or a company, an institution is “any system that has a defined set of norms that organize social life” (Hattery and Smith 14). These intangible institutions, like our families and friends, are where we first learn how to be in a society. They are also where we learn how to interact with other people. A person who is raised in an environment that promotes toxic masculinity will interact with others accordingly. Aggression and violence are all that person knows. Hattery and Smith argue that the loyalty one has to a given institution is just as important as what that institution is or stands for. In this sense, the toxic masculinity discussed here is an institution as well. Its proper use requires loyalty, otherwise it doesn’t work the way it needs to, to get the results it does. When it is added to a domestic violence situation (one can even say that it *is* the domestic violence situation) it is the loyalty to the base instincts it satisfies that continues to feed it. Toxic, hyper masculinity gets the results that domestic violence seeks.

We are taught from childhood that there is a natural order to gender dynamics in a relationship. There is the strong male-figure that provides and the submissive female-figure that is provided for. Adding an ultra-masculine ideal to this formula raises the risk for violence by leaving the door open for the person in the submissive role to go off script. This break from typical roles destabilizes the structure hyper masculinity puts in place. Violence is not the answer, it is the question. “What are you going to do about it?” “Why aren’t you respecting me?” “See what you made me do?” These are all the questions domestic violence asks. The expected answer is the submissiveness of the other person. We have established by now that domestic violence is what one person uses to dominate someone in a relationship and keep them suppressed. Toxic masculinity helps to legitimize the rationalization behind that awful treatment

Note the use of the word “masculinity” instead of strictly referring to males as a gender. This affects both male and female abusers, whether their partners are male or female. Domestic violence is not a male-perpetrator specific issue. According to the National Domestic Violence Hotline, “Nearly 3 in 10 women (29%) and 1 in 10 men (10%) in the US have experienced rape, physical violence and/or stalking by a partner and report a related impact on their functioning” and “nearly 15% of women (14.8%) and 4% of men have been injured as a result of IPV that included rape, physical violence and/or stalking by an intimate partner in their lifetime” (2018). This amounts to 12 million people in a given year. These numbers are estimates; they have to be because not everyone reports every crime. Even the police are more likely to file a report if the attacker in an assault is a stranger than if the two parties know each other.

This lack of reporting explains two things. First, it explains why we know more about how domestic violence affects women more than men. Women are more likely to report violence against them than men are. Not only that, but because domestic violence is seen as almost only against women, many men might not see the signs as they truly are. The image of “domestic violence survivor” becomes feminized. There is a stigma attached to the way we as a society see an ideal man, one that says that men must be strong, must be good providers and must be in control at all times. This image makes it hard for a man to come forward and admit that he has been hurt, especially if the one that hurt him is a woman. Coming forward would be a major blow to their ego. The fear of being perceived as weak is far greater than the danger of remaining in an abusive relationship. This image also makes it easier for a woman to come forward and say that she has been hurt. It is easier to wrap our heads around the man being the abuser.

Second, the lack of reporting also explains why we tend to ignore the possibility that intimate partner violence could be directed at a man. There isn't as much data on male survivors, but that doesn't mean there aren't any, it just means there isn't as much data. This void left behind by underreporting often serves as proof that this doesn't happen to men; this is far from the case. “The most often cited reason for ignoring the higher or nearly equal rate of domestic violence against men is that the figures include women acting in self-defense. This is not true in the majority of cases. Mutual combat is the norm in violent households” (Cook 17). If a relationship already has a tendency towards intimate partner violence, chances are, the violence is reciprocated. There is an imaginary difference between the violence coming from a man versus the violence coming from a woman. When a man beats a woman, we see that as worse because of his size and the increase in strength that comes with that. When a woman beats a man, we think that it is less damaging because it probably doesn't hurt him because of the size difference, or because she might be defending herself. These images are not only not accurate, but they are obstacles for lessening the dark figure of crime (the crime that is unreported and therefore cannot be addressed).

If we were to view every domestic violence situation against a man to be self defense or not take it seriously, it would be a failure of the criminal justice system for both the abuser and the survivor. “Male perpetrators get a lot of assistance, for example, they are commonly referred to batterer intervention programs. Female perpetrators, by not being recognized as such, often fail to get assistance, and they and their families do not receive needed intervention in a timely fashion” (Cook 40). Sexism is another reason some men feel they cannot come forward with their stories. Will they be believed? Yes, we know what the substantive law says, but what about the procedural law? How will this really be handled? Over the course of several interviews done by Philip W. Cook in his book *Abused Men: The Hidden Side of Domestic Violence*, one of the various concerns is that their female partner will be believed or that the police will automatically

take their side. This is sexism. Usually, when we hear “sexism” it brings to mind the maltreatment of women simply because they are women. But sexism goes both ways. The immediate siding with the female, before the facts have been fleshed out, is sexism against the man in the situation.

Intellectually, we know that this is sexism because we understand the definition of the word. But it still doesn't feel like sexism, does it? It feels like there's a big “Yeah, but ...” hanging overhead. We have learned to see sexism in one way and deviating from that makes us uncomfortable. Yes, this scenario favors one gender over the other and the gender not in favor is at a terrible disadvantage, *but* sexism is only for women, right? Not at all. There are always many more ways of seeing something other than yours. There are perspectives from other fields that can contribute to your understanding of a topic, even one that seems simple in theory but might be more complicated in practice, like sexism. Interdisciplinary studies seek to bring these fields together to shore up the holes left unanswered for by any one specialization. Interdisciplinary studies deal with “a complex problem (including mega ones) by drawing on disciplinary insights (and sometimes stakeholder views) and integrating them” (Repko 20). This is not to be confused with multidisciplinary studies, in which the views from multiple disciplines are used but are not combined. An interdisciplinary approach to domestic violence looks at it not only as the crime that it is, but an opportunity to address a larger problem. Unemployment is often used as a factor; it breeds frustration and misdirected anger. But there are other things to consider, like the abuser's mental stability and what kind of environment he/she grew up in. That list alone includes criminal justice, socio-economics, psychology and sociology. They all play a part in explaining not only who does this but who is affected by it and how we address it.

Let's take a step back from domestic violence for a moment and look at the idea of interdisciplinary studies as a whole. Being able to look at a problem through multiple lenses is important because there is no one fit-it-all solution to a complex problem. There are always tiny details that have everything and nothing to do with what is really going on. Interdisciplinary studies are a safe space to take all of those ideas and let them talk themselves out; like academic family therapy. The problem is never just your problem, it's also his problem and her problem and their problem and so on. School, in general, teaches straight from the disciplines (a particular branch of learning or body of knowledge such as physics, psychology, or history) (Repko 4). This method of teaching is limited in scope, though it is effective in flooding a student with facts. The issue therein is that, that isn't all there is to knowledge. Understanding that there are other parts to something, even if you don't understand all the parts yourself, helps you understand it better. Having enough mental flexibility to accept that you are but a small piece among many pieces helps you understand your place in the world.

Bringing domestic violence back to the forefront, interdisciplinary studies (referred to as IDS for the remainder of the paper) can level the playing field in

different ways. A) IDS helps people understand themselves and others. As a person, you are more complex than the small details that make up your whole. You are more than the product of your environment, more than your mistakes or your past. And you are more than what your future will be. The multifaceted nature of IDS takes all of this into account and approaches issues as if they are just as intricate as the people studying them. This is important when looking for an explanation for one's own behavior because there are many reasons why you do what you do. B) IDS gives you the ability to see things beyond what any particular discipline teaches you. There are holes in every theory, things that cannot be explained or cannot fit into a given perspective. Seeing the holes for what they are instead of narrowing the topic to fit the little bit of information you have puts you on the path to truly understanding it.

Common causes of domestic violence are mental illness, unemployment, growing up in a single parent household and/or poverty. From a criminal justice perspective, mental illness plays almost no part; if you did the crime, you do some form of the time. Unemployment and poverty don't give you a free pass to assault someone and neither does coming from a single parent household. Mom or Dad wasn't there to supervise you when you got home from school and you fell in with the wrong crowd? That's not our problem until you make it our problem. Domestic violence from an economic standpoint disregards the human aspect even more so. Taxpayer money is wasted when parties in a domestic violence case drop the charges against a partner. Programs for abusers require funding and if the participants are either not using the resources or are only using them to stay out of jail and aren't benefiting from the help, they are a waste of money. As discussed, men report being in abusive relationships less than women, so is it fiscally feasible to put as much funding into men's shelters as women's shelters? If we as a nation could do more about the unemployment rate for the good of everyone, we would. There is no plan to only help families affected by domestic violence with employment resources because they are not the only ones that need it. Domestic violence in its complete sense (child abuse, elder abuse and intimate partner violence) is so damaging to the family dynamic that the entire family structure is just shot to sunshine. An unstable family dynamic is the perfect incubator for unstable mental functioning. Each of these perspectives either disregards or glosses over the importance of the others. Yet not one of these is more important than any other.

The widened capacity for understanding yourself and the world around you through IDS does not in any way replace the nurturing one receives in childhood. As stated before, if a child grows up in an environment that promotes toxic masculinity and aggression, it is a good indicator that the child will display this in adulthood. The nurturing and socialization children need is not only necessary to teach them how to interact with others, but to teach them how to be in general. You will not always get what you want, it will not always be easy, and no, you aren't special. When these lessons are not taught at an early age, it builds frustration

when they are encountered in adulthood. Frustration in an emotionally underdeveloped person is often relieved in aggressive ways because there is no alternative available to them. If an adult is taught that a social or political problem can have solutions from a variety of sources, it gives them the problem-solving tools they were deprived of earlier in life. It carries over into other aspects of a person's life. Parenting techniques are hereditary: You parent the way you were parented, with slight variations. Coming from a bloodline of emotionally malnourished people means that the line will continue thusly unless something intervenes. Rerouting the track of an under-nurtured person can mean rerouting the track of their descendants.

Parental nurturing provides a safe space for a child to grow and be themselves. Nurturing is not just providing the basic needs such as food and shelter. Nurturing is a hug, it is comfort because the world is a crazy place, it provides the foundation for what is right and what is wrong. Not having this can cause depression, low self-esteem and low self-efficacy, not to mention getting into more trouble than you should. This is what is taught because this is what is known. Imagine the child of two narrowminded, authoritative parents with limited involvement in civic duties, limited interest in widening their horizons educationally, socially or mentally and little to no emphasis on the acceptance or tolerance (these are two different concepts) of others. What kind of adult will this child grow into? How will they raise their children? If you take that same child and expose them to IDS either in high school or college, how will that change them? I believe the phrase we're looking for here is "When you know more, you do more." IDS cannot undo damage already done, but it can be an effective ointment. Not being taught something is no excuse for not doing the right thing. As adults, we should know better when it comes to certain things, but do we? How much crime is caused by someone's greed and unwillingness to go through the proper channels to get what they want? How many assaults begin as small arguments between people without enough interpersonal skills to communicate a dissenting opinion? How much of a person's inability to exist among others can we blame on upbringing without holding *the adult in question accountable for their actions*? Let's say for arguments sake that Mom and Dad did not teach you to use your words and not your fists when something makes you angry. That does not give you a pass. IDS doesn't teach you what you should have been taught or what you should have caught onto by now in adulthood. What IDS does do is open your eyes to the possibility that there might be another way, there might be a different way of looking at this problem. Yes, you're right, but maybe she is too. That is a better legacy to leave your children than what was left for you.

Admittedly, there is a massive hole in my theory, and it would be a failure on my part if I did not point it out. This is an overly simplified solution for an issue I just spent a lot of pages convincing you is more serious and complicated than it may seem. An abuser is not thinking of bettering themselves or trying to find out why they handle situations poorly. They are on a power trip that does not include

a mental self-care regimen. Here is the bad news: this does not apply to everyone. This is not meant to sound doomsday pessimistic or overly dramatic, but it is very possible that it's too late for a large chunk of the population to benefit from this particular method. Our young people, the millennials, have a different way of viewing the world. They are not as rigid as the generations that raised them. This is both a good thing and a bad thing. These tools have to be given to people that are still forming their sense of selves. It acts as a preventative measure. This may be impactful for the established adults, but more likely than not, they are already stuck in their ways and will change from their patterns of behavior very little, if at all. Abusers are frustrated; they use aggression as a means of dominating someone to force them to accept their attempt at power. They are right and everyone else is wrong, so they won't enroll in classes that will point this out to them. And even if they were to take such a class, the material won't sink in because they will resist. The emotional maturity of this younger population must be invested in because like it or not, they are the future. They will be the next wave of politicians, the next teachers, the next doctors, and the next Supreme Court Justices. If they are not okay upstairs, we're toast. I do not want to give the impression that this is a fix-all solution or that everything would fit neatly in a pretty box if only we took this class instead of that one or if we just looked at it this way instead of that way. This is a *suggestion* of a solution based on observations and research and should be treated accordingly. Which also serves to make my point about an interdisciplinary approach to an issue. I am neither overdramatizing the positive effects IDS would have nor am I minimizing the importance of accountability for your own behavior. This is not a roundabout way of serving up a fresh excuse. And this is certainly not a commentary on how underdeveloped funding for IDS are in certain areas in favor for the STEM studies. There is still much to understand about intimate partner violence, and this is a tiny baby step.

It would also be a failure on my part if I did not try to make the connection between IDS and a possible Masculinity Movement. In the brief moments between the utterance of that statement and the time it takes for the pitchforks to be sharpened and the torches to be lit, I shall explain. The feminist movements were meant to call attention to the plight of women and to require society to acknowledge that they were deserving of equal treatment. They were a response to the feeling that your worth as a human being was directly connected to your gender. It was *not* an attempt to raise women above men or to prove that they were better than men. A potential masculinity movement would do the same for men in a different way. Objectively, we can argue that men (the biologically male-bodied and others) are under a lot of pressure from society to do and be certain things. We can also argue, with substantial proof, that this pressure is just as damaging as the pressure that women face from society. This should prompt a few questions: A) Why do we leave them to suffer if freeing them could mean freeing us? Societal norms require scaffolding and scaffolding requires support. Women can say, "We are not this and

this should not be demanded of us,” but that only unbalances half of the scaffolding. In order for the whole structure to be brought down to be rebuilt, all of the nuts and bolts have to be loosened. Certain things are expected of men because certain things are expected of women and vice versa. We cannot rebuild this structure bit by bit because in the time it takes to change these poles over here, the screws over there have rusted pretty tight. By loosening the rigid structure of what we expect from masculinity, we can reconfigure what it is used for and hopefully de-weaponize it.

B) Why has it taken so long for us to formally recognize this pressure as a problem? This goes back to why men report abuse less than women do. Participating in a movement such as this could be seen as weakness. Like being a “real man” was too hard and the world needs to stop being so mean. As if you instantly become less of a person the moment you admit that you aren’t what you are told you must be.

C) Why hasn’t this movement taken hold as well as the feminist movements have? It’s 2019, people. Supposedly, we are the most socially conscious generation in history. Instead of moving away from archaic views of what masculinity is or should be, we seem to be multitasking with them. While we do not hold the same views that our parents or grandparents had, we are still working around them. New forms of displaying masculinity have arisen and we have taken these to be *exceptions* to displaying masculinity. The metrosexual man, for example, can do “manly things” like work on cars and play sports, but can also take an interest in fashion and art. Instead of this being *one of many* forms of masculinity, it is a subgroup. You have men, then you have metrosexual men. It’s nice that a little space is made for the rest of us, but singling out a group as a subset defeats the purpose of making space. Just move over, you don’t have to make a production out of it. If we were to slacken the constrictions we have for proper masculinity like we have (started to do) for femininity, the frustration that comes with getting or not getting it right would also be alleviated. But first we would have to collectively acknowledge that it is next to impossible to “do” masculinity properly, which means those that “do” masculinity would have to admit that maybe they weren’t doing such a good job in the first place. This would be difficult because one hides behind a masculine façade to protect or prove oneself. One does not hide behind femininity, one is banished to it.

Each generation does a little better than the generation before it. The issue of domestic violence is nowhere near resolved, nor can it be cured with only one solution. Complex problems require equally complex remedies. The theories discussed here are just that: theories. There is no guarantee that IDS would aid in changing the mindsets of potential abusers or would provide a more diverse problem solving skillset. But it is a step, if not in the right direction then surely diagonally towards it. That’s better than nothing. The masculinity crisis, and it is indeed a crisis, is not seen as such because the people typically in power tend to subscribe to its ideology. Keeping to this pattern is a sure-fire way to ensure that this crisis remains intact and the collateral damage will continue to add up. The only way

out of that rut is to shake up the players. Aggression feeds on toxic masculinity; reducing its concentration starves the fire. If we remain an androcentric society, we continue to legitimize its existence, which helps it bleed into other aspects of our lives. How much crime would be reduced if we didn't feel the need to dominate, to own or to prove ourselves to someone else? If we were able to move past our need to act on those base emotions, how could that change the criminal justice system? There is a possibility that we would then be able to invest in rehabilitation instead of relying on incarceration as our only means of punishment. Think about what kind of society that would be if we weren't so obsessed with being or having more than the next person. Maybe, just maybe, there would be enough space for everyone instead of a select few.

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# The Intersection Between Gender Variant Individuals and Drug Use: Where Do We Go from Here?

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Professor Stuart Parker

Very little research has been done on any facet of life that affects transgender individuals' mental health. Thus, there is widespread conjecture, and inevitably misinformation, that contributes to the stigma of the mental health and medical treatment of this underserved community. To compound this, there is social stigma painting drug users as criminals, which contributes to the severity of the drug addiction phenomenon. This pilot study explores the intersection between gender-variant individuals and drug abuse and will attempt to plot out future options for studies concerning the well-being of members of the transgender community.

## Literature Review

Johann Hari begins *Chasing the Scream* with a beautifully, however infuriating, illustrative narrative of the origins of the drug war in the United States. The war on drugs has been pervasive in the memories of the recent generations and has been violent and bloody. The first laws prohibiting psychoactive substances were passed in 1914. Ten years earlier, a very young Harry Anslinger, the man who founded the federal government's drug fighting branches, witnessed his first drug withdrawals in the form of a woman's screams in a barn. This man took the drug war by the horns in the 1930s and made it an ugly and deadly phenomenon.

Anslinger was deeply affected by his experience as a child, and this began his desire to fight addiction. However, as he grew up, he developed racial biases which clouded his judgment, and which he used to manipulate legislators and the general public towards his agenda. Because of this, the drug war as we know it has

deep roots in institutionalized racism. Anslinger went so far as to comment that when a black man uses marijuana, he is sent in to a crazed rage and is incredibly dangerous; therefore, marijuana must be eradicated and these people must be put away. Propaganda was created on this basis, and the prison system was drastically expanded and altered to accommodate this notion.

Hari tells the story of a transgender man named Chino in Brooklyn that he befriends in the second part of his book. Chino's story explores everything from his childhood exposure to drug culture, to his struggle with gender identity and how that affected his mental health and drug use. Chino, like many in the transgender community, experienced familial and societal rejection, which has been shown to cause a lot of mental health problems. Because of this and his upbringing, Chino fell into the American drug use lifestyle of using and selling, wound up in the prison system, and had a very difficult time getting himself out of it. He managed to get sober, and now runs an organization working to shut down juvenile detention centers around the country in an effort to stop the institutionalization process from beginning in childhood.

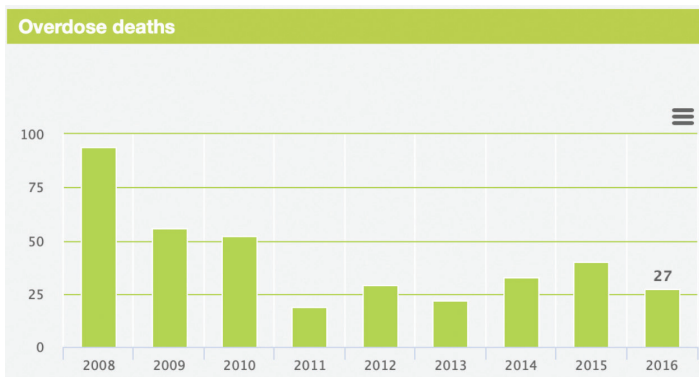
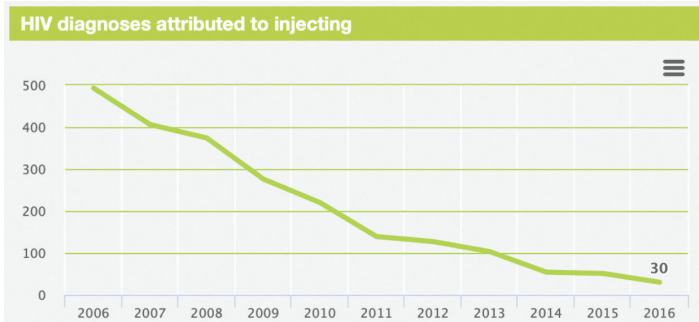
The effects of social environment are further illustrated in Bruce Alexander's "Rat Park Study" (Alexander et. al.). In this study, the researcher first put rats into bare cages and made available food and two water bottles: one with fresh water and one infused with morphine, in which case the rats chose the morphine and died of malnutrition. In the second part of the study, a set of rats was kept in isolated conditions, and another set was kept in colonies. The colonies were group living situations, where the rats had free access to food, water, physical activity, and social activity. A bottle with morphine was also made available. These rats chose fresh water over morphine. The isolated rats exhibited expected behavior with the morphine, but when later placed into the colonies and allowed to integrate into those rat societies, they too began to choose the fresh water.

It would appear that the Rat Park Experiment shows that material conditions (open areas with access to exercise and social situations) and institutions (the social structure of rats, in this case) play a huge role in developing the system that created addiction as we know it. This experiment does need to be replicated for more conclusive results, and further non-experimental studies would be helpful in humans to further explore the effects of stigma and social systems on drug use, though it seems that Portugal is off to a great start with its new public policy on addiction.

Portugal implemented a radical new drug policy in 2010. Instead of criminalizing drugs, it has completely legalized them. Patients' drug use is supported medically, rather than condemned socially. This completely removes the anxiety of addiction that often leads drug users to use more frantically, thus overdosing or increasing their tolerance and dependency. They can continue their lives normally. This policy also distributes clean syringes, as the substances are all prescribed.

Portugal reports staggering results, perhaps the most so in the reduction of new HIV cases. In 2006, there were about five hundred new cases attributed directly to injecting illicit substances. In 2018, there were thirty-six. Also substantial is the decrease in overdose deaths: from ninety-four in 2008 to the lowest of nineteen in 2011. Likewise, the crime rates have drastically decreased, as drugs are easily available and the need for black market substances no longer exists (Santos).

### TABLES FROM PORTUGAL DRUG REPORT, 2018 (Santos)



Overdose deaths in Portugal, 2008-2016 (Santos)

Of course, there are biological and physiological components to addiction. Addiction is a complicated phenomenon that stems from a mix of broken social systems, biological predispositions, and physiological changes that occur in the brain after repeated exposure to a substance (Kandel). However, as there is very little research on gender variance, there is very little research on the social aspects of addiction (James, et. al.). The people at the intersection of these issues are being done a great disservice; we as a society do not understand how to help them.

### Methods

Two individuals were interviewed with the same set of questions regarding their upbringing, drug-use history, and experience with gender variance. The participants were informed that the interviews would be recorded for the purpose

of transcription, then destroyed, and their identities kept confidential; both agreed. Participant 1 was met in person, and Participant 2 was met with over Facebook video Messenger. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and destroyed. There is no numerical data, therefore this is a qualitative study. As this was a pilot study, it was very limited. The sample was very small with only two participants, both assigned male at birth.

## Findings

Participant 1 is a genderqueer drag performer in New York City who was assigned male at birth. They use they and they pronouns. They had a cultured childhood and were raised with their immediate family and were close to their grandparents. They went to public school but took solace playing the violin and preferring spending time with girls over boys. They realized in college that they liked makeup and heels offstage as well as during performances. Their friends know about their gender identity as do their family, but it's not talked about within the family due to the participant's discomfort in discussing sexuality or gender identity with them. Participant 1 would like to do more to express their gender identity but doesn't feel safe after Trump's election.

Participant 1's drug use started with nightlife and gender expression on stage as drug use is ingrained in the gay culture they experienced. It was easy to get drugs as a well-known performer. The participant went on a weeklong bender following a birthday, which ended in an episode of suicidal ideation, self-harm, and a hospital stay. They did eventually go back to using but found themselves in some precarious situations and had to reassess. They cut off all contacts and connections to drugs. Friendships did become distant during drug use, and visits to an ill family member were put off because of this.

Post drug use, Participant 1 still is afraid of missing out: "Why can't I use but you can?" They cheated once for a friend's going away party but hasn't used since then. They still see drug use when performing but actively does not pay attention to it. The participant is now a high-achieving student. Their relationship with themselves has improved through Zen Buddhism. The participant does not regret drug use because they wouldn't have made the decisions to become successful without it. Their goals for the future include to simply be happy.

Participant 2 is non-binary, female-leaning, and assigned male at birth, living in Ohio. She uses she and her pronouns. Her family was not accepting of her sexuality or kind of gender variance when she was younger. She was bullied at school and knew she was different at a young age. She did identify her gender difference when she was quite young but rejected this for a very long time. She was influenced by a transgender character on a TV show to come out as transgender. Her family is still not accepting her gender identity in adulthood. She has a supportive circle of friends and husband. She would like to do more to express her gender identity but finds this difficult due to larger shoe and dress size, financial stressors,

and not feeling safe in the political and social climates.

The participant's family was very controlling and overbearing when she was younger, which she attributes to driving her to a bad relationship with a drug dealer. Eventually, methamphetamines became entwined with sex; she becomes desperate for sex as if she is starved for oxygen. She still struggles with meth use and subsequently unsafe sex. Her friends and husband are concerned but supportive; her husband is very loving, and they are in an open polyamorous marriage. Both she and her husband state that she is harder on herself than anyone else. Her ideal future includes living with her husband and another polyamorous transgender couple on a ranch, running an "occult witchy shop." The participant states that the future is hard to fathom because of self-worth issues. She is seeing a therapist and they are trying to figure out what fuels her addiction so that she can heal.

### **Analysis**

Though the sample size for this pilot study was very small, it provided great information and the participants were unexpectedly willing to discuss some very personal issues. There were some mutual themes from both participants. Both were assigned male at birth, were bullied at school and had some familial difficulties as a result of their sexuality and gender expression. Both participants would like to express their gender identity more often than they do, but don't feel safe because of the political and social climates. Both participants also drew a parallel from how they were treated and made to feel about their gender identity to their drug use, without being prompted. Therefore, it would seem that social stigma has played or is playing a role in these individuals' struggles with substances. Because this study was so limited, conclusions cannot be drawn outside of this scope, and extensive additional research needs to be done on the issue and how to address it. This is why it is so paramount that these studies be done.

### **Future Studies**

Very little research has been done on transgender and gender variant individuals, and so much research beyond drug use needs to be done in order to understand how to help this group best. Gender identity is not included on the U.S. Census, so there is no definitive answer to how many people identify as transgender or any variation of nonbinary. This is thought to be due to a lack of understanding and certainly acceptance by government officials and leads to a slew of statistical problems. There can be no definitive longitudinal studies on issues such as the rate of suicidal ideation before and after transition. These numbers are currently unknown, despite many mental health practitioners reporting the numbers from their own patients returning to the levels of the non-gender variant population after a transgender client has undergone and settled into their realized gender (Frank). Understanding the scale of and factors going into the suicidal ideation of transgender individuals could help practitioners treat their patients more effectively,

and help educators develop programs similar to the ones already in place for suicide prevention for gender conforming individuals and those of different demographics.

To obtain quantitative data in future studies such as the one regarding the rates of suicidal ideation before and after transition, a self-reported survey could be helpful. More helpful, however, would be a collaboration between mental health and perhaps medical providers where these providers, with the permission of their patients, kept reports on the suicidal ideation rates of their own patients and report back to a research committee. This committee would then compile the data deemed appropriate, certainly into “before” and “after” categories; but also perhaps by direction of transition (female to male, male to female), age group, location, and so on. Archival research is always helpful to set up a foundation for a study, but there is very little valid, reliable research to work off of. At this time, experimental studies are not appropriate as they would interfere with an already fragile group of people and put them further at risk.

### **Conclusion**

Bias and stigma are pervasive factors in many struggles in the lives of just about everyone, gender-variant and gender-conforming alike. They are social constructs created by systems that evolve over long periods of time that serve a purpose in our various societies. This phenomenon led to the racist foundation of the United States drug war led by Harry Anslinger, the remnants of which we are still fighting today. The drug war affects every demographic but tends to hit disenfranchised minorities the hardest. One of these minorities is the transgender community, which is one of the least understood populations in the country and world. The level of bias and stigma towards this demographic further compounds the tendency to fall into the habits of drug addiction, and the lack of understanding due to the lack of research does these individuals a great disservice.

The participants in this pilot study provided a wealth of information on their own lives and the pressures of society on them to fit into the “norm.” It is very difficult to be oneself as a gender variant individual because of the political and social environment, and it feels unsafe to express one’s true gender. This seems to culminate in a tendency towards mental health and drug abuse issues, and both expressed they used controlled substances as a direct result of how they were treated due to their gender nonconformity.

The participants not only provided information about themselves and the relationship between gender variance and drug use; they shed light on directions for more research. There are so many more subjects that need to be addressed in order to understand and serve gender variant individuals the way that everyone else is, and so many different methods to do so.

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# How Does Working in Healthcare Take a Toll on the Mental Health of Its Employees?

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The stressful nature of the healthcare field leads to a number of mental health issues for nurses and other healthcare employees. Healthcare professionals have been found to experience higher degrees of work-related stress, burnout, and psychological strain than other professions (Khamisa, Peltzer, Ilic, & Oldenburg, 2016). This essay investigates the contributing factors, direct and indirect effects, and potential responses to the mental health challenges faced by healthcare employees. The essay argues that nurses and other healthcare providers are challenged to manage unique emotional and cognitive demands in the course of their everyday work, and that the most effective solutions to this problem will address the organizational and managerial factors contributing to these demands.

## Contributing Factors

In order to understand the factors contributing to poor mental and psychological health outcomes among healthcare professionals, it is useful to consider the most common causes of burnout, which is a broad term for the loss of motivation and generalized psychological distress “resulting from prolonged exposure to work related stress” (Khamisa et al., 2016). Healthcare employees experience burnout at a higher frequency than workers in most other professions, and the higher rate of burnout has been attributed to the high concentration of stressors inherent in healthcare employment, including the frequency of emotionally challenging interactions with patients, families, and other staff (Khamisa et al., 2016). Multiple studies have revealed connections among work-related stress and the overall psychological toll that healthcare work takes on employees (Alenezi, Aboshaiqah, & Baker, 2018; Khamisa et al., 2016; Kunie, Kawakami, Shimazu, Yonekura, & Miyamoto, 2017; Tully & Tao, 2019). Nurses in particular appear to experience more work-related stress than other categories of healthcare professionals; one recent study indicated that nurses experience burnout nearly



twice as frequently as physicians and technicians (Khamisa et al., 2016).

In a study exploring the relationship between burnout and job satisfaction among nurses, Khamisa et al. (2016) sought to identify the factors most strongly associated with low job satisfaction. While these factors are not necessarily causally linked to psychological distress or other mental health issues, their association with burnout makes it plausible that these factors negatively influence the mental health of employees. Among five variables used, only job demands had a non-significant but positive relationship with burnout, while the following four factors had significant positive relationships: lack of support, staff issues, patient care, and overtime (Khamisa et al., 2016). Somewhat differently, patient care, staff issues, and overtime had significant negative relationships with job satisfaction while the other two factors had non-significant negative relationships. Finally, patient care, staff issues, and job demands had significant negative relationships with general health. Overall, the strongest associations between the variables were as follows: lack of support and burnout; patient care and job satisfaction; and staff issues and general health (Khamisa et al., 2016). In this study, specific phenomena categorized as “staff issues” included “items such as staff shortages and poorly motivated coworkers,” while lack of support was measured by inadequate recognition and assistance from managers, and stress related to patient care was measured by incidents such as patient deaths and patients’ demands (Khamisa et al., 2016). The items used to measure staff issues and lack of support suggests that organizational factors play important roles in the mental health impact of healthcare employment. Inasmuch as poorly motivated coworkers impact burnout, these organizational factors might have a snowball effect. In other words, one individual’s negative responses to excessive stress may contribute to burnout among the individual’s coworkers, who then affect further coworkers in turn.

Other studies have offered further evidence about organizational factors and their impact on the mental health of healthcare personnel. Van Bogaert et al. (2014) conducted a qualitative study of the impact of work roles and organizational characteristics on work engagement, job satisfaction, and turnover intentions among various levels of nursing staff. Job role variables included role conflict, role ambiguity, and role meaningfulness. Overall, job role variables accounted for the largest variances in all three of these outcome variables (26% of variance for work engagement, 42% for job satisfaction, and 20% for turnover intentions) (Van Bogaert et al., 2014). Although these explanatory variables were categorized separately from organizational characteristics, they can be understood as environmental or institutional factors (i.e., factors tied to the organization) that have strong associations with the psychological outcomes in question. Meanwhile, variables categorized as organizational characteristics also explained variances in all three outcomes to a smaller but still significant degree: i.e., 2% of variance for work engagement, 5% for job satisfaction, and 8% for turnover intentions (Van Bogaert et al., 2014). Organizational characteristics included items pertaining to

the availability of resources and interactions with coworkers, such as coworker collaboration, physician collaboration, work agreements, personnel and material resources; this category also included more individualized factors such as work/home interference, job security, and job reward (Van Bogaert et al., 2014). In addition to the variables discussed above, the study also measured environmental, work-related emotional exhaustion among the participants and found that the strongest risk factors were negatively perceived role conflict, low perceived role meaningfulness, negative perceptions of decision authority, and negative perceptions of work agreements (e.g., clearly stated policies) (Van Bogaert et al., 2014).

In light of the data discussed above, several organizational factors which directly impact the everyday work of nursing personnel increase the risk of emotional exhaustion and other forms of work-related stress. For instance, a nurse who is expected to fulfill several and/or poorly defined roles in his or her work are more likely to experience these adverse psychological outcomes. These findings also align with a similar study conducted by Alenezi et al. (2018), which measured the aggregate outcome of work-related stress (without the subcategories listed above) in relation to several contributing factors. The following five factors had the strongest impacts on work-related stress among nurses, in descending order: workload, uncertainty regarding treatment, lack of support, conflict with physicians, and conflict with nurses (Alenezi et al., 2018). Weaker but significant associations were observed with death and dying and inadequate preparation. These findings lend further support to the data reported by Van Bogaert et al. (2014). Although Van Bogaert et al. (2014) did not address workload specifically; their findings on work role variables and organizational characteristics align with those of Alenezi et al. (2018) on lack of support and conflict with physicians and nurses.

Finally, research has also been conducted on how managerial behavior contributes to the mental health and motivational outcomes of healthcare workers. Kunie et al. (2017) studied three types of manager communication using a cross-sectional survey in order to measure their associations with work engagement and psychological distress. The three types of manager communication studied by Kunie et al. (2017) were direction-giving, empathetic, and meaning-making language. Direction-giving language was defined as communication used to specify objectives and goals and to clarify or reduce ambiguity around defined tasks; empathetic language involves conveying concern or consideration for employees and their well-being or recognizing their performance; and meaning-making language entails the communication of norms and values pertaining to the organization or cultural context in which the work is being performed (Kunie et al., 2017). The reported frequency of all three of these communication types were compared with self-reported levels of work engagement and psychological distress. Psychological distress was identified with elements of “empathetic exhaustion

and tension at work” (Kunie et al., 2017, p. 116). This construct is closely aligned with Van Bogaert et al.’s (2014) use of emotional exhaustion as a measurement. The authors reported that all three communication types had significant, positive relationships with work engagement, but no significant (positive or negative) relationship with psychological distress (Kunie et al., 2017). Within these findings, there is no evidence that managers’ use of these communication styles will directly or immediately decrease psychological distress.

### **Impacts on Mental Health and Work Performance**

As discussed above, work engagement and burnout are significantly impacted by work-related stress among healthcare workers. In addition, the stress of healthcare employment leads to several other direct and indirect adverse outcomes. The most frequently cited outcome, closely related to burnout, is emotional exhaustion, otherwise termed empathetic exhaustion (Alenezi et al., 2018; Khamisa et al., 2016; Van Bogaert et al., 2014). Another psychological response identified by researchers is depersonalization. Depersonalization is considered an unhealthy coping strategy in response to inordinate stress, as defined by Khamisa et al. (2016): “Depersonalization involves emotional and cognitive distancing, which might reduce negative effects of burnout on job satisfaction” (p. 543). Understood in these terms, depersonalization helps mitigate some of the emotional strain experienced by healthcare workers as a result of work-related stress. Furthermore, it could be reasoned that depersonalization would protect nurses and other healthcare providers from becoming emotionally invested in the work to an extent that would distort their judgment and increase their overall stress. Despite these salutary functions, depersonalization represents an imbalanced response to the stressors of healthcare employment. Given that depersonalization is roughly the mirror opposite of work engagement, it should be considered not a solution, but an adverse behavior that occurs when a healthcare professional finds him- or herself unable to balance and address the excessive demands of the work.

As several studies cited above have shown, work engagement is an important measure of the overall well-being of healthcare workers, both professionally and personally, and disengagement results from the psychological distress and emotional exhaustion so often experienced by these professionals. According to van Mol et al. (2018), “Work engagement is operationalized as a positive work-related state of mind and is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption” (p. 235). The following definitions are also revealing of the risks of disengagement among healthcare professionals: “Vigor represents a high level of energy and mental resilience while working; dedication refers to experiencing a sense of significance, enthusiasm, and challenge; and absorption is characterized by being fully focused and absorbed in the work” (van Mol, Nijkamp, Bakker, Schaufeli, & Kompanje, 2018, p. 235). These positive definitions demonstrate the risks associated with the opposite conditions of disengagement, detachment, and depersonalization: namely,

the hazards of healthcare professionals who are unenthusiastic, who find their work insignificant, and who lose focus or do not feel invested in their work. In the same study, which conducted a cross-sectional survey on intensive care professionals, the researchers found that work engagement had the strongest negative correlation with cognitive and emotional demands among intensivists and intensive care nurses (van Mol et al., 2018). Some self-reported personality traits were also observed to correlate positively with work engagement, namely conscientiousness, emotional stability, and agreeableness. Interestingly, the researchers also noted a positive correlation between number of hours worked per week and work engagement (van Mol et al., 2018), contrary to expected results and despite other research pointing to workload as the leading cause of work-related stress and disengagement (Alenezi et al., 2018). This discrepancy likely results from Alenezi et al. (2018) defining workload not in strictly quantitative/hourly terms but instead more loosely as the amount of work that needs to be accomplished relative to the “lack of time to complete tasks,” including non-nursing tasks (p. 4). Regardless, the central implication of these findings is that healthcare professionals whose jobs involve excessive cognitive and emotional burdens, independent of their personality types or even quantitative workload, are more likely to lapse into burnout and become disengaged from their work.

Indeed, the adverse psychological outcomes are directly related to poor organizational performance and are therefore an urgent concern with respect to the quality of care for patients (Teraoka & Kyougoku, 2015). In a series of three cross-sectional studies, Teraoka and Kyougoku (2015) tested the correlations between occupational dysfunction and stress response, occupational dysfunction and burnout syndrome, and occupational dysfunction and depression. The authors define occupational dysfunction as “a negative experience emerging from an unsatisfactory lifestyle atmosphere; it includes occupational imbalance, occupational deprivation, occupational alienation, and occupational marginalization” (Teraoka & Kyougoku, 2015, p. 2). More specifically, occupational dysfunction was measured by indicators such as lack of opportunities for refreshment, lack of time for leisure activities, and unhealthy work relationships. Some categories of healthcare professionals experience occupational dysfunction at alarmingly high rates; one study found that 75.4% of rehabilitation therapists experienced this problem (Miyake, Teraoka, Ogino, & Kyougoku, 2014, cited in Teraoka & Kyougoku, 2015). Moreover, the authors noted that healthcare workers suffering from burnout syndrome also exhibited poor performance in job-related tasks and collaboration with colleagues (Teraoka & Kyougoku, 2015).

### **Approaches to Managing the Mental Health Toll on Healthcare Employees**

Notably, most of the research cited throughout this paper has placed greater emphasis on organizational and work role factors than on the aspects of healthcare employment that would seem to cause immediate emotional strain (e.g., witnessing

human suffering and interacting with emotionally distressed patients and families). The research has not ignored the latter category; for example, Khamisa et al. (2016) cite several studies attributing work-related stress to emotionally charged interactions with patients and families. However, the findings discussed here suggest that healthcare employees experience above-average levels of work-related stress because of variables that would also be applicable to other professions (e.g., role conflict, interactions with managers and colleagues, and demotivating environmental factors). While healthcare-specific conditions such as witnessing death and dying do contribute significantly to work-related stress alongside these other factors, as noted by Alenezi et al. (2018), organizational factors appear to have the strongest impacts. Consequently, the best approaches for managing or mitigating the psychological toll of healthcare work may be focused on organizational and environmental factors rather than on the individual psychology of healthcare workers.

Ultimately, reducing and managing work-related stress is best accomplished by a balance between individualized and organizational approaches. Primarily, managerial behavior can have a considerable impact on psychological outcomes among healthcare employees. As discussed above, Kunie et al. (2017) found that direction-giving, empathetic, and meaning-making language from managers has a strong positive correlation with work engagement and motivation among employees. The same study did not confirm any significant relationship between these communication styles and psychological distress. However, it would be reasonable to conclude from the study's findings that such empathetic communication styles counteract at least some of the main symptoms of psychological strain observed among healthcare employees, most notably burnout and emotional exhaustion. The following observation suggests a close relationship between increasing employees' motivation and alleviating the strain placed on them by their professional roles: "Motivating language has the potential to decrease job demands and increase job control, because the motivating language used by managers can help subordinates clarify goals and prioritize tasks" (Kunie et al., 2017, p. 116).

If these observations are understood alongside findings from other studies, it seems clear that certain managerial communication styles that promote motivation among employees may simultaneously influence not only the symptoms but the underlying causes of disengagement and emotional exhaustion. Van Bogaert et al. (2014) found that role conflict and negative perceptions of decision authority contributed to emotional exhaustion and disengagement, and Alenezi et al. (2018) found that workload was a strong contributor to work-related stress. While the available data does not statistically conclude that motivational language directly interacts with psychological distress, the ability to counteract role conflict, perceived overload, and negative responses to decision-making control suggests that such language and managerial behavior may influence the adverse symptoms of psychological strain.

The current literature also suggests that individualized approaches can help counteract mental health issues among healthcare employees. Van Mol et al. (2018) conclude simply that “work engagement, which recognizes positively labeled elements, is the counterbalance to work-related stress,” while also noting that a certain degree of emotional distance (short of depersonalization) can also encourage a balanced approach to undue mental health strain (p. 240). In light of the findings from Kunie et al. (2017) discussed above, one influencing factor here is that managerial communication can promote such engagement. However, individual healthcare employees can also make behavioral adjustments to manage work-related stress and channel the stress into beneficial mindsets rather than unhealthy mechanisms. According to Tully and Tao (2019), there is a slight but significant correlation between work-related stress and positive thinking. Positive thinking is defined by the field of positive psychology as “a cognitive process that creates hopeful images, develops optimistic ideas, finds favorable solutions to problems, makes affirmative decisions, and produces an overall bright outlook on life” (Tully & Tao, 2019, p. 26). The slight correlation between this practice and work-related stress is notable in light of the rest of the research discussed throughout this essay, which suggests that healthcare professionals often respond in much less healthy ways to work-related stress and overwhelming demands of the job. However, both can be true: providers variably resort to depersonalization (Khamisa et al., 2016; van Mol et al, 2018) and positive thinking (Tully & Tao, 2019) to cope with the considerable demands of healthcare employment, but those demands often remain too great to manage.

## Conclusion

This essay has discussed the contributing factors, effects, and potential responses to the mental health strains experienced by nurses and other healthcare workers. The main contributing factors are emotional and cognitive overload, role conflict, and organizational factors such as workload and lack of empathetic support from management. The mental health effects include disengagement, demotivation, and burnout, which studies have shown negatively impacts job performance. While some research has highlighted individualized solutions for managing work-related stress among healthcare professionals, the research strongly supports organizational and managerial approaches to managing and mitigating the psychological strain on healthcare employees. More studies are needed to further explore organizational and environmental factors, and the primary responses to them.

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# The Mystery of Schizophrenia

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**S**chizophrenia ... What is it? Why is this mental disorder so unique and terrifying at the same time? Why is it impossible to diagnose until a certain age? And why, despite all the modern technology, is this one of the most mysterious diseases that is impossible to predict? These questions had been bothering me for ages way before I decided to dedicate my life to studying the human mind and chose a psychology as my major. I was very biased about this illness “of two minds,” but at the same time curious enough to read and watch as much about it as I could. The biggest questions that were always bothering me were if by any chance it is possible to predict schizophrenia during early childhood to start the intervention on time to prevent sad consequences and if schizophrenic people can function well enough to be full members of society. And my personal investigations surprised me a lot.

According to the Mark Durand and David Barlow, “Schizophrenia is a devastating psychotic disorder that may involve characteristic disturbances in thinking (delusions), perception (hallucinations), speech, emotions, and behavior” (2013). Characteristic positive symptoms according to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) are: “delusions, hallucinations, disorganized speech (e.g., frequent derailment or incoherence, grossly disorganized or catatonic behavior” and negative ones like “affective flattening, alogia (poverty of speech), or avolition (lack of motivation)” (2013). It is also characterized by “social/occupational dysfunction: For a significant portion of the time since the onset of the disturbance, one or more major areas of functioning such as work, interpersonal relations, or self-care are markedly below the level achieved prior to the onset (or when the onset is in childhood or adolescence, failure to achieve expected level of interpersonal, academic, or occupational achievement)” (DSM, 2013).

Schizophrenia can be diagnosed only after six months of continuous signs of the disturbance that include at least one month of active-phase symptoms



and periods of prodromal or residual symptoms that might be manifested by only negative symptoms or odd beliefs, unusual perceptual experiences. Subtypes of schizophrenia include the paranoid type (the most dangerous one) that expresses with preoccupation with one or more delusions or frequent auditory hallucinations; the disorganized type that meets such criteria as disorganized speech, disorganized behavior, flat or inappropriate affect; the catatonic type “in which the clinical picture is dominated by at least two of the following: motoric immobility as evidenced by catalepsy (including waxy flexibility) or stupor, excessive motor activity (that is apparently purposeless and not influenced by external stimuli), extreme negativism (an apparently motiveless resistance to all instructions or maintenance of a rigid posture against attempts to be moved) or mutism, peculiarities of voluntary movement as evidenced by posturing (voluntary assumption of inappropriate or bizarre postures), stereotyped movements, prominent mannerisms, or prominent grimacing, echolalia (word repetition) or echopraxia (repetitive imitation), undifferentiated type in which symptoms that meet Criterion A are present, but the criteria are not met for the Paranoid, Disorganized, or Catatonic Type; and the residual type that shows absence of prominent delusions, hallucinations, disorganized speech, and grossly disorganized or catatonic behavior but defines with continuing evidence of the disturbance, as indicated by the presence of negative symptoms or two or more symptoms listed in Criterion A for Schizophrenia, present in an attenuated form (e.g., odd beliefs, unusual perceptual experiences)” (DSM, 2013).

There are a number of predisposing, triggering, or functionally modulating factors that might influence the development of schizophrenia. The most common of them, according to Carol A. Tamminga, M.D., are: “genetic, psychological, endocrinological, metabolic, environmental, virologic, and auto-immunological factors, as well as neurotransmitter systems and structural disorders of the brain” (2000). For example, the genetics risk for schizophrenia were vindicated during twin studies. Despite the fact that schizophrenia occurs in only 1% of the world’s population regardless of the nationality, culture and gender, “the monozygotic twin of a person with schizophrenia, who shares the same genome, has a 40% to 50% risk of contracting the illness” (Tamminga C. 2000). Some pre- or perinatal events, like exposure to famine, radiation, or a maternal viral illness, especially during the second trimester, or toxemia and hypoxia at birth in addition to genetic predisposition can also be risk factors for schizophrenia. Environmental factors were also suggested to have a huge influence for schizophrenia development. For example, use of marijuana or other drugs from a young age, traumatic events and a rearing environment causing a lot of stress are also identified as factors for schizophrenia. Moreover, cognitive and neurophysiological dysfunction in many cases also identify schizophrenia. According to Tamminga, people with this disorder often show “particular inabilities” fulfilling tasks related to attention, sustained attention (sometimes called vigilance), memory, including “working memory” and executive function. Cognitive scientists relate such widespread disturbances with a change

in the “internal representation” of contextual information. Also, the important fact that emphasizes oscillation and fluctuation of symptoms over time complicate the tracing of these cerebral abnormalities.

The case that proves such research output has been provided to me by Veronica McHugh. Her own experience of working with a 22-year-old African American schizophrenic impressed me a lot. So before describing his case I would like to start with a little introduction. The young man tall enough to play basketball, in perfect physical condition, but with serious psychological issues, was still living with his mother. He had 10 more siblings from one mother but different fathers, who used to practice Hoodoo (a very interactive religion) and could “speak in tongues” (and might also have schizophrenia). At the age of 22 he became the father of four children from three different women without being in a long-term relationship with any of them. He graduated from high school but never applied to any college. When McHugh first met him, he had an extensive criminal record for primarily small things like pimping, stealing, fighting. However, he had never been incarcerated but was always on probation or parole. He created his own world based on whatever he watched on MTV and managed his life this way. He also had been hospitalized multiple times for being delusional, and according to the previous psychiatric reports was diagnosed with schizophrenia before McHugh became his therapist.

At the beginning of the therapy McHugh also noticed two important features that she picked up immediately. The first one referred to disorganized speech, as his responses during conversation never matched up. The second factor that came to the surface later after the full psychiatric evaluation was the diagnosis of intellectual developmental disorder, which meant that his cognitive abilities didn’t exceed the ability of a second-grade student. Such diagnosis wasn’t obvious from the beginning, because unlike the majority who have the same disorder, he didn’t share any mongoloid traits. The question “How could he graduate from high school being disabled?” arose automatically. The answer that he was socially promoted took me aback.

During the therapy, McHugh figured out that he was addicted to the synthetic cathinone that ruined his mind and became one of the reasons for his previous delusions. During the periods of time when he didn’t smoke at all, he used to hear voices that were fighting with him to harm other people, and his diagnosis was confirmed. His mother, who originally asked for help, mentioned that he had displayed tendencies to be delusional and to fight with someone who wasn’t there ever since childhood, but that was always interpreted as “talking to his angels.” His case becomes even more interesting when realizing that real symptoms like strong delusions and audio hallucinations in his case appeared early, around the age of 16. Right before the beginning of therapy he started to be paranoid with delusions that everyone was spying on him and he should destroy the ones who would harm him; this, in addition to his strong ego, made him deny medical treatment and

disappear.

This case is a perfect example of the environmental, biological, possibly genetic factors in addition to cognitive disfunctions that indicate schizophrenia. Likewise, this is one of a few cases that points to the symptoms of schizophrenia since early childhood. However, even despite some characteristics like cognitive delays or intellectual deficits, sudden shyness and withdrawals, talking about bizarre ideas or fears, and clinging to parents, these much more often do not ensure the diagnosis of schizophrenia until late adolescence. The most common explanation of it is based on the necessity of brain to complete its development. And the neurobiological influence also supports it. According to Mark Durand, “One of the most enduring yet controversial theories of the cause of schizophrenia involves the neurotransmitter dopamine” (2013). Such a theory cannot explain everything as “although the neuroleptics block the reception of dopamine quite quickly, the relevant symptoms subside more slowly than we would expect” (Durand M., 2013).

In my opinion, however, despite all the scientific evidence and research, there is a factor that can foresee schizophrenia. Children’s anxiety or fear of shadows or any other mystical creatures that appear in their imagination and constantly talk to them might be a great sign to be aware of. Scientific research shows that the parts of the brain that have been associated with delusions, the left and right entorhinal cortexes that “are located in the inner parts of the left and right temporal lobes,” develop fully only after 25 years of age (Arehart-Treichel J., 2004). “The entorhinal cortex functions as a relay station between the prefrontal cortex and the hippocampus. It holds real sensory information while the hippocampus compares such information with internal representations to detect familiarity versus novelty” (Arehart-Treichel J., 2004).

However, what if in the case of schizophrenic people, the prefrontal cortex develops earlier, or certain areas that also play a major role in producing delusions develop much earlier but are not defined till adulthood? Recent research has just found the main differences between how adult and teen brains work; the research has established that adults think with the rational part of the brain, the prefrontal cortex, while teens process information with the emotional part, the amygdala. It explains why children are so emotional in their decisions. It also suggests the idea that emotional over-anxiety might cause certain types of delusions that would follow the child during childhood as a part of their imagination and will flow to the cortex only after it is mature enough and ready to accommodate them. In the meantime, the fact that kids are believed to have a well-developed imagination even though the parts of the brain that are responsible for it, the occipital lobe and the parietal lobe, also completely develop only at the age of 25, creates a lot of confusion (Wanijek C., 2014). As a result, in my opinion, additional research and testing the activity of the different parts of children’s brains who are involved in certain types of conversations, connections, visual or audio “hallucinations” with any “mysterious creatures” might find the activity that will point at if not the early

symptoms but at least real predictors for schizophrenia.

The case of Cecilia McGough, an astronomer, activist, and writer as a Penn State Schreyer Honors College scholar, also points to that. She has been thought to have schizophrenia all her life, but it became prevalent in high school. According to her memories she started to see shadows around the age of five. However, she was thinking that it might be just a fear of the dark. In February 2014 she was trying to commit suicide because her life had turned into nightmare. That's the time when she first started to hallucinate fully (see, hear and feel things that were not there). It manifested as Stephen King's clown from the novel *It*. It was following her everywhere, giggling, taunting, poking and even biting her. The other hallucinations she had were spiders that confused her a lot and messed up her perception of reality. Sometimes she couldn't tell the difference between real spiders and the ones that were inside her head unless they were too huge to be real and created a weird noise (for example the creaking of the legs of one of them sounded like a young child's laugh). However, that wasn't the most horrifying hallucination. After she started to see a *The Ring*-type of girl, who was carrying a knife with her all the time, stabbing Cecilia and talking to her and always having answers for everything, she wasn't able to function anymore. She couldn't concentrate, started to feel anxious about red and white colors (because of their association with the clown), she couldn't sleep and started to lose the perception of reality. It ended up with an unsuccessful suicide attempt. However, only after living in hell for four years before trying to commit suicide and trying to gather herself together for another eight months, she was finally diagnosed with schizophrenia and started to receive treatment. Why? Because the family refused to accept her disorder. Unfortunately, for society schizophrenia looks like a black mark or a leprosy that ruins the life of the diseased one and the reputation of his/her family. However, most schizophrenic people with proper treatment can function and even reintegrate into society and act like normal people and learn to hide their major symptoms like Cecilia did.

The treatment of schizophrenia was always considered to be a difficult task and had a lot of issues. First of all, the medications called antipsychotics that aim at interfering with the neurotransmitter system of the brain with the dopamine are very effective only for some people. Because schizophrenia is a disorder that manifests differently and individually, in some cases such medications can also affect serotonergic and glutamate systems and have a lot of side effects like blurred vision, grogginess, dryness of the mouth, motor difficulties, akinesia or tardive dyskinesia. Secondly, the majority of patients refuse to take medications in general because of negative doctor-patient relationships, cost of the medication, or poor social support. Others stop taking medications as soon as they see the first results of reducing hallucinations or delusions that only aggravate symptoms, and in some cases, even begin self-treatment by trying street drugs or alcohol. However, without the continued taking of the antipsychotics, that is if they really fit the person,

treatment won't be successful. The other reason why treatment of schizophrenia is so difficult refers to the psychosocial treatment. Despite the huge variations and theories that are aimed at reduction of relapses and improving social skills, there's no major one that really works and can be applied and be helpful for the majority of people with this disorder.

Concluding this investigation, I would like to summarize that schizophrenia is an umbrella-like disorder with too many shades, colors and shapes. Being probably one of the most ancient psychological disorders, it still remains one of the least explored. The deeper you dig into it, the more questions remain unanswered. The only thing that becomes clear is that despite all the biases, schizophrenia is not the end of the world, not a plague in the world of abnormal psychology but on the contrary is a field for innovative discoveries and explorations.

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# Diabetes in Young Adults

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Spring 2018

HPE 1200 | Wellness, Health, & Fitness

Professor Nicholas Skirka

## Introduction

A study conducted in 2007 by a Canadian scientist revealed that my small island, Saint Lucia, is the “the diabetes capital of the world” (The Voice, 2016). Many blame the consumption of high starchy foods and lack of exercise on the island. An article published by The Voice newspaper claims obesity in the country is a number one factor. A small island with only 170,000 inhabitants, nearly 6.1 percent suffer with diabetes. Unfortunately, the number doubles each year, leaving hundreds of people on dialysis or with amputations. Recently, the local news reported a surprisingly increase in Type 2 diabetes among young adults. The levels of diabetes in young adults is similar to that in older people. Recently my grandmother was diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes. This sparked a concern for me as I know diabetes can be passed down. My lifestyle has changed drastically since I migrated to New York for school. I no longer eat salads and fruits, but I have adapted to the unhealthy lifestyle of fast food, and I don’t exercise as I should. I discovered that I take better care of my vehicle than of myself. I took a health class in spring 2019 and it has made me reconsider my lifestyle. As a young adult I think it necessary to discuss the future of our health. This paper will focus on diabetes in young adults.

## Diabetes Mellitus

According to Donatelle (2015), the word diabetes is derived from a Greek word “to flow through.” The word diabetes often stands alone in our lexicon. However, the full name of this disease of the blood is *diabetes mellitus*. Mellitus meaning “sweet” in Greek. Diabetes mellitus is defined as “a group of diseases characterized by persistently high level of sugar--technically, glucose—in the blood” (Donatelle 2015, 387). When the blood’s glucose level is elevated, this is called *hyperglycemia*. Constant elevation of blood glucose levels can lead to numerous health problems or premature death. Contracting this disease places a

huge financial toll on and causes a great deal of bodily damage to the individual. It is estimated that the government spends a whopping \$250 billion directly and indirectly to treat diabetes in the United States. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC), in 2017, approximated that there are 30.3 million (9.4%) of people in the U.S. living with some type of diabetes. From this total, only 23.1 million people would have been diagnosed. This leaves 7.2 million undiagnosed. Health care professionals are concerned because diabetes is the seventh-leading killer and the fastest-growing chronic disease in American history. The percentage of people affected with this deadly chronic disease varies among ages. There is a dramatic increase in young adults compared to older American adults. As a result, the disease has sparked a new healthy lifestyle era.

### **Glucose**

Before I go further, I think it prudent to discuss glucose, how diabetes develops and the types of diabetes. *Glucose* is the main sugar found in the blood, and is one of the main sources of energy for all living organisms (Donatelle, 2015). After you eat, glucose is released into the bloodstream by the digestive system and sent to all the cells of the body to use for energy. For example, metabolism, movements, etc. Glucose is simply carbohydrates found in the food we consume that is broken down into monosaccharides.

### **Type 1 and Type 2 Diabetes Mellites**

The vast majority of cases of diabetes mellitus fall into two broad categories, Type 1 and Type 2. Type 1 diabetes is caused when the body has a deficiency of insulin. This autoimmune disease, which can appear suddenly in an individual, is the least common but the most serious type of diabetes. With this form of diabetes, the individual's normal body cells are destroyed and attacked by the immune system, those cells in the pancreas. When normal cells are destroyed, the production of insulin decreases or the pancreas does not produce insulin. This causes dramatic issues for the body as cells can no longer absorb glucose, raising the blood glucose level (Riddle, et. al, 2019 & Donatelle, 2015). This type of diabetes is prevalent in young adolescents and young children. However, Type 1 diabetes can begin at any age, and requires daily insulin intake. Type 2 diabetes, unlike Type 1, develops slowly, and is more common in older adults. It is known to be a non-insulin dependent diabetes. With this disease the pancreas produces ineffective or inadequate insulin. As a result, the body cells do not allow glucose to effectively enter. In the development stages of Type 2 diabetes, the pancreas will try to compensate by producing more insulin, but insulin producing cells will not be able to operate normally, and the output of insulin declines. Blood glucose levels then rises to a point where a diagnoses can be made by your doctor (Riddle, et. al, 2019 & Donatelle, 2015).

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## College Students and Diabetes

Should college students be concerned about diabetes? In the fast-paced American society where everyone is seemingly rushing, the consumption of unhealthy foods to complement the fast-paced lifestyle is at an all-time high. Home cooked meals are becoming a thing of the past, while fast food giants are becoming multi-billion dollar giants. College students may not be concerned about diabetes because it is often preserved as a disease found in older people over 65. Recent statistics have proved young adults should care more about their health as more people under the age of 20 are being diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes. People with diabetes need to be constantly checking their blood glucose level during the day to ensure they stay within their reasonable range.

### Monitoring Blood Glucose

To monitor blood glucose level, you have to prick your finger to get a drop of blood, then using a special strip, insert the blood into a handheld meter. I am terrified of needles. I know many young persons are too. It can be depressing to know you cannot enjoy the sweet treats, or you have to be pricked numerous times a day. Why not try to avoid this while you can? To avoid this, we need to take the necessary measures to prevent diabetes and enjoy our youth. Young people always complain there is not enough time, or finances are low, therefore they cannot afford to live healthy lifestyles. But, your health is your wealth. Donatelle (2015) lists these steps to reduce the risk of obtaining diabetes: 1. It is essential to maintain a healthy weight that is in sync with your age. You should also lose weight if needed. 2. Family history of diabetes could put you at risk for diabetes, and you should get regular checkups. 3. Your cholesterol levels should be low, and constantly checked. 4. If you cannot afford to go to the gym you should dedicate at least 60 minutes of moderate activity three days a week. 5. Get adequate rest. Sleeping during the day will not replace the sleep you lose during the night, and can leave you at risk for Type 2 diabetes. 6. Food choices should consist more of fruits and vegetables, and be eaten in smaller portions. Consume less saturated foods with salt, fat and sugar. 7. Smoking increases one's blood glucose level. Quit smoking. 8. Stay away from alcohol or reduce the consumption of it, as alcohol can interfere with blood glucose levels due to its high level of calories. 9. Reduce stress.

### Recommendations

As a college student myself, I face many challenges such as back-to-back classes, working and going to school full time. We students have to keep up with our studies to ace our classes, papers are due, and we might have to commute hours to campus. Often, we neglect our health to see our dreams come to fruition, forgetting to breathe and not living in the moment. It is sad that we neglect our health to reach our goals. Unfortunately, we might get sick before we enjoy the fruits of our labor, because we have neglected our health for quite some time. If



we do, it is important to know when our bodies are changing. Researchers have come up with the following symptoms of diabetes. They are as follows, thirst, excessive urination, weight loss, fatigue, nerve damage, blurred vision, poor wound healing and increased infections. The symptoms for Type 1 and 2 diabetes are fairly similar. If not treated, diabetes can lead to other severe complications, such as amputations, tooth and gum diseases, eye disease and blindness, flu-and pneumonia- related deaths, kidney disease, and cardiovascular disease. Therefore, we should not ignore any of these symptoms, and get proper treatment (Donatelle, 2015).

It is never too late to change your lifestyle. As many as 58 percent of the people who were pre-diabetic have delayed or prevented Type 2 diabetes by changing their lifestyle. If diagnosed already, a change in your life style can prevent or delay the need for insulin medication. You can then avoid pricking yourself daily by just changing your lifestyle. The *Diabetes Prevention Program* suggests that losing 5-7% of body weight can lower the risk of diabetes. Eating foods that have high fiber, consumption of omega-3, and eating whole grain foods can keep the body healthy.

### Summary

Diabetes is treated both by severity and type of diabetes that the person has. People with diabetes face many unique challenges. Grabbing a pack of chips and soda on a regular, or not exercising, depriving yourself of sleep, etc., can put you at risk for diabetes and other health diseases that can be avoided if you take the necessary precautions. At the end of the day, it does not sound logical to neglect your health when in the prime of your youth, because sooner or later you might just pay for the consequences of your mistakes.

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# The Effects of Poverty on Childhood Development

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Spring 2019

PSY 3000 | Childhood and Adolescent Development

Professor Carol Carielli

With 18.1% of the United States adult population (40 million people) experiencing anxiety disorders, many of us are familiar with the symptoms of panic attacks, stress, and depression and how debilitating they can be. The Anxiety and Depression Association of America also reports that 25.1% of children between ages 13 and 18 experience anxiety disorders.<sup>2</sup> Untreated anxiety in students often leads to poor performance in school, drug and alcohol abuse, and less social interactions with peers. While many things can cause anxiety in adults and children, in this paper I want to explore the relationship between children who grow up in low-income families and how poverty affects their development, school performance, social lives, and future chances of success.

As someone who grew up being raised by a single mother who had to work multiple jobs to provide for my sister and me, the subject of childhood poverty is very dear to me. Remembering growing up a lot of the time in the care of babysitters, being watched by grandparents, never staying in the same school longer than a year, the stigma of having to eat the free peanut butter and jelly sandwiches from the lunchroom, the anxiety I felt as a child, even though not really understanding what it was, has stayed with me into adulthood. For most of my adult life I've experienced trust and attachment issues with people and family that might stem from my parents divorcing young, and my not ever being able to form lasting bonds with my peers, teachers, or neighbors, since we were constantly moving. While it's easy for me to look back on these events from my childhood and retroactively blame them for adult anxieties, trust issues, and my own struggles to gain societal benchmarks of success, I was curious to read studies and understand concrete information about how detrimental growing up poor can be to a child and their

1 "Facts & Statistics | Anxiety and Depression Association of America." <https://adaa.org/about-adaa/press-room/facts-statistics>. Accessed 4 May 2019.

2 "Facts & Statistics | Anxiety and Depression Association of America." <https://adaa.org/about-adaa/press-room/facts-statistics>. Accessed 4 May 2019.

future adult lives.

The prefrontal cortex and amygdala are two areas of the brain that are very important for emotional and behavioral regulation in children and adults. Studies have shown that the higher levels of stress in children who grow up in poverty-stricken families can negatively affect these parts of the brain, and if untreated can affect the child for their entire life.<sup>3</sup> A study which was led by Dr. K. Luan Phan from the University of Illinois at Chicago College of Medicine focuses on the chemicals in the brain adrenaline and cortisol. Both these chemicals are released into the brain during periods of high stress and can negatively affect childhood development if high levels are present in the brain on a consistent basis. They studied children at age nine and again at age 24 and found that long term exposure to high levels of cortisol in the brain can lead to multiple physical health problems such as heart disease, memory and concentration issues, and digestive problems.

One of the main causes of anxiety in the chronically poor is the instability they face on a daily basis. Most poor families often face regular housing insecurity, evictions, forced moves, unsafe neighborhoods, and inconsistency in schooling. Housing insecurity is the main focus of *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City* by Princeton sociologist Matthew Desmond. Some of the statistics he presents are staggering. While his book mainly focuses on Milwaukee, he found most of the numbers in Milwaukee were “common in cities across the United States: “In 2013, 1 in 8 poor renting families ... thought it likely they would be evicted soon.” He also writes, “In Milwaukee ... roughly 16,000 adults and children are evicted each year ... 16 families a day.” Once families are evicted finding housing can be even more difficult than paying rent. Many landlords charge more for renters with children and “families with children were turned away in as many as 7 in 10 housing searches.” With the threat of eviction constantly weighing on parents, schooling for their children is often thought of as a luxury or a secondary priority. When a parent isn’t sure if their family is going to have a roof over their heads next week, or if their children will be able to eat dinner that night, they can’t properly focus on making sure their child receives the education they deserve. Desmond writes of one family in his book and their child, “Jori,” who, “between seventh and eighth grade attended five different schools.” Even when Jori was enrolled in school his attendance wasn’t consistent. At one point the family was living in a domestic violence shelter and, “Jori had racked up seventeen consecutive absences.”<sup>4</sup> The anxiety caused by these types of insecurities can only negatively affect a child’s school performance.

The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development<sup>5</sup> identifies

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3 “The Mental Effects Of Being Poor In Childhood.” Anxiety.org. 21 November 2013, <https://www.anxiety.org/the-effects-of-being-poor-in-childhood-increased-anxiety-and-mental-illness>.

4 Desmond M. (2016) *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City*. New York: Penguin Random House.

5 “How Poverty Affects Classroom Engagement - Educational Leadership.” <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/may13/vol70/num08/How-Poverty-Affects-Classroom-Engagement.aspx>. Accessed 4 May 2019.

seven different ways in which children from low-income families can struggle in school in ways children from middle- and upper-class families most likely do not. I will summarize some of these areas.

The first focuses on the health and nutrition of children from low-income families. Food insecurity is a serious problem among the poor in the United States. The USDA found that 21 million or 70% of students who eat school lunch nationwide received free or reduced price meals,<sup>6</sup> with many children often receiving their only meal of the day when they are in school. Many low-income children are forced to skip breakfast, which negatively affects “gray matter mass in children’s brains,” and “adversely affects cognition and raises absenteeism.” One study performed by Dr. Clancy Blair and Dr. C. Cybele River found that “children in families in poverty had reduced gray matter volumes in the frontal and temporal cortex and the hippocampus. When families were at 150% of poverty, these reductions were 3% to 4% below developmental norms. For children in families at 100% of poverty or below, reductions in these regions were 8% to 9% below developmental norms.”<sup>7</sup> Poor nutrition can also affect a child’s behavior by causing hyperactivity in children receiving too much sugar, or low-energy levels in children not receiving enough food, or food with very little nutritional value.

Lead exposure is also a problem many poor children nationwide have to deal with. In New York City alone, NYCHA estimates, “48,000 of the 176,000 (public housing) apartments citywide have lead-based paint, 4,200 of which have children under six living in them.”<sup>8</sup> This demographic is most susceptible to lead paint poisoning as they are more likely to put objects in their mouths. Infants from birth to a year are even more susceptible as, according to Freud, they are in the “oral stage” of development, often exploring objects by putting them in their mouths. NYCHA also revealed that, “between 2010 and 2016, more than 7,700 children in New York City were found to have elevated lead blood levels.”<sup>9</sup> Exposure to lead paint can cause life-altering issues in children, affecting proper development of the brain and nervous systems.

The second issue affecting low-income children and not their middle and upper class peers is in development of vocabulary. The ASCD, citing studies, writes, “Children from low-income families hear, on average, 13 million words by age four. In middle-class families, children hear about 26 million words during that same time period. In upper-income families, they hear a staggering 46 million words

6 “For Lower-Income Students, Snow Days Can Be Hungry Days.” 12 Feb. 2014, <https://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2014/02/10/274899069/for-lower-income-students-snow-days-mean-hungry-tummies>. Accessed 22 May 2019.

7 “How Poverty Affects the Brain.” *Scientific American*. 12 July 2017, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-poverty-affects-the-brain/>. Accessed 22 May 2019.

8 “What It Takes to Get Something Fixed in the Red Hook Houses.” 11 Dec. 2017, <http://brooklynink.org/2017/12/11/56468-what-it-takes-to-get-something-fixed-in-the-red-hook-hou-ses/>. Accessed 4 May 2019.

9 “What It Takes to Get Something Fixed in the Red Hook Houses.” 11 Dec. 2017, <http://brooklynink.org/2017/12/11/56468-what-it-takes-to-get-something-fixed-in-the-red-hook-hou-ses/>. Accessed 4 May 2019.

by age four—three times as many as their lower-income counterparts” (Hart & Risley, 1995). They also found that children from middle- and upper-class families “actually used more words in talking to their parents than low-SES mothers used in talking to their own children” (Bracey, 2006).

Many low-income families also tend to live in hyper-segregated communities as well. This causes many difficulties in language development in children. In *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass*, Princeton professor and sociologist Douglas Massey focuses on the “ghettoization” of America, and the language issues this causes. While the focus of Massey’s book is mainly black/white segregation, he points to language development as a major difference between poor blacks and the mainstream white society. He uses the differences in language that develop in hyper-segregated communities to show how poverty persists and how language helps it. What Massey calls “Black English Vernacular” has fairly uniform characteristics in urban centers across the United States. Massey points out that the development of a separate language is only possible in groups who are extremely isolated from mainstream society, as many poor blacks usually are. Massey writes that Black English Vernacular is in no way an inferior language or a sign of ignorance, as “it constitutes a complex, rich, and expressive language in its own right, with a consistent grammar, pronunciation, and lexicon all its own.” Massey says this separation in language can be extremely challenging to poor black students when they enter school. “U.S. schools rely almost exclusively on the standard dialect for instruction and exposition. Thus when children grow up speaking Black English Vernacular rather than Standard American English, their educational progress is seriously hampered.” Massey continues, “When ghetto children enter schools where texts and instructional materials are all written in Standard English, and where teachers speak primarily in this dialect, they experience a culture shock akin to that felt by immigrant children from non-English-speaking countries.”<sup>10</sup> So not only are poor children exposed to less grammar from their lower-income parents who didn’t have the same educational opportunities available to them as middle- and upper-class parents, living in hyper-segregated communities creates language barriers that can be extremely challenging for students to overcome.

The United States has a long, disturbing history with eugenics and the notion that lazy poor people breeding creates more lazy poor children. Another difference the ASCD points to between poorer children that isn’t as prevalent in their higher-income peers is a perceived “lack of effort” demonstrated by lower-income children. However, “Research suggests that parents from poor families work as much as parents of middle- or upper-class families do” (Economic Policy Institute, 2002). There’s no “inherited laziness” passed down from parents,”<sup>11</sup> yet

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10 Massey D. & Denton N. (1993) *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass*. Cambridge, MA. Harvard University Press.

11 “How Poverty Affects Classroom Engagement.” Educational Leadership. <http://www.ascd.org/publications/may13/vol70/num08/How-Poverty-Affects-Classroom-Engagement.aspx>. Accessed 22 May 2019.

the myth of the “lazy poor” continues. These myths persist as it’s often easier for one to blame others’ failures on a personality flaw or “poor breeding” rather than face the reality that systemic problems and the brutality of a capitalist system creates and perpetuates these issues.

Researchers have found that symptoms that appear to be a “lack of effort” are really signs of stress and depression. “Low socioeconomic status and the accompanying financial hardships are correlated with depressive symptoms. Moreover, the passive ‘I give up’ posture may actually be learned helplessness, shown for decades in the research as a symptom of a stress disorder and depression.”<sup>12</sup> One tactic the poor often use to cope is a rejection of societal norms. A lack of hope or belief that one will be able to go to college, get a good job, afford a home, be able to advance socially can cause the individual to reject these symbols of success that the mainstream society holds so dear. When one feels that they can’t achieve something they not only won’t work for it, they will reject it altogether. We often see this in low-income communities where students are discouraged by their peers from showing an interest in education, as if trying to learn and move up in society makes you some sort of a sell-out.

The development of healthy relationships is another problem many children from low-income families face. While part of the reason for this is the housing insecurity I mentioned earlier, another reason is they have fewer examples of healthy relationships in their lives. The ASCD states: “Three-quarters of all children from poverty have a single-parent caregiver.” Often, poor children’s first exposure to relationships is their parents’ failed marriage, which in itself causes stress and anxiety; couple that with the stress and anxiety from poverty and it can be a very damaging combination. A single parent raising a child is often much more stressed and that stress is often shown in their interactions with their children. “In homes of those from poverty, children commonly get twice as many reprimands as positive comments, compared with a 3:1 ratio of positives to negatives in middle-class homes. If caregivers are stressed about health care, housing, and food, they’re more likely to be grumpy and less likely to offer positive comments to their kids.”<sup>13</sup> Children often internalize their parent’s behaviors, stresses, and anxieties, and these negative relationship examples can often cause children to develop antisocial behaviors. Whether the antisocial behaviors manifest in acting out, bullying, or withdrawing from society and peers, they can be very harmful to successful development and the child living a loving, fulfilling life.

It can’t be any more clear that growing up in poverty greatly reduces a child’s normal physical and mental development, making success far more

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12 “How Poverty Affects Classroom Engagement.” Educational Leadership. <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/may13/vol70/num08/How-Poverty-Affects-Classroom-Engagement.aspx>. Accessed 22 May 2019.

13 “How Poverty Affects Classroom Engagement.” Educational Leadership. <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/may13/vol70/num08/How-Poverty-Affects-Classroom-Engagement.aspx>. Accessed 22 May 2019.

unattainable, perpetuating the cycles of poverty, depression, anxiety, and antisocial behavior so prevalent amongst the U.S. poor. If we are ever going to live up to the declarations made in our constitution that “all men are created equal,” then the profit motive cannot continue to be the driving force of society. Whether we completely move away from a capitalist system or just start to realize that universal human needs such as housing, food, healthcare, and education can’t be based on profit, we need to make drastic changes.

On a micro-level, teachers need to be educated on these issues so they can look to the root cause of some of their students’ behaviors. If more teachers were educated on the negative effects of poverty on a student, they could become more patient and not immediately dismiss some children as just “the bad kids.” Often in our society we try to punish negative behaviors away. If one steals to support their family, we lock them up. If someone uses drugs to cope with the crippling anxiety caused by the low self-esteem of not being able to succeed in mainstream society, we throw them in prison. Students who act out are often given detentions and suspensions rather than a counselor to speak to, furthering their belief that society doesn’t care about them. As long as we continue using policing to remove “bad people” from our society, yet do nothing to address the root cause of these behaviors, we will never fix these issues. You can’t police poverty into extinction.

On a macro-level, some immediate actions that can be taken to reduce income inequality and increase stability amongst the poor are providing universal free healthcare, universal access to child-care and pre-schools, free higher education, higher minimum wages, rent controls, and an investment in good quality public housing. We can’t continue down the same path that we have been on and expect things to get better. We need to change how our schools are funded, stop cutting funding to schools that underperform, and invest in measures that will help those students be able to perform. We need to stop blaming poverty on “laziness” and face the reality that poverty is a byproduct of capitalism and maintaining an underclass is necessary for this system to persist. We need to be able to stand up to politicians and corporations who believe their greed is more important than our futures and our children’s futures.

A country that fancies itself wealthy enough to invest in a “Space-Force” can surely spend the money to invest in the education and well-being of the students who could grow up to be the scientists to create that new technology. Better yet, by investing in education and increasing equality we could develop the minds of children to create real solutions to issues and create technologies that help humanity as a whole rather than playing army-man in space. To quote evolutionary biologist Stephen Jay Gould, “I am, somehow, less interested in the weight and convolutions of Einstein’s brain than in the near certainty that people of equal talent have lived and died in cotton fields and sweatshops.”

If the United States continues to implement policies based on profit which perpetuate the cycles of poverty and inequality so prevalent in this country, we will

continue to decline into obscurity and devolve into a third world nation. A study done by MIT economist Peter Temin has already shown that the United States has regressed to a developing nation for most of its citizens.<sup>14</sup> All of the evidence and facts are in front of us. It is time to act, because if we continue to ignore these very real issues, generations will continue to suffer, and this country will never live up to its promise or potential.

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14 “US has regressed to developing nation status, MIT economist warns” The Independent. 21 April 2017, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-developing-nation-regressing-economy-poverty-donald-trump-mit-economist-peter-temin-a7694726.html>. Accessed 22 May 2019.



# The Breath of Death

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ENG 2400 | Freshman English II  
Professor Eben Wood

*Living is easy with eyes closed  
Misunderstanding all you see*

— John Lennon and Paul McCartney, “Strawberry Fields Forever”

**Y**ou have two names. Both hold sustenance and yet do not express your true self. One signifies a life of lust, and another love. The imperfect versus the immaculate. Dead or alive, you become a binary, one or the other. In reality, you are a hybrid. A middle ground. A gray area, you live your life forced to be the intermediate for the romance between Black and White? Love and Lust? Life and Death? The list goes on, you are stuck in remnants of the past. You have the words, Ariel Dorfman’s words “truce for my throat” (Dorfman 91). You beg for a truce where you live your life accepted by a society of pure bred wolves that hate mutts. You know this because he told you it was love as the word *Kike* escaped his gnashing jaw. You are confused the first time this happens because you have never even heard this word before. Looking for answers you wish you never found, it stabs you like a dagger aimed straight at the heart. The wound penetrates the already disfigured heart. He degrades you because he loves you, so he says, “You are a naïve seventeen-year-old, what do you know? You have always been alone and misunderstood, why should this be different? It has always been this way, hasn’t it?”

This is just one of the situations you have experienced in a world that penetrates your soul with love and your heart with daggers. Despite your obstacles you manage to stand out. This leaves you questioning the moment that has just passed, you double-take at the drive-by moment, shot off guard by his sharp and painful words. You ruminate between the self-self’s subjective memories and the historical-self’s objective past. You are jolted back to your painful history in the making, you swallow this bullet for the sake of sanity; the world moves forward,

and time continues, yet you let go for a moment and return for an eternity.

What is a situation? How does your subjective memory, and history effect your perception of a situation? According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, “situation” has three definitions. First, a set of circumstances in which one finds oneself; a state of affairs. Second, the location and surroundings of a place. Third, a position of employment; a job. *Citizen: An American Lyric* by Claudia Rankine discusses the situations that occur within the mind of a conflicted hybrid. The speaker uses a second person narrative to force the reader into a variety of situations. A majority of the situations are uncomfortable and seem to take place over the span of the speaker’s life. It is not until the reader gets to the end of the book that they discover that events taking place are nothing more than the living memories of the speaker. The speaker seems to be ruminating on traumatic past events. Like a ruminant animal, the speaker regurgitates her memories; she chews them over and over again, but never fully digests their meanings. You, the reader, are forced into the trapped mind of the speaker. You walk in her shoes as she takes you on a tour of the life of a mixed up hybrid, a hybrid who is part of the pack that hunts those who look like her. But she is different and this, this is what causes the ruminations. The reflections of a past that wants to devour the history you hold on to. You are left questioning, why me? You must now rise up to the challenge and mediate a relationship that both divides and creates you. You as the reader must find a way to cope with the new trauma you have experienced both through reading and remembering, not just the speaker’s past but your past too.

To understand the emotions of the speaker you must analyze this book in reverse: the speaker chooses to end her book with what seems like a grim image, specifically a painting called *The Slave Ship*, circa 1840, by Joseph Mallord William Turner. Turner’s work depicts a slave ship sailing into the dark horizon that is divided by the sunrise, or maybe the sunset; this is not made clear to you. What is clear is the ship is sailing away from the light, entering the dark, fiery, abyss located in hell. The sun objectively distinguishes between the darkness of night and the light of day, although subjectively it acts as barrier between what was, what is, and what will be; the difference between yesterday, today, and tomorrow. You notice the right-hand side of Turner’s painting has been magnified, the speaker wants you to focus on the light filled area. You notice a leg; a dark leg, devoured by the fish of the sea. You wonder who or what the leg belongs to. Maybe, the foot of a woman or man, pushed overboard? Or the hoof of some livestock carried by the ship as a commodity? You analyze the blurred image seeking answers. You uncover the unsettling truth, the one you did not wish to find. The murky shackled foot belonged to a human commodity, a slave. You wonder, who was this person? Why did they end up a slave? Why were they cast ashore? Did they jump to their death? You can never be sure of who they were. However, you are sure of their fate, death by sea.

You wonder what the speaker intended when selecting this specific work

of art? Did the speaker want you to question why the death was found in the light while the future sails away into the depths of the unknown? The “historical-self” reminds you that your situations and moments are not exclusive to you. Death tells the “self-self” that you too will perish. You remember how good it felt to be embraced by the hands of life, when the speaker mentions the watchful gaze of a father. Just as you remember the painful grip of Death’s hands as they wrap around you the way a boa constrictor catches its prey, when the speaker uses Wangetchi Mutu’s collage *Sleeping Heads* to emphasize the choking hands of Death. Your situations bring you closer to the truth; you are born to die. This forces you to question how, where, and when will your life end? Will you live a full and eventful life, creating a legacy for the future? Or will you die a slave, traveling on *The Slave Ship* destined for the dark “future” in hell? You ruminate on the past as the jaws of death bite at your throat, you clench your teeth as you follow the light of death. You remember the devoured slave. You realize that the light found in this death is the light of freedom. Better you die free in the light of day than to die on all levels as you become a surviving commodity, a spectacle for all to gaze at in the darkness of this new life of death called hell.

Death comes in many forms. Death of the mind. Death of the soul. Death of the spirit. Death of the heart. Physical death. Emotional death. You find yourself in situations that constantly allude to death. In recent years, you have experienced more death than ever before. This causes you to feel death’s strong gaze on you. You look for death knowing it has concealed its dark face in the crowd of angelic faces. The crowd enjoys death robbing you of your sanity as you are their commodity; they own you. “The rules everyone else gets to play by no longer apply to you” (Rankine 30). They remind you that you are unwelcome, like the leg of the drowning slave in Turner’s painting, you stand out against the light backdrop. The speaker reminds you of your history, the history that formed you into a “Kike.” The history that left you emotionally mutilated and physically sick. So sick that you pass out in front of a muted television that has distracted you from the death of your ruminating mind. “To live through the days sometimes you moan like a deer. Sometimes you sigh. The world says stop that. Another sigh. Another stop that. Moaning elicits laughter, sighing upsets. Perhaps each sigh is drawn into existence to pull in, pull under, who knows; truth be told, you could no more control those sighs than that which brings the sighs about” (Rankine 59). You remember what makes you sigh all at once and it causes you to ache. You are crippled by your emotional pain. You seek help for your living nightmare but cannot shake the recollection of the last time you asked for help. You recall the moment; it plays itself in your mind as you slip into the memories of your own minor deaths. You remember “the new therapist specializes in trauma counseling. You have only ever spoken on the phone . . . when the door finally opens, the woman standing there yells, at the top of her lungs, Get away from my house! What are you doing in my yard?” (Rankine 18).

It is here that you must stop and remind yourself, you live excepted not

accepted by a society of pure bred wolves. Situations such as these are the root of your ruminating thoughts. You become *Little Girl* by Kate Clark (Rankine 19). Your aged body transforms into a young child, a young child that has rapidly aged, you are forced to relive the situations, sighing like the wounded deer that *Little Girl* is made out of. You carry the pain of endless death. You carry the names of the brothers and sisters, lost to a world that death thrives in. You carry the names of those who could not handle the aches of life and found light in death. You realize that “the you” the speaker engages is a commodity of outside thoughts. You become aware of “the I,” you ask, well, who am I? It is at this very moment you learn the significance of “you” and “I” and the different meanings they hold. “I” is your creation of “you,” and “you” are the creation of the watching world.

You start your day in bed, the date is July 13, 2013. You are alone, disassociated from the world, you are separated by a window. The window allows you the opportunity of a hybrid view. You watch the gray clouds as they blend with the reflection you cast. You are able to see both yourself and the outside world. Today is one of those days when you find yourself trapped in the comfort of your thoughts, the same thoughts that have caused your aches and made you sigh in this world. The memories always start the same: “the route is often associative” (Rankine 5). You associate the remnants of your bitter-sweet past with your new life. The new life presents itself to be better than what you had before, but this comes at the price of your mental health. You begin to reflect on your black and blue past, as you live in a black and blue present. You remember today, and the importance of today, you know that you will soon hear his name on the radio, Trayvon Martin. You remember when you first heard the news. You remember how it broke your heart, you felt as if it was you that took the bullets that ended his precious life. As if it was you that buried your child. You wait hoping to hear the words; you never hear them. Instead you hear the infuriating news that George Zimmerman the trigger-happy buffoon has been acquitted for the second-degree murder of Trayvon Martin. These words hit as hard as the initial shots that penetrated your heart emotionally and Trayvon’s heart physically ending his life, not once but twice. In this moment, your history is thrown in your face, you are forced to remember and bitter memories of death.

Again, America the great allows its children to be slaughtered like lambs, by the mouth of the vicious wolves. As you sit in the car, “your partner wants to face off with a mouth and who knows what handheld objects the other vehicle carries” (Rankine 151). You drift off as Trayvon Martin’s name weaves thorough the sound waves, you relax as you are not being pursued at least at this very moment. You are forced to ruminate on the thought: “yes, this is how you are a citizen: Come on. Let it go. Move on” (Rankine 151). Since the beginning of this so-called citizenship, you are reminded that you are a lamb or worse a mutt living amongst the wolves. The wolves that hate you only on the basis of skin, the wolves that allow you to join their pack if it benefits them, the wolves that will attack you in the name of self-defense. You must remember this “though a share of all remembering, a measure of

all memory, is breath and to breathe you have to create a truce--a truce with the patience of a stethoscope. It is with this new found patience that you discover the true purpose of your situation, my situation, our collective situations as a whole. A situation is like a game of tennis, two players attempting to maintain rhythmic motion with a ball while simultaneously attempting to take out each other. Tennis games have those who sit and pray to catch you in the wrong; even if you have done nothing at all. Those who sit and watch never getting up to utter a word about the injustices that played out on the court but are quick to justify the actions of crooked line judges. Finally, there are those who stand up, maybe for themselves or those who can no longer speak, and call out the injustice kicking and screaming, giving up their soul for all those lost in the abyss of the hellish seas. A situation is a lesson, a lesson teaches us we must open our eyes to the wicked truth in order to bask in the light of the pure truth we wish to find.

You have two names; you are a hybrid of what those names truly mean. The first name is the name that holds your history, Claudine. The second name is the name that only those who have recently come to love you use, Malka. Malka is the Hebrew word for queen; by happenstance it is also your Hebrew name. He calls you his queen as he gently whisks the hair away from your beautiful face, so he claims. He reminds you that you are no longer a naïve seventeen-year-old girl but a strong twenty-four-year-old woman that has accomplished the impossible. You have broken free from those who captured your soul, you succeeded in finding your truce, him. He is not the man that clenched his teeth as obscenities left his mouth, he was not a man, that was not love; it was a lesson, the lesson that taught you of the love you did deserve. Your current partner is not just a man but a savior. It is he that ripped the stitches that sealed your eyes, granting you the freedom to finally understand. While the past regurgitates itself in my mind, leaving choked and trapped, he was the best lesson I had. He taught you that someone that claims to love will never degrade you, they will never make you think that death's breath entered into you. You now understand that true love is growth, it is understanding and seeing what you could not before, it is the clarity you seek in a world filled with blood thirsty wolves that hate mutts.

\*

P.S. For as long as I can remember I have always been a hybrid. My hybridity has taken on many forms; the form that has stuck out most is socially. As a toddler I had an accident that completely altered the course of my life. I sustained a right cerebral infarction, commonly known as a TBI (Traumatic Brain Injury). To my parents' dismay they were told that I was lucky to survive, but the damage was done, I would never walk, talk, or be capable of living a normal life. I spent the first three years of recovery doing just that, until one day I just woke up and started talking as if I had never lost the ability to do so. Obviously, to my parents' joy

I have outlived everything doctors said I would or should be. I once viewed my accident as the worst part of my life; however, as I have grown older, I have come to find the beautiful truth masked by the ugly truth created by my perception of reality. My experience as a neuro-typical and neuro-diverse hybrid has sparked my passion to create a true understanding of people with disabilities like myself, or as my husband says abilities. I aspire to become a special education teacher so my future students can see that their disabilities do not the define them, but rather they define their own abilities and are capable of anything and everything they put their minds to.

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## Double Consciousness

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ENG 2400 | Freshman English II  
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**S**ituation refers to what is happening to us in a particular place at a specific time. Every single act we perform, and eventually, our whole moral life is dependent upon situations. Memory gives us the ability to recognize different situations by making connections with similar situations we, our friends or loved ones were in in the past. This is how we learn how to behave in different situations by obtaining a sense of the roles of those involved previously in similar situations. Our subjective understanding of objective roles played by different people defines our role in any given situation. Every situation solidifies our experience and helps us shape our identity. Memory plays a significant role in creating a positive sense of self and helps in forming our identity. If we have no memory of past experiences, the sense of our existence in the past would be compromised. For example, when we point to our school photos and say “that’s me,” what we essentially mean is that the present “me” is the same as that past “me.” The link between the present me and past me is identity. Therefore, the memories of the past provide a sense of personal identity that I am the same person as someone in the past. History and memory are the ways how the past shapes our present. However, different people experience history differently and hence can have different memories of the same experience. Remembering involves encoding and translating history into a narrative that makes sense in the context of our past experience and present situation. Because each person’s experience is unique, they will translate memories of the same event differently. Our position is a hybrid of our subjective association with the situation as well as the objective understanding of others that might disassociate or contradict our own perspective. Therefore, in any given situation, we are both “I” (how we see ourselves) and “you” (how we are being looked at by others) at the same time.

*Citizen: An American Lyric* is a hybrid of different situations explained by the speaker Claudia Rankine. The cover image of the book is the hood of a hoodie, which is the work of David Hammons, exhibited in 1993. Claudia used it

as a reminder of the death of Trayvon Martin (a young black American) because he was wearing a hoodie when he was killed by George Zimmerman in Sanford, Florida, on February 26, 2012. The book deals with the feelings of worthlessness and invisibility in the black community. It shows us the ways in which black people are invisible before they even fully understand that they are. The question is, how does the sense of invisibility develop despite satisfying the laws of physics to be called visible? The answer is when others degrade you, you start feeling that you are worthless. There comes a time when you start questioning yourself: Am I a person they think I am, or am I a person who I know I am? Who am I? When you inquire of yourself, you feel divided between “I” (your inside self) and “you” (your outside self). A battle begins inside you about your own identity. You feel like “inside you” is completely invisible to the world around you. Your conscience continuously rejects what others say about you, and you think if only they could see “who I really am.” It feels like there is a veil between you and the world around you; behind the veil, you are a completely different person, but others always perceive you wrongly. They always interpret a negative meaning out of whatever you do or say.

After continuously being rejected and feeling low finally you start questioning yourself: Why me? Why did they think that about me? Why did they say that to me? Why did they look at me that way? Why? Why? There are so many whys that you don't know the answer to. You develop a sense of inferiority, and as a result even if you are given a compliment or respect, you take it as sarcasm and always question its authenticity. This is when you literally think of yourself as “worthless” and “invisible.” The sense of invisibly, in turn, affects your identity. Identity is meant not in the sense of characteristics, but it is the sense of the essential quality that makes you “you.” When you seek your worth in the eyes of other people, you let them influence your identity, which changes your identity over time. Each community's image is created by looking at past events (how they were treated in the past) and making a connection with its current situation (their current status in society). Therefore, remembering historical events of domination, such as political violence or colonialism, has many adverse effects on your social consciousness, ranging from shame to trauma to anger. Rankine narrated multiple situations of African Americans focused on microaggressions. She encourages us to think critically about race, which is somehow either directly or indirectly related to our identity. Racism is everywhere, even in supposedly “post-racial” America. Rankine shows us how systemic racism against African-Americans alter their identities (by making them feel worthless and invisible) and inhibit their ability to function. She also suggests how race is connected to our feeling of belonging and, hence, to our citizenship.

Citizenship is a symbol of nationality; that is why you take a pledge of allegiance, which states that you will be unified and loyal to the state of which you are considered a citizen. By taking that oath, you associate yourself to a specific



territory, the place of your citizenship. The race is also a symbol of nationality at a more specific level, which is based on the color of your skin. Therefore, your body is a house where you are a resident or more precisely a “citizen.” The question is, are you at home in your body? According to Rankine, your identity is nomadic: “the kind of body that can’t hold / the content it is living?” (143). The only difference is because you are born into it, you cannot migrate from your body to avoid conflict as you can from a country. As a result, you feel encaged inside your own body. You are kept in this cage for life, and you realize that you will never be emotionally able to be free to fly around. You dream of and desire freedom. You feel imprisoned, emotionally tortured, and frustrated physically as well as mentally because you can see the outside world but can’t enjoy it. However, this cage provides you a refuge when you feel threatened by the outside world. You cover and mark your refuge with a hood. Rankine mentioned the similar situation of a young black guy. He was wearing a hoodie (probably to cover his refuge) when he was killed because the hoodie is stereotyped as dangerous “a symbol of fear.” On July 13, 2013, a jury gave the verdict that the killer of Trayvon Martin, George Zimmerman, was not guilty. She describes the feelings when she heard the results of the verdict. She was forced to keep her feelings bottled up. Rankine states, “Yes, and this is how you are a citizen: Come on. Let it go. Move on” (151). To associate with society, she feels a serene dissociation from her own existence. She is unsure whether or not she is supposed to feel the way she does. She describes the challenges of living with the knowledge of being viewed as worthless. She explores the dissociation from the self, floating above her ache she wants to escape, but still the pain coexists. She realizes that a part of being black is you lose the control of your own body. The condition of blackness is the condition of detachment. In order to exist, you must hold your pain at an objective distance, “a truce with the patience of a stethoscope” (156). This is a form of self-alienation. Your identity becomes a collage of different feelings, among them fear, pressure from society, pain, and sorrow.

This idea is represented by Rankine when she includes a collage, *The Sleeping Heads* by Wangechi Mutu, which resembles an embryo. An embryo is a rudimentary stage that has the potential for development. During the process of development, it goes through various situations that turn it into a collage. In some situations, you feel hurt, betrayed, or embarrassed, but instead of acknowledging your feelings, you are told to repress them. The ache increases as time goes on, and your body becomes an injured body “You are not sick, you are injured” (143). The image also has sunglasses on it, allowing it to see only what society wants it to see. Sunglasses hide the harsh glare of the light or, in this situation, symbolically hides the truth and reality when it comes to a certain group of population (especially black people in this context). Bloodshot eyes on the embryo show that perhaps it has been desperately trying to see. Your eyes say everything yet nothing. Words can smooth the transition between intention, necessity, and reaction, but the body remains as it is. However, a cry from the voice might be intriguing if only to know

what you sound like. The modes of expression grow more abstract. “To live through the days, sometimes you moan like deer. Sometimes you sigh” (59). But the question is, do people really care about your sufferings? Some of them are glad that you suffer and your moaning elicits laughter in them. Others don’t care at all, and your sighs upset them. Overwhelmed with emotions, you need to sigh, and it is not a sickness, but when you are injured, sighing is the only way to breathe. You question why you survive since you are invisible, “you are in here and here is nowhere” (73). You are ruminating over every situation you were in, and pressure is continuously building inside you.

You are holding yourself together, and you are continuously aching. You become highly sensitive, and if someone says or does something hurtful, you feel a rush of emotions like a wave has cracked over your head. In the ocean, thrashing and fighting against the water will exhaust you and you could drown. To keep yourself from drowning you must fight. Repressed emotions lead to depression and anxiety. Rankine relates to this situation by giving an example of the 2009 Women’s US Open final when Serena Williams allowed her rage to be seen. Serena turned her depression or silence into anger. The prominent oppositional force in her career was the umpire Mariana Alves, who made five bad calls against her in one match back in 2004. The speaker suggests that it must have been Serena’s black body that was “getting in the way of Alves’s sight line” (29). Everyone including the speaker called Serena’s behavior insane, “Oh my God, she’s gone crazy” (25). The experience of living in a society stratified on the base of color is like every situation is a tennis match between a white team and a black team. This match is not about winning or losing. Every match is a lesson; a lesson that blackness renders individuals visible and invisible, everyone and no one at the same time. Zora Neale Hurston said, “I feel most colored when I am thrown against a sharp white background” (53). Perhaps the lesson Serena learned was how to control her emotions. However, her new attitude was difficult to parse by overtly racist people. They considered that Serena was acting out. Is this new Serena a dissociation from the previous Serena, or is her new behavior just a mask she puts on?



*The Sleeping Heads* by Wangechi Mutu

The body has a physical identity of its own along with the abstract identity. The body also has a memory of its own. The memory is connected to the history,

an “American battle between the “historical self” and the “self self” (14). The speaker raises a question about the identity of the body by including an image *Tennis-Brazil-Wozaniacki-Exhibition* on page 37. It is the image of Serena’s tennis opponent, Wozaniacki. In this image, she is embodying Serena’s physical attributes by stuffing cloth in her shirt and shorts. Her physical appearance changed, but her race did not. In fact, if anything, her identification as a white person grew stronger. Therefore, it is not wrong to say that the identity of the body is racial. The racial identity is the historical self that is the basis of stratification among the societies, whereas your self-self is your identity. The question is, what is your true identity? Is it a historical self or self self or a hybrid of both? Immediately, your response would be your true identity is self self; then why is it when a black person is thrown against a white background he or she is visible the most? This means that your historical self has a significant impact on your self self. Therefore, your true identity is a hybrid of both (historical self and self self).

You feel divided between the two identities, which is known as double consciousness. This double consciousness makes it difficult or impossible to have one unified identity. The awareness of being double and divided gives rise to the issues of invisibility and hyper-visibility. Quite ironically, when you are hyper visible as in the case of black people when they are thrown against the white background, you are, in a sense, invisible. This invisibility is because of the intensity of your presence; just as it’s impossible to look at the sun when its light is the brightest.

Rankine shares her own experience of invisibility. She is in the Catholic school, and a girl is looking over her shoulder as she is taking the test. The teacher, Sister Evelyn, does not know about this cheating arrangement, or she seems to ignore it on purpose: “she never actually saw you sitting there” (6). The speaker further suggests that Sister Evelyn’s reaction would have been different if she were cheating from the girl’s paper. She made that assumption in the context of race relations in the United States. Double consciousness makes blacks not only view themselves from their perspective but also to look at themselves as they might be perceived by the outside world. American blacks live in a society that has historically repressed and devalued black people; therefore, it is difficult for them to unify their black identity with their American identity. As a result, their identity becomes a mixture of identities.

The image *Little Girl* on page 19, by Kate Clark, is a visual representation of a hybrid identity. The image is of a human-deer hybrid. When you look at yourself through the eyes of others, you develop a damaged self-image shaped by the perceptions and treatment of other people: “The worst injury is feeling you don’t belong so much to you” (146). Your life, in turn, becomes shaped by stereotypes perpetuated by mainstream culture. You turn into a ruminating creature who is always assessing itself on the standards built by society, as depicted in the image of *Little Girl*: “What else to liken yourself to but an animal, the ruminant kind?”

(60). No one is perfect; therefore, you can never satisfy the standards of society and, hence, happiness can never be achieved. Happiness is when you feel satisfied and fulfilled. It is a feeling of contentment, that life is just as it should be. Since your satisfaction thrives on your approval in the eyes of others, you are never happy. You are always sad, lost in memories, and trying to create your own meaning out of them; a meaning that belongs to you or that makes sense to you, “you know no memory should live in these memories” (144). You always feel something that is an ache: “You ache for the rest of life” (143). Every situation you go through adds more memories, which increases the pain.



*Little Girl*

Therefore, it is not wrong to say that identity is a combination of many situations woven together. As every situation is unique, the identity is not a homogenous mixture of situations; rather, it resembles a unique art or collage. Even our society is not homogenous. Many people might argue that we live in a post-racial society, but many inequalities still exist based upon race, and this makes it difficult for black people to unite the different components of their identity. Therefore, double consciousness is still very relevant in contemporary society. Double consciousness creates an element of conflict within black Americans, as they struggle to conform their identity as a black person and as an “American Citizen.” When they internalize the idea of anti-black sentiment from the outside world, they begin to shape the black American experience. The prejudices of white people elicit self-disparagement, self-questioning, and lowering of ideals among black people. Black Americans strive to create the best expression of themselves and try to do what makes them successful. In the process of creating what makes them successful, they fail to express themselves and, in some ways, may appear to be rejecting their true self. Our media also sells images of black men as rappers, athletes, or criminals, and as a result, the black man is perceived as such. Young black males see these limited paths as their only options for advancement. This is just one way how society shapes the perceptions that blacks have of themselves (and that whites have of blacks).

The problem is not race or racism; it is the culture. Every human being on this earth has the same basic needs, so no group is intrinsically better or worse than any other. Race is a concept which is not dependent on biological traits. Racial classification is done immediately after birth or even before that, by dividing people into two main groups, either white or black. However, while classifying, it is not the difference between the skin color, which is most decisive, but other social differences are also considered significant. According to these differences, society determines and creates roles for each group, which are prescribed as typical behavior for the individual of a specific race. The norms, about how white and black should behave, become internalized early on in life in a person's mind. Over the lifetime, the person is subjected to a complex process of rearing into a black person or a white person by means of identification, education, norms, values, traditions, and images. Because white and black are not a homogenous group, cultural norms establish a lifecycle of racial socialization and stereotyping. As a result, clear-cut inequalities exist between whites and blacks in a society which gives rise to racial stratification.

Therefore, cultural pressures define a person's status in society. However, biologically there is only one race: the human race. If racism were eliminated or if everyone had the same skin color, we would find something else to be racist about. The nature of man is to satisfy his sense of superiority to feel better. If we were all white (or black), we would find other things to divide us (in fact, we already have) such as rich or poor, fat or skinny, tall or short, science or religion to name a few. We should learn to live and let live. It is not possible to eliminate racism. However, it is possible to reduce its negative impact, and the solution to that is education. We need to be taught from a very young age to accept all kinds of people. Rankine says that major headway towards ending racism around the world is the power of words, both written and spoken.

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## If I Were You

Kateryna Dorozhynska

Spring 2019

ENG 2400 | Freshman English II

Professor Eben Wood

Somebody once said, “The way you live your days is the way you live your life.” I would also expand this sentence and say, the way you act this minute is the way you spend your day. Sometimes so much is happening in the current moment that you cannot even understand if it is actually happening, or if it is a hallucination. All of the exciting or unpleasant moments that we experience every day, these little puzzles that create the life-long journey, are called situations. From time to time, these situations create ourselves and shape the role we play in society. People remember what you said or did a few years ago, if it was something significant for them, and create the perception about you based on this information. As the “people” you can try to remember what the person has done and/or said, or you can try to forget it. As an actor in the situation, you have to keep in mind that you might not even mean something, but just the way you said or did it might hurt someone else or change the opinion about you. The issue of visibility versus invisibility arises within the society, especially if you live in a capitalist society, like the one I live in, the United States. You might need to understand that your social and economic statuses will make you extremely visible or vice versa. For example, if Kim Kardashian says that she has a dream to become a lawyer and help people, everyone on her Instagram, one hundred and thirty-six million followers, myself included, and even people outside of this network, start to discuss it. However, if a girl from a poor neighborhood in, for example, the Chicago Housing Projects, had a similar dream, no one would ever care about it. Unfortunately, that is the reality we all live in.

Inevitably, I am a very detail-oriented person. I care about every single moment in my life because I do not believe in life after death. Therefore, I want to do everything that I can possibly do now and today. Fashion, politics, architecture, art, law and society, countries around the globe, extreme adventures, love, and family are my everyday themes to care, talk and act about. Each and all of them

create a perception of who I am and who I became within the twenty-one years that I have been living so far. Of course, my life was a lot easier in Ukraine as long as I had my family's support back there. Moving to the United States definitely made me stronger, tougher, and more self-sufficient than I had ever been before. Nevertheless, I can create this analysis only because I can analyze with the help of my memories what has changed in my life. Memories are, in a sense, situations that once happened to you, and then come back to your mind when something similar is happening around. *Citizen: An American Lyric* by Claudia Rankine makes the reader analyze the issues of racial and gender identities in American society situation by situation, and as a whole topic. The author moves back and forth in her memories to expand the view on her life as a person of color and a woman who does not always understand if it is life which is so cruel towards her, or if it is she who makes those "wrongful" assumptions.

In the last section of the book, VII, the author mostly talks about ending something that cannot be ended. As she points out, "I don't know how to end what doesn't have an ending" (159). She is definitely talking here about the life of people who are not "white" and have to struggle through their lives to achieve success. Historically, these people were enslaved, killed, lynched, segregated, sold, bullied and scorned. Today, as a "black" woman, she is still being deprived of the quality of life that most people have. The speaker is seen as a threat even though she is an innocent person. And yes, she cannot simply end the history of discrimination because she is an innocent and good person. The author and other "black" people have to live their lives without recognition from others and accept themselves through the window of the crucial history of the United States and other countries of the post-colonized world. In this sense, your "historical self" shapes the way you and society respond towards your "self self."

One sentence later from the previous quote I mentioned, the author writes: "Yesterday, I begin, I was waiting in the car for time to pass. A woman pulled in and started to park her car facing mine. Our eyes met and what passed passed as quickly as the look away. She backed up and parked on the other side of the lot. I could have followed her to worry my question but I had to go, I was expected on court, I grabbed my racket" (159). That is an extremely strong paragraph that should, in my opinion, connect the reader to the issues that have been raised previously in the book. When I first read this paragraph, I thought, Why would this woman do it? Are we in the era of Jim Crow? Are we supposed to be separated? While I was thinking about it, I recognized that there is an image of the Jim Crow Road on page 6 by Michael David Murphy. I did a little research and found out that there are two streets named after Jim Crow in the United States, and both of them are in the state of Georgia, a predominantly "white" state. People who live there are probably still thinking that *Plessy v. Ferguson* should not have been overturned. Otherwise, why would anyone name the street by the name of a person who created one of the most discriminatory laws in the world? And why does no

one in that state ask the authorities about removing it? Maybe no one is against it. Now, can you just imagine the author sitting in the car on Jim Crow Road and not being “white”? This woman might have just looked at the sign, the name of the street, and recognized the laws (which are not a reality anymore) and decided to be “separate but equal.” Without even talking to the speaker, or knowing her personally, she decided that she would not have her car parked beside the black woman’s. Inarguably, the author realized what has just happened to her, but she is so tired of the attitude like that towards her that she just keeps her thoughts inside of her mind and does not complain.

The speaker tries to be an extremely strong woman who would achieve all her goals despite the judgments and stigmas that follow her every step forward that she makes. In the passage I mentioned previously she says: “... I had to go, I was expected on court, I grabbed my racket.” Here she is comparing herself with a famous tennis player, Serena Williams, who was previously mentioned in the book. Serena is a black woman who was not able to win some tennis matches because tennis was made for people who do not look like she does. She protested so many times and kept her thoughts deep in her mind, but when the anger inside of her body overloaded itself, she became “another black angry woman.” That is exactly what society expected to see from her. However, she struggled through all of it and achieved her goals. Today, she is a celebrity tennis player that makes millions of dollars around the world every year and celebrates her identity in the way she is. The speaker was inspired by her strong visible “self self” and wanted to be another successful and “visible” black woman despite what the “historical self” for these women is. “Watching this newly contained Serena, you begin to wonder if she finally has given up wanting better from her peers or if she too has come across *Hennessy’s Art Thoughtz* and is channeling his assertion that the less that is communicated the better. Be ambiguous” (35). Truly, the speaker followed this rule and did not bother and ask questions of the woman who parked her car on the other side of the lot.

What is also extremely shocking is the picture “Tennis-Brazil-Wozniacki-Exhibition” from December 7, 2012, which speaks to the quote on page 35, of course. Even though Serena fairly won the game and became “Winner Takes All” player of the year and did not act in a disrespectful way towards any of her partners, she was mocked by the Dane Caroline Wozniacki. She put towels inside her top and skirt imitating a black woman’s body and making a parody of Serena Williams. Putting myself in the position of Ms. Williams I would definitely respond to such a parody in an extreme way. Williams kept silent. Today, most of the people do not know the name of Wozniacki, but a lot of people recognize the identity of Serena Williams. Well, “winner takes all.”

Everyone has been told by someone else, “If I were you, I would have done better ... made it in a different way ... been silent ... been not that silent” and many more suggestions that might come to people’s minds. The problem here



is that *you* are not *I*. You might not even have an idea of how *I* struggled to do things the way I want to have them done. I remember I met with my girlfriends once after I argued with my boyfriend, and they told me, “How could you talk to him in that way? He is such an amazing man!” I told them that they do not know where I am coming from and they cannot judge my words based on one situation; they should keep in mind my whole life story. The same story or situation arises in this book: we cannot understand how the author feels like a child based on one situation: “You never really speak except for the time she makes her request and later when she tells you you smell good and have features more like a white person. You assume she thinks she is thanking you for letting her cheat and feels better cheating from an almost white person” (5). If someone would just read this situation he or she might think that everyone is being bullied through his/her life, and that is fine, you just have to get through it. The world is mean towards all of us. However, after you read situation after situation that the author shares with the reader, you must be able to understand that it is not just one situation where this woman was bullied. It is her life.

Imagine living the life where you are bullied every day by people that you do not even know. You are invisible to the world with its “sharp white background.” Maybe you would not like to live in a world like that anymore? That is why, in my opinion, the author includes the image *Detail of Fish Attacking Slave from The Slave Ship* by Joseph Mallord William Turner. This picture speaks to colonial history and shapes the understanding of your “historical self” where people just like you commit suicide because they do not want to live their lives enslaved and as the commodity of someone else. Now, as a “self self,” whose thoughts and mind are shaped by the “historical self” and society’s view towards *you*, you might want to end it all, but *you* cannot end what does not have an ending. Therefore, you might want to end something else, maybe your life, maybe someone else’s life, maybe your thoughts, or maybe you want to give it another chance, and start everything again, from the blank paper, white paper.

All these situations, images, and memories lead us to understand the whole story of the woman who was often excluded from her own community, and maybe, in a sense, from her own country. As it is stated in the XIV Amendment to the U.S. Constitution: “All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the state wherein they reside. No state shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; . . . nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.”

In my opinion, Rankine was definitely not the one to make “wrongful” assumptions about people. Life was extremely cruel towards her. The world we live in is still racist and discriminatory. Some people enjoy mocking other people and think it will make them look better. Of course, it will make them look worse. Some people are suffering visibly, like Serena Williams, for example. Millions

of people though hold their pain and keep it silent because they know that in our society they are invisible. They may have thoughts just like the speaker of the book had that maybe they are wrong, maybe they over-think it. However, when they put a puzzle piece to a puzzle piece and create clear images in their heads, people understand that the era of the new Jim Crow has started. Even though you are a citizen, you are not treated like one. Even though you were born and raised in the United States, and you speak English, and you are Christian, you still remain a slave like back in the days because your skin is “colored.” Living in the community that you do not belong to and feeling alienated from the whole world just because you were born some way is humiliating. It has been proved that “race” does not exist at biological level, but it does at the social. People are the ones who create distinctions, not biology, not human nature.

In my opinion, the issues that are raised in *Citizen: An American Lyric* should be taken extremely seriously on the federal level of jurisdiction. People who were scorned every day by other people are the constituents of the government. They pay their taxes to the government in order to be protected, and they do not receive any clear protection. The Constitution should be amended one more time with the clear and brief statement that people cannot be discriminated against because of their age, race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity or historical background. The Amendments we have are very ambiguous and were written in the extremely “smart” way in order to stop the former slave population from threatening the government but still be the commodity of it.

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# Am I Naïve?

Islam Farghaly

Spring 2019

ENG 1200 | Freshman English I

SOC 3100 | Introduction to Sociology

Professors Emily Schnee and Dominic Wetzel

“**T**hey know where we live, where we are working and what we are doing.” These statements are the common comments by a couple of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients as a response to my question about their immigration status. In this respect, knowing a couple of DACA recipients was the main motive to address the DACA issue and gave me the opportunity to interview them and have a couple of fruitful conversations prior to writing this essay. During our conversations, I felt tension, fear, disappointment, and hopelessness. One of the guys, Johnson, shouted, “We are holding our breath waiting for the Supreme Court rule whether they will uphold the lower court rule to extend Obama’s executive order validity or side with the Trump administration executive order to revoke the protection of deportation and let ICE do their job.”

At this point, I tried to cool down the intensity of this conversation and provide some hope and an optimistic response by saying that I do think that the coming Supreme Court rule will be in DACA recipients’ favor. I referred to the fact that the Supreme Court upheld this executive order before, so why not now? However, my response did not serve my good intention and fueled the already heated conversation. Johnson responded with a sarcastic tone and pointed to the various negative topics that reflect the current cruel direction, path, and policies that have adopted by the current administration such as not condemning and praising white supremacist violence and separating children from their parents. He explained that the current majority of the Supreme Court judges are conservative and hardliners on immigration. He paused for a couple of seconds and ended this conversation with two statements: “Just do the math. You sound naïve, man.”

Am I naïve? I was just trying to be nice. However, I put myself in his shoes and swallowed this offense. Since I believe in the power of reliable and credible data, studies, and research, not the alternative facts, I decided to verify, go through, and answer three questions addressed by Johnson. These questions

can be summarized as follows: Firstly, why do they hate us? Secondly, are not we protected members of society? Lastly, are not we a political tool being used by this current administration along with the GOP to achieve their agenda? I strongly believe that answering these questions would allow me and the reader to reach and get to the bottom of what's going on and distinguish facts from false information, claims and so-called alternative facts.

Prior to diving into answering these questions, I would like to explain what DACA is along with the circumstances that drove the previous administration to issue DACA. In this respect, during the Obama presidential campaign, Obama promised the Hispanic population to put in place an immigration policy that would provide millions of undocumented immigrants a path forward to citizenship. Considering the circumstances and problems that Obama inherited from the previous administration such as the 2008 economic crisis and Gulf War, Obama was not able to address his immigration policy in the first year while the Democratic party was holding both Congressional chambers. Later on, Obama addressed the immigration issue in the 2012 State of the Union speech and argued for lawmakers on both sides of the aisle to start an immigration debate about the fate of millions of undocumented immigrants. Obama tried to restore an old attempt by Congress, which took place in 2001, to provide lawful status and a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants who had arrived in the United States when they were children. This proposed law, the "Dreamer Act," failed to pass both the House and Senate. In order to honor and fulfill his campaign promise, and maintain and satisfy his base, specifically Hispanic people, he issued the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals in June 2012. This memo provides unlawful immigrants who came to the United States as children temporary protection from deportation along with eligibility for work permits (Dussault 445-446). In November 2014, the Obama Administration announced its intention to expand DACA to cover children's parents, "DAPA." However, a coalition of states and firms sued the federal government and this expansion was halted before it was implemented (Starr 294).

The current administration, through its former attorney general, announced its plan to revoke DACA over a six-month period, stating that the previous administration's executive order concerning DACA was against the immigration law (Dussault 448). Furthermore, Trump tweeted "the Congress has now six months to legalize DACA" (Dussault 448). Immigration advocates organizations sued the federal government and a federal court upheld DACA (Associated Press 1). The administration appealed to the Supreme Court and, currently, all DACA holders are holding their breath waiting for the final rule that is going to determine their fate.

### **"Why do they hate us?"**

Actually, Trump adopted an unusual and aggressive series of statements

during his presidential campaign that viewed undocumented immigrants as a threat to the country's culture and economy. In other words, he falsely accused and promoted the idea that illegal migrants are taking jobs from Americans and committing crimes. Anti-immigration citizens found this message appealing to them. Furthermore, alt-right groups viewed Trump as a candidate that promoted their ideology and adopted the same hate speech. Consequently, they took the opportunity to reorganize themselves and come back to the public and promote and endorse a candidate that served their agenda. In light of the above, since DACA holders are undocumented immigrants, Trump, to satisfy and maintain his image as a hardliner on immigration among his base, did not waste time in revoking the protection provided by Obama's executive order. Now, we understand who are the ones against extending and legalizing the status of DACA recipients. They can be categorized into two groups. The first group is white nationalists (extremist people).

Actually, before jumping into the second group, I have to draw the reader's attention to the fact that both the Trump administration and white nationalists have something in common, which is being ethnocentric. Ethnocentrism is judging and evaluating other people and cultures based on the standards and principles of your own culture. The problem with being ethnocentric, from a sociological point of view, is that the influence and the roles of your own culture prevent you from understanding the roots and reasons behind certain beliefs or/and practices of other societies. To apply this on DACA recipients, as per this group point of view, DACA recipients are outsiders that came from other countries with a different culture, genetics, and color (non-white). Therefore, they are perceived as a threat to white civilization. The second group is made up of American citizens against the current immigration policies and laws (normal citizens with a point of view). The question is, what is the percentage of the American people in favor of providing lawful status to DACA recipients? According to the *New York Times*, most polls indicate that the vast majority of Americans are in favor of DACA legalization and only a slim percentage of the American public is against legalizing DACA status and in favor of deporting them (Jordan 1).

Therefore, my answer to the first question is: No, the American people do not hate you guys. On the contrary, they view you as Americans that deserve respect and should be recognized as residents or citizens.

### **“Are not we protected members of society?”**

The Trump administration argued that ending DACA would provide job opportunities to the American people (Davidson 1). On the other hand, DACA recipients expressed that they were not granted this status. They nailed it by meeting the placed criteria that qualify them to have this protection and work permits. In other words, in order to obtain DACA status, they have gone through a long process and verification stages to prove that they are valuable, qualified and useful to both the economy and society. The question is, what is the economists' point

of view regarding ending DACA? By referring to the economists' assessment of such a move, Davidson refutes the Trump administration's argument that ending DACA would provide job opportunities to the American people. In this regard, economic experts mention that this decision would have a negative impact on the U.S. economy by reducing the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and increasing the already existing shortage of manpower (Davidson 1). The author stated: "As a result, some analysts say there will be a bigger economic toll. Brannon says deporting the immigrants would reduce economic growth by \$280 billion over the next decade, or about a half-percentage point a year. CAP says GDP would be whittled by \$460 billion" (Davidson 1). These numbers reveal that DACA recipients are a very important figure in the workforce and the economy of the United States. Furthermore, many institutions and organizations express their concern over the Trump administration decision to end DACA.

In an interview with Mike Rose, Director of Government Relations at the National Association of College Admission Counseling (NACAC), Rose pointed to the negative impact on the economy of ending this program. He expressed that this uncalculated action would deepen the already existing shortage of qualified employees. In other words, this decision would hurt the nation's business (Cox 23). Additionally, union leaders condemned and denounced Trump's decision and voiced their worry about the serious effects on the economy of such a cruel and cowardly move (Johnson 10).

Based on the above, I would answer the second question by stating: Yes, DACA recipients are very important assets to the U.S. economy and most of the respected and reliable economists along with the heads of many American institutions and organizations have come together to the conclusion that the current administration's statement has no merit. In other words, the Trump administration undermined the contribution of DACA recipients in the economy.

**“Are not we a political tool being used by this current administration along with the GOP to achieve their agenda?”**

Johnson said, “We all were raised and educated here. We do not know or even remember much of our original countries. Do you think it is right to throw us out? We feel betrayed by a country we thought home.” He continued that politicians, specifically in the GOP, are using them as a political tool to achieve a specific agenda such as the wall. DACA recipients were thrilled and their expectations reached the ceiling when they read a Trump interview with the *Times*, which took place in November 2016, concerning the fate of DACA recipients. Trump said, “We’re going to work something out that’s going to make people happy and proud. They got brought here at a very young age, they’ve worked here, they’ve gone to school here. Some were good students. Some have wonderful jobs. And they’re in never-never land because they don’t know what’s going to happen” (Abramson 1). Furthermore, Trump doubled up their hopes when he provided his empathy about

DACA recipients and assuring viewers that his zero-tolerance immigration policy would not be applied on the Dreamers during an ABC News interview in January 2017. He said, “They shouldn’t be very worried” (Abramson 1). In February 2017, he conveyed the same message of empathy towards DACA recipients (Abramson 1). At this point, we could think that Trump had had a change of heart from his previous promises during his presidential campaign to end this program. The country thought that Trump was considering the human and ethical angles in any future decision regarding DACA status. However, this angle did not last for long. In this regard, Trump used DACA as political leverage to secure the required funding to a wall along the southern border (Karni, Stolberg 1).

In light of above, unfortunately, my answer to the question above is: Yes, DACA recipients are being used as a political tool, which is immoral and unfair, starting from characterizing them as lawbreakers and extended to ignoring their contributions to both the economy and society.

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In conclusion, after answering the above three questions, I ran to Johnson to tell him my findings, which I thought would cheer him up. My smiling face and high spirits did not last long. Again, with a sarcastic tone, he responded, “Do you think that I do not know all of this information? Genius.” He added, “I am sick of talking, positive polls, and some public support without action. We are now fighting for our existence (temporary protection), not for a permanent solution. We are back to square one.”

Oh, boy. I do not blame him. He and DACA recipients are living the uncertainty. They do not know what is going to happen to them in the near future. I have to admit that I was wrong when I thought that the outcomes of these questions would satisfy him and provide hope. Some critical thinking needs to be done here.

The United States is always promoting itself as a symbol and the defender of human rights around the world. However, the priority of people in office is to apply their agendas and policies without considering humanity and ethics. This concept is clearly applied on DACA recipients. To be more specific, the DACA issue is not a new one but is rooted back to 2001 when Congress failed to pass the Dreamer Act. DACA recipients grew up without legal status and realized that after finishing their education and while looking for jobs. Obama’s executive order was very beneficial for both DACA recipients and the struggling economy after the 2008 economic crisis. In this regard, DACA recipients provide the market with skilled and qualified manpower that the market desperately needed. Furthermore, these people don’t have the language barrier that many immigrants have. Actually, they speak fluent English that allowed them to blend in with society and community. Some of them are highly respected figures in the neighborhoods and communities they live in. Most of the polls indicate that the American people are in favor

of legalizing their status. Even some leaders from the GOP called to provide a path forward to citizenship for DACA recipients. For instance, the former House Speaker spoke out publicly arguing for the current administration not to revoke Obama executive orders concerning DACA recipients. He expressed his belief in the need to issue legislation to fix DACA legal status permanently (Berenson 1).

All the above factors make DACA recipients ideal candidates that deserve to be Americans. In other words, it is a win-win situation. However, most GOP lawmakers and the current administration decided to ignore all the above-mentioned facts which are in favor of legalizing DACA recipients' status and have sided with agendas and ideologies that shape and address their party as hardliners on immigration. In light of the above, it is very disturbing to me the amount of hypocrisy, misguided information and false statements that come from officials about DACA recipients.

Finally, I would say that the theory or the idea that explains this current administration's actions towards immigrants generally, and DACA specifically, is revolving around having and creating an enemy with the support of the alt-right media, activists, and leaders by manipulating statistical data and providing false information that serves "nativism," such as immigrants are violent invaders. They focus on any crime committed by illegal immigrants and sell it as a character that all migrants possess. This strategy keeps the conservative base fully occupied and supportive of any cruel action against immigrants. Additionally, it gives this administration a window to implement its own agenda and get its base on board with any decision, regardless of how ugly, distractive and immoral it is. It goes without saying, this strategy would result in violent crimes against immigrants. For instance, manipulating data and information was one of the main motives that drove the Pittsburgh synagogue shooter, Robert Bowers, to commit his massacre. To be more specific, in the wake of the caravan of asylum seekers, he posted the United Nation chart showing the high murder rates of three Central American countries, thereby implying that these people are coming to the United States to invade it, ignoring the fact that gang violence is the major factor that drives these people to flee their countries and seek a safer place to live in (Amend 9).

Unfortunately, I have nothing to contribute but my prayers and hope for some empathy towards immigrants and specially DACA recipients from the people in office.

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# Skin Color Is Not a Weapon

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The United States of America has always been a very multicultural and diverse country. Nevertheless, minority groups are often subject to discrimination. America has come a long way since the days of slavery, and huge steps were made towards granting equal rights by race; however, racism is still a very pressing problem today. It is subconsciously built into the system, as racial profiling by law enforcement, and nearly impossible, especially for African Americans, to break the cycle of poverty. *Dear White People* is a 2014 American satire film, directed by Justin Simien, set in the 21st century at a university campus. The University has its different social groups, but the scenario is mostly built around black people versus white people. Through the humor in media and everyday life examples at a fictional Winchester University, Justin Simien demonstrates the problems of African-Americans and gays in the today's society.

Winchester University, like any other, has diverse social groups, as well as groups that are separated by skin color. Armstrong-Parker is one of the residential housing dorms predominantly of African-Americans. Once students arrive on campus, they are divided into different residencies. The film shows how social groups interact with each other, what conflicts arise between them, and how they solve the problem.

*Dear White People* has a structure where each episode mostly describes the story of only one character. Episode 5 in Volume 1 is about Reggie Green, one of the main characters in the film. He is playing the role of a son of an American novelist and social critic, James Baldwin, who is famous for his essays where he describes the psychological pressure of the racism against gay and bisexual men: “*Not everything that is faced can be changed. But nothing can be changed until it is faced.*”

This is how the episode starts, with the quote of Reggie's father. Reggie is a student who lives in Armstrong-Parker; his major is a computer science. The episode starts with a few scenes that show what Reggie is experiencing in his life

being African-American. A white woman while withdrawing money at an ATM, after seeing Reggie, tries to finish up faster and run away, as if she is scared of him. But would she act the same if it was a white man standing behind her?

The coach of a football team thinks Reggie is on his team, even after Reggie denies it; this clearly shows that he simply thinks that people of color look the same, and he doesn't distinguish them between one another. Throughout the whole movie Reggie plays the role of a man who is trying to understand what would his life look like, and what he would be, if he could only remove that skin and live as a different person, because people around him do not see Reggie for who he is; they see his skin color, not what is beneath it.

The culminating moment happens when the university has a party hosted by Reggie's friend Addison, who is a white man. During the party Reggie and Addison have a miscommunication, when Addison is using the n-word while singing a song and repeating the lyrics. Reggie asks him not to use it and explains his discomfort. The two started arguing with each other and it leads to a physical fight. When campus police arrive, and the two boys are pulled apart, Reggie is the one who gets more "attention" from the police. Even after Addison tries to explain that that is his party and Reggie is a student and a friend, police insist that Reggie show his identification. Reggie's feelings are very understandable. He is the student in the university, and he pays the tuition just like everyone else, including Addison. This is an on-campus party; therefore, he wishes to know why exactly he needs to show ID. The officer then pulls a gun. Finding himself held at gunpoint, Reggie reaches for his wallet, all shaky and stressed; scared and frightened students in the background are screaming and crying, and they keep repeating that he is a student. However, the officer is not letting down his gun. While breathing very heavily Reggie provides his identification. Without apologizing, the officer just sends everyone back to their residences, leaving Reggie with post traumatic stress disorder.

This scene is an educational example of law enforcement profiling that leaves Reggie with double-consciousness. After this he is scared of white people, and he is scared to express himself. He is scared when he sees them on the streets, and he does not know how to act in front of them, how to talk. His double-consciousness is going beyond the limits. He struggles with letting go of double-consciousness. Mapping it out for the person can take a lifetime, because first they need to understand how history sees them, then how the world sees them, and then how they see themselves. Reggie has to learn how to navigate and behave depending on context; it is hard for him spending time outside of his comfort zone, outside of "his" people.

The episode finishes with the same idea as it started, judgmental behavior towards African-Americans only because of the skin color. Reggie has not shown any signs of danger; he has only wanted to know why he, out of every person at that party, needed to present an ID to the law enforcement. Skin color is not a

weapon. This moment is very sensitive because in this scenario Reggie represents the whole African-American community, and the university is considered to be the United States, and law enforcement is playing the same role. This is one of the educational moments in *Dear White People* that help society to see the truth and take one more step in the right direction.

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# A Look at English Stratification

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**O**n October 14, 1066, the Duke of Normandy, known today as William the Conqueror, and formerly known as “William the Bastard,” defeated Harold Godwinson in the Battle of Hastings. The Normans came over from France and altered the English social structure. Although there are similarities in the stratification between the English and the French, the Normans’ ruthless efficiency restructured every aspect of the English government. Remnants of their restructuring still exist in English government today. Many aspects of French culture were also incorporated into English society. For over three hundred years, the English court spoke French, which was considered the language of the nobility. Additionally, nobles wore French fashion, and some kings preferred residency in France. These appropriations are fitting examples of how much cultural capital the French held within English society. A little-known fact is the first English king to use the English dialect in court was Welsh, Henry Tudor (Henry VII). The Normans solidified their power and control by building castles and a rigid social structure. Today’s fondness for shows like *Game of Thrones*, *The Monarch Glen*, and *Braveheart* offer a glimpse of the social structure that existed at that time. This paper will begin a sociological exploration of the strata of the United Kingdom from the time of the Battle of Hastings through the present. Definitions for royalty, nobility, gentry, other social classes, and the “honour” system, still in place today, will be provided. Additionally, descriptions for lesser known terms like primogenitor, Domesday Book, coronet, peer, and many more will be detailed. A breakdown of all styles of dignity along with all their proper form of address and official regalia will be presented.

The first stage of organizing this stratification is the introduction of the King and the surveying of his realm. England’s strata fulfill the criteria to be considered an estate system, which includes the three primary sectors of the church, nobility, and commoners. Within the British social structure, the King is of master status, which dominates others, and in turn, determines their position in society.

William the Conqueror was crowned King of England on December 25, 1066, and remained in control by building fortifications all over England (Johnson). These fortifications are known today as castles. The Normans strategically built castles to control and put down any uprisings that occurred, and they were extremely successful. William II was also faced with another problem, “What is mine and how much of it is there?” Consequently, he ordered a complete survey of everything in England in 1085.

Thirteen thousand, four hundred and eighteen settlements were surveyed by royal commissioners. This survey not only gave an assessment of the country’s wealth but gave the crown a better understanding of the socio-economic tiers of wealth and power in England (Johnson). Every lot of land, ox, chicken, pig, farm, person, and Barony was accounted for. One could only imagine how awestruck and terrified villagers became when the king’s commissioner showed up in town, knowing that noncompliance with the survey would mean death. These surveys were seen, in many ways, like the Last Judgment. Some locals would refer to it as “Doomsday,” hence the origin of the name of the most infamous book in history, “The Domesday Book.”

The Domesday Book, which was written in Latin, was first published in 1086 and consisted of two books merged into one, totaling 413 pages (Johnson). Throughout history, it has been utilized to track wealth, social mobility, and descendants that date back to the Normans. Ben Johnson writes:

As well as valuing assets, this fascinating document gives a valuable insight into land use at the time, the life of local landowners, and disputes between neighbors. By studying individual entries, it is possible to discover that upmarket Hampstead in London had woodland containing 100 pigs and assessed as being worth 50 shillings. Brighton residents may enjoy fishing, but how many catch enough to pay their taxes? The Domesday Book reveals that one Brighton landowner did exactly that--with 4000 herrings to be precise.

This is a small sample of the extensive detail that the Domesday Book archived. As a result of the Domesday Book, the king implemented without hesitation a new command structure rewarding loyal soldiers with land and titles and dispensing with the old Lords structure. At the time, the social structure was primarily feudal with Lords having control over the manors. They were also given the authority of extracting and dispensing justice in the name of the King. The definition of the Manor Lord and their questionable role in today’s society will be discussed later, but we must remember villagers and farm workers were tied to the manor. These individuals in positions of servitude were considered to have an ascribed status. Their status was assigned by society with no consideration given

to their individuality. They were not able to leave without expressed permission from their local Lord, and there was little to no social mobility. The expression “born a serf, die a serf” accurately characterized the restriction of the class system of the time.

The Table of Precedence, which is the organizational chart that breaks down the social structure from King to the lowest form of commoner can be seen in 1895’s *Debrett’s Peerage, Baronetage and Knightage* (preface, xx-xxii). It is very important to note that gender is clearly defined, meaning the parallel male of that dignity takes precedence over the female. For example, the King outranks the Queen, and when the Queen outranks her selected husband, he is known as King Consort. That is why the Table of Precedence is divided by gender (Pine, xx-xxii). The hierarchy is almost the same today, with the exception of certain knighthoods.



*Royal Crown as heraldically depicted*

### **THE SOVEREIGN**

First in dignity, honours and power, the fountain of all. The sovereign is the Fountain of honours; none can move up through this social structure without the seal of the Sovereign. A man may be born a gentleman and die a Knight or a Lord, but the death is guaranteed, the honour is not. Today we have a constitutional monarchy, her Majesty the Queen. One of her many social roles, on the advice of her ministers and government, still presides over who can be a Knight or be ennobled. The Queen can grant specific authority to the Prince of Wales or another H.R. to conduct the Investment Ceremony, but it is still by her own words that the honour is bestowed upon the recipient. Once the Honour Roll is published, the awardee may be addressed by his or her new dignity, and the ceremony would usually follow later. If the sovereign addresses a person by a new dignity, that person is now elevated to that dignity. Such is the power of her Majesty; in this matter, it is absolute (Debretts).

The title of Prince of Wales will be defined briefly, the emblem of his office will be shown and explained. The text will dwell less on royalty and more on the nobility (the Lords) and the commons. Contrary to today’s belief, less are known about them. The misinformation spread by films and television series has caused a weak understanding of this ancient administrative body. Before moving on, there must be a brief description of the sovereign heir apparent, the Prince of Wales.

The first-born issue of the sovereign, be they male or female (the old rules of succession primogenitor no longer apply) will be titled at birth. The Duke of Cornwall and all rights and revenue from said Dutchy will be bestowed. Upon his

21st birthday, his royal highness will become the Prince of Wales. On that day, a large sum of money is also bestowed on his royal highness, along with an annual revenue. This title is only reserved for the Heir Apparent of the Sovereign, first instituted by Edward I in 1301.

Now that the ascribed dignity of the Prince of Wales has been defined, and its position in the strata made clear, it is important to make clear that this was a closed system. The social hierarchy classified royalty on the very top and commoners on the bottom. This was protected generation to generation by a law called primogeniture (not used here in the United States). This is loosely defined as a “law stating that all property would be inherited by the firstborn son; if the family has no son the land went to the next closest male relative. Women could not inherit property, and their social standing was primarily determined through marriage” (Lumen). This is one way that the Royals used to protect their status. The chances of a commoner gaining access to the crown, and one day possibly becoming king or queen, was little to none.

For many centuries, the class system in Britain saw very few exceptions in the socio-economic tiers of the upper class. Then, along came the Industrial Revolution. The development of industry and manufacturing altered British social structure and improved the possibility of social mobility. Although the class system, in terms of social status, remained consistent in Britain for quite some time, economic status saw more mobility after the Industrial Revolution. Commoners moved to the urban areas, received employment, and improved their living standard. Change has been slow; however, wealth and power shifted (Lumen). Parents were able to send their children to some of the most elite schools in Britain, and abroad, one being Saint Andrews in Scotland.

On April 29, 2011, Prince William, Duke of Cambridge, stepped outside of the norm and married Catherine Middleton. He met his longtime girlfriend while attending Saint Andrews. Catherine Middleton is from the most common of families in England. Her mother was a flight attendant, and her father was a flight dispatcher. The Middletons became entrepreneurs, and business owners, who rose through the middle class and into the upper middle class (Lumen). The ascendance of her parents is an example of intragenerational mobility, which is vertical mobility for people within their own lifetime. Catherine not only benefited from intergenerational mobility by way of her parents’ movement through social classes and occupation but created her own intragenerational mobility when she married Prince William. Eventually, she will become Queen Catherine, and hold a position of Queen Consort. An interesting and inspiring fact is that she will join a very short list of queens to hold a college degree (Lumen). With the ushering-in of more gender equality regarding the line of succession, that list may continue to grow.



## **The Aristocracy**

Aristocracy can be defined as people of a higher class, that govern society. Now in England, it refers to the noble class plus legally one gentry. The nobles are the Lords or Peers, and Baronets are at the bottom of the aristocratic pyramid. In actuality, they are not nobles but commoners. The nobles formed the House of Lords, who are in charge of running the government. These peers of the realm are divided into five categories, with Duke being on the top of the hierarchy and Barons on the bottom (Debretts).

1. Duke
2. Marquis
3. Earl
4. Viscount
5. Baron

These five nobles comprise the House of Lords. The Lords are made up of hereditary peers that by chances of birth become the ruling class of England. They were the majority landowners in the kingdom, and govern themselves. At one time, they could not be arrested or charged with a crime, because only a peer can sit in judgment over another peer. They were, and continue to be, the most powerful men in the kingdom. The Lords brought down kings, defended the land against foreign invaders, and gave their future generations away during World War I. It is best to define the Lords, their stations, and some of their origins.

The first dignity would be the Dukes. The title of Duke, in England, first appeared around 1337 when the Dukedom of Cromwell was given to the Black Prince, who was the eldest son of Edward III. This title is usually conferred on children of the monarch and is rarely ever given out. In fact, there are only 24 non-royal Dukes, down from 29, still in existence (Debretts). The last person offered Dukedom was Winston Churchill. He was offered the Dukedom of London, but declined with his famous statement, "Born a commoner, die a commoner." Churchill was somewhat of a product of social mobility. His father was Lord Randolph Churchill, and his Brooklyn-born mother, the Lady Randolph Churchill, came from a family in American finance. This is a perfectly good example of aristocracy merging with meritocracy for their own personal needs. One has titles and nobility, and the other has wealth to support it. It was the self-made man and his daughter that saved the aristocracy in England.

## **Marquees**

Marquee is the second highest in the Peerage of U.K., which origin stems from a time where a Lord that defended the borderlines or marsh was given this title. It is usually conferred as a courtesy title that went with a Dukedom. As a

stand-alone title, there are only 34 Marquesses.

It is worth mentioning that England is poised to have its first biracial Marquess. The daughter of a Nigerian oil tycoon married Ceawlin Thynn, who is the Viscount Weymouth. His father is the Marquess of Bath, and upon his death, Ceawlin Thynn will inherit his title (Kamp). It's good to note that under British Peerage Law, the issue of a peer that holds dignity of an Earl or higher can use his father's lesser title if one exists. This title is known as a courtesy title. The Viscount and the Viscountess have already produced three male sons, and because of primogeniture, their son John will be the first black Marquess of England (Kamp). He will not be able to use any title other than "The Honorable" until his grandfather expires, and he reaches the lawful age of 21. This is another interesting example of social mobility, more specifically vertical mobility, even though it is upper class moving into the nobility.

### **Earls**

Earldom is ranked number three in the peerage chart and holds one unique distinction among the rest. It is the oldest title and rank of English nobility, and until 1337, it was considered the highest. The Earls of old, during the Norman Conquest, used to be the enforcement agents that would extract payment of one-third of a county's profit. This norm was the origin of the old phrase "three penny" for the justice (Burkes). Nowadays, the dignity of Earldom has only been offered to retiring prime ministers; since World War II, only a few have accepted. This practice was discontinued during Margaret Thatcher's ministry. Some would say the practice was discontinued because the queen believed she was a supremacist. All in all, she did receive a life peerage (Pine, 77). As a result of the redistribution of wealth by imposing death taxes on the aristocracy, who at one time were exempt from it, more Earls have lost their seats, meaning their original power base and stately manor. An example of downward social mobility would be the case of the Earl of Cardigan. The family estate, which was owned for one thousand years, named Tottenham House, has been in custodianship for over 65 years. The poor Earl and his wife, the Countess of Cardigan, must live in a smaller house on the estate, with no hot water or heating. They are forced to shower at a local public bath and have applied for public service or welfare. He is now a delivery driver and a transporter of fine goods, like caviar (Clarke). This Earl is in a unique classification, because of the Peerage Act of 1999, which states that only ninety-two Hereditary Peers can sit in the House of Lords, with the exception of the Earl Marshall of England (Pine, 113). If not for this act, he could get a job in the House of Lords by performing his hereditary duty as a peer of the realm. He would be paid a flat rate of attendance of 150-300 pounds a day with an expense allowance. There are many cases like this where Lords fell from grace, but if they had it their way, the inequity gap would be monstrously large.

## **Viscounts**

Fourth in ranking as a lord is a Viscount. According to Debrett's, in the British Peerage system, Viscounts made the first recorded appearance in 1440. This is when King Henry the Sixth, when crowned King of England and France, decided to merge the titles of the two countries. This decision created John Lord Beaumont. Consecutively the Viscount Beaumont in England, and Viscount Beaumont in France. Currently, there are only 115 Viscounts that are not courtesy Viscounts. In today's system, Viscounts are more of a courtesy title for Heir Apparents to Earls, Marquises, and Dukes (Kamp).

## **Barons**

A Baron is the fifth rank in the peerage system. A Baron can be defined as the king's tenant-in-chief or a land holding noble (Debrett's). Barons currently make up the majority of Lords of Parliament. Using Debrett Numbers, from their official website, there are currently four hundred and twenty-six hereditary Barons, including life peers. And not to be one gender-specific there are also nine hereditary Baronesses. The life peer is a new addition to the peerage system, having its origins from the Life Peerage Act of 1958 (Pine, 77). Here you can finally see a large infiltration of the nobility by the commons. These exemplars come from a wide variety of society, fields like education, technology, art, sports, media, health, science, and volunteers. A person can now ascend into the nobility by being outstanding in a particular field and gaining their right to manage and run the realm. These new Lords are selected by a committee at 10 Downing St. They are then put on a list to be presented to the prime minister and the Queen. After this process, they are announced in the New Year Honour List. Without industrialization and globalization, none of this could be possible. Earlier generations did not pick up from the farms and manor houses to find more lucrative work or advancement. Their offspring would not be able to advance themselves. By not letting wealth be inherited from one generation to the next without contributing back into the system, there is great potential for vertical mobility in a system that was once closed. Levying taxes on inherited wealth creates more money for social programs. For centuries, the aristocracy controlled huge portions of land in England, which limited socio-economic growth for farmers and residents cultivating land they did not own. Recently, in order to pay their death taxes, aristocrats had to sell off huge amounts of their estate, which means there is more land available to build on. Now, instead of leasing from the Lords, they can buy the land and build farms.

In conclusion, this small essay should provide a better understanding from a sociological perspective of a medieval estate system that evolved into part of today's functioning government of the United Kingdom. The reader should ascertain rare insight of a thousand-year-old stratification-origin that exists today. The insertion of modern day examples adds context, and a human character, to the strata. The United Kingdom has a mixed stratification system today, with a limited

caste system of nobility. The current administrative class system is a holdover from a legacy of a feudal system rooted in the old estate system. The widespread inequity of old is replaced with a new form of inequity. Although the fundamentals of these structured systems have been maintained for centuries, there continues to be an evolution of mobility and hierarchy that shows no sign of stopping.

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# Grandma's Best Creation

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**G**rowing up I was exposed to many things in my culture. One of my most memorable pastimes would be enjoying my grandma's delicious homemade roti on Fridays.

My entire family is from Trinidad and the roti dish is one of their many traditions. It is also our favorite dish. Anytime we had a holiday reunion, celebration, or any other family gathering, grandma made many dishes, but you could bet roti was always a part of our meal. I like roti because you don't necessarily need to sit at the table and eat it on a plate. It's made conveniently for you to take anywhere on the go. The roti consists of a dough-like substance that is fried into a flat shape, also known as the skin. You prepare the skin with curry meat or any other meat you like; however, chicken is the most popular choice. Although it can become messy while consuming, you can't pass up on the irresistible taste.

My grandmother loves to cook. I would stand at her side keeping her company and most likely handing her a thing or two. I remember being about nine years old and standing on a footstool at the counter with her. Every time I did this I became more interested in how she prepared things. Of course she was always happy for my company and often reminded me of our roots. Other times we would talk about her favorite stories of growing up in her country. She would say, "You remind me of myself. I always used to help my mudda make roti." My grandmother, like all Trinidadians, has an accent, and hearing it back then it seemed funny to me. I sometimes mimicked her while she wasn't looking just out of curiosity to hear how I would sound. I would laugh at myself because I wasn't original like her, but I had some sort of accent of my own. She would sit at the table and contemplate her big task at hand.

To begin the process of her homemade roti she would make a long list while shopping for her ingredients on Tuesday evenings. I would be there with her at C-Town grocery store, which sold these well-organized bottles of seasonings and spices neatly on the shelves. The store wasn't too far from our house, only three

blocks away. She often fixed her glasses and made a fuss when the ingredient she wanted was out of stock. She would say, “Yuh have to make sure yuh have enough seasoning, else it wouldn’t taste right.” I would hold my grandma’s hand while we each held a grocery bag on the short walk back home. She would call out names and calculate how many rotis she had to make.

On Wednesdays she would spend her evening in the kitchen grinding the peas. She did this manually until she had the privilege of using the pea-grinder machine. The use of the machine cuts down the time of this tiring process. It was pretty simple as you put “whole” peas in the front compartment, and they grind through and come out of the back end. The harder part was turning the handle over and over in a circular motion. My grandma had a large foil pan under the receiving back end, and I remember seeing mountains of bright yellow peas coming out and piling up. After the texture of the peas became soft and grainy, she would lightly season it all with tasty flavors.

Thursdays seemed to be my training day. I was so connected to my grandma on this day because we were more hands on together. I felt really proud to be a part of something she loved to do and learn about our culture. I remember the kitchen being very hot and my grandma very busy. She would open the back door for fresh air, sit on her stool, and drink a glass of water on her brief break. The kitchen became cluttered with ingredient bottles all over along with other utensils scattered about. All these things would be used for her creation. She had a rolling pin that was used to flatten the dough, the roti skin. As she rolled the pin against the dough, she sprinkled flour over it and repeated over again.

One day she said, “Jade, come. Jus roll dis out flat fuh me. By the meantime, I look fuh di box to put them in.” I was so excited to get a chance to imitate her. I did well for my first time, and it was my job to flatten the dough from then on. She then would transfer the dough to a flat iron pan on the stove to be fried. I remember another job of mine was to count how many fried roti skins she made. I would stand on the stool against the counter and count five per group. She would immediately put them in a large Styrofoam box with a lid so they could stay warm and soft. My grandma would already have a pot of curry chicken with chopped potatoes made to go with the roti skins. After placing the curry chicken in the middle of the roti skin, she would fold over all four sides in a particular way. It would look like a wrapped sandwich after the process. This prevents the food from falling out and making a mess. Curry is very oily and can be a difficult stain to clean. I would stand on the stool and hand her small thin sheets of tissue paper to wrap it in, followed by a piece of foil paper to wrap over it. This way it could stay warm and maintain shape. My parents would call my name in hopes of me being tired, but I refused to go to bed. Cooking with grandma happened so often that they didn’t even bother after a while.

We would stay up all night until I saw daylight peeking in the sky from outside our window on early Friday morning. The rest of the household would still

be asleep and yet so much action was going on in our kitchen. All the lights in the kitchen were on, the four burners on the stove were hot with pots, and Grandma moved all around the kitchen trying to beat the clock before getting ready for work. This made me think of how important making roti was to her and how she loved doing it. Although she may have been tired from being on her feet all night and often had to sit down, she didn't give up and was determined to finish.

On Friday mornings after the food was complete and packed neatly, I remember my grandma making two groups, a couple of rotis in one and all the rest in the other. One group was for our family and the second group was for friends. She took a black marker and wrote names on the foil of each roti so everyone would expect to get one for lunch. I remember taking mine to school and the kids looked at it in a confused way, often asking me what it was and why it had a funny name. Other kids and I who identified with this particular food would share my lunch. I was so proud to say my grandma made it and that I helped her. I would give my classmates the timeline of my rewarding experience, how I got to stay up late on a school night and was such a great help to her, that I was so good at using the rolling pin and Thursday was my training day. After our day was over and Grandma returned home, she would take the longest nap ever. Cooking is a lot of hard work and also very tiring.

Grandma's roti became so popular amongst our friends that the following times after that she decided to make more and more. This meant the work of making roti would increase. After a while I was older and knew exactly what to do, so I made the grocery runs to get the seasoning. Because she was also getting older and older I became the leader, doing the majority of the cooking. She didn't seem to mind, as she was confident I had paid close attention and had reliable training. It was then I realized she had been preparing me for this moment on Thursdays while I was younger, hoping I would keep the tradition going when she couldn't anymore. Eventually there were many requests and she thought that selling them would be a good idea. So on Fridays my grandma sold roti at her job in the hospital where she worked. Everyone looked forward to eating her homemade creation, and many complimented on how delicious it was.

I'm so grateful that I got a chance to learn this part of my culture during my childhood. I believe culture is the habits of people and is an important part of any society. I'm fortunate for her to still be alive, and maybe one day I will have one of my children stand on the stool and help me make roti too. Just like my grandma decided to sell her roti at work, I might possibly have interest in opening a restaurant with her. This way we can keep her recipe in the family business and she can still do what she loves to do. The memories and family tradition will never be forgotten.

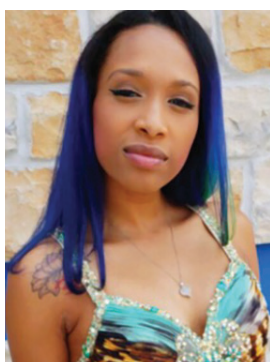
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## CONTRIBUTORS



### CHRISTOPHER ABDULLAH

Christopher Abdullah is a former military sergeant who served in Chile, Japan, Myanmar (Burma), New Zealand, and Ethiopia. While he was working in Burma he took a voyage to a holy place called Bagan, a UNESCO World Heritage site. Its sheer mysticism and magnificence along with the great people got him into the concepts of their religion, Buddhism. This broadened horizon made him interested in taking Philosophy of Religion by Professor Rick Repetti, one of the best classes Christopher has ever taken.



### JADE ALIBOCAS

“Ever since I was a child I loved reading and especially writing. I wanted to create the imagination of my readers being there in the story with me. This was a special piece of writing for me. Besides writing I like to sew in my spare time; I dream of one day opening my own boutique.”



### JAWERIA BAKAR

“In Claudia Rankine’s *Citizen: An American Lyric*, she describes various situations of feeling double and divided; how being black you are viewed in a society that not only inflicts the indignity of racism upon you but also forces you to create a palatable version of blackness to make others feel safe. Being an immigrant in the U.S.A. myself, I believe that double consciousness is also the immigrant identity that tries to be seen as American and has been alienated by the increasing anti-immigrant sentiment of late. The concepts I learned in Dr. Wood’s English 24 class made me keenly aware of the issues of immigrants, racism, and identity.”



### BRIANA BENINATI

“I just graduated from KBCC after the Spring 2019 semester with an associate degree in science for Education Studies (1-6). My mentor and professor Laura Kates assigned a project for our class in EDC 90A, choosing a topic and arguing our stance on it. She has guided me every step of the way for my research. I was bullied half my life while in middle school and high school, so I am very passionate on this topic.”





### **JILLIAN BEVENS**

Jillian Bevens is currently working on her bachelor's degree and is excited to see what's in store for her next. She continues to write about her various research interests as well as other works of fiction. Jillian remains, as always, grateful for the opportunity to continue her education and is mindful never to take such a gift for granted. She owes a tremendous amount of gratitude to her mother and sister, who have supported her through every moment of her journey.



### **CLAUDINE BRUMMEL**

"I would like to dedicate this essay to my loving husband Mendy, my amazing mentors, my mother, mother-in-law Esther, and Professor Carpenter. Thank you for seeing my abilities and worth even when I did not."



### **DAKANG CHEN**

"When I am creating my work, it can take many hours. I love creating and I can't stop it, and nothing can interrupt me. Sometimes I will give up something that is not perfect, even if it has taken me many hours to make it."



### **ESTHER DAKLO**

"I am currently in my last semester of nursing school. From the age of five, I knew that I wanted to be a nurse. The way I see it, nurses are like superheroes who traded in the cape for a stethoscope. I am enthusiastically looking forward to becoming a nurse, specifically in the emergency department."



### **KATERYNA DOROZHYNKA**

“I am always on my way to achieve the next goal, and the credo of my life is: No matter how you feel. Get up. Dress up. Show up. And never give up.”



### **BECKIE DUGAILLARD**

“I am a Speech Communication major. I would like to thank my mentor, Dr. Laura Spinu, for motivating me to write research papers, and my professor Dr. Nicholas Skirka for assisting me with the completion of this paper. A huge thank you to my mom for giving me the idea to write on diabetes in young adults since my family has a history of diabetes and she wanted me to be knowledgeable on this deadly phenomenon that is plaguing our society. I am 22 years old and from the island of Saint Lucia.”



### **ISLAM FARGHALY**

“I am from Egypt. I have more than 14 years of experience in the field of construction, specifically contract administration. I am in Kingsborough’s Business Administration program. I have already applied to a M.S. in Business Administration at Brooklyn College.”



### **RYAN HOUSSEIN**

“I am an Education Studies major working to become an American history professor. I am also interested in social issues such as poverty, housing, and inequity in society. I believe studying history is the best way to understand the current conditions people in society have to deal with.”



### **AUNDRE MIGNOTT**

“I am 100% Jamaican, whose ancestors were well-respected planters and educators, that cared more about uplifting people than the almighty dollar. I am currently a member of the Progressive Democrats Political Association of Central Brooklyn. My goals are to battle the inequity gap, fix the healthcare system, raise educators’ pay to reflect their eminence, and women’s rights. I’m a giver more than a taker, and a no nonsense feminist.”



### **ANASTASIIA OSADCHUK**

“I’m a Ukrainian girl who’s following her dream to become a neuropsychologist and start her own clinic that will include a research laboratory. I hope to be able to influence the whole mental health field one day by recognizing the first symptoms and reasons of mental illnesses and discovering the vaccinations and/or medications that will help to cure at least some of the mental health disorders from the earliest ages of life.”



### **KYLE AARON REESE**

“I’m a student in in the CUNY Baccalaureate for Unique and Disciplinary Studies program, and my major is Queer Psychosocial Research. My home college is now Brooklyn College. My major draws on anthropology, sociology, psychology, and gender studies to give a holistic understanding of issues which affect the LGBT communities, in particular transgender individuals. I hope to help de-stigmatize the transgender community by identifying the root of stigma and developing ways to address it, and developing methods to assist trans people in their day-to-day lives.”



### **ENDRI RUSTEMI**

“Everyone wants to live the utopian life of America, to have a beautiful house, a big car, a dog and some significant numbers in their bank account. The point of my essay is that people have to plant more sensibility and empathy in their life in society and toward America. People have to change their concept of seeing the United States like a tool; they need to see it like a home and like an apple tree, where they will feel comfortable and it will be a healthy food physically and mentally for themselves, for society and for the future.”



**NARGIZA ZAYNULLINA**

Nargiza Zaynullina wrote “Skin Color Is Not a Weapon” for Professor Katia Perea’s Introduction to Sociology in the Spring of 2018.

## **SUBMISSION GUIDELINES**

*Distinctions* welcomes submissions year-round. The deadline for the Spring 2020 issue is February 1. Submissions that come in after that date will be considered for the Fall 2020 issue (deadline: August 15).

**STUDENTS:** Please submit to *Distinctions* any outstanding research-related course work, whether you wrote it for Honors credit or not. As for visual art, the present editor is most interested in depictions and projects related to New York City and its environs.

**INSTRUCTORS:** Please encourage your students who have conducted original and compelling research to submit it to *Distinctions*.

Email the file to me, Bob Blaisdell (Robert.Blaisdell@Kingsborough.edu), with the subject line DISTINCTIONS SUBMISSION and on paper to the Honors House in M377. Include your contact information. I will acknowledge all submissions upon receipt.