

Sosland Journal

A collection of essays

written for the 2007-2008 Ilus W. Davis Writing Competition

by

Undergraduate Students

at the

University of Missouri, Kansas City

Competition Coordinator and Editor: Kristin Huston

Acknowledgements

UMKC writing classes produce an enormous amount of superior student writing and sorting through it all is an enormous task! So I must begin by thanking this year's first-round readers, who made possible the task of turning a more focused group of essays over to the final judges: Madaline Walter, Lauren Obermark, Katie Manning, and Cynthia Knight. Thanks goes out as well to our final judges who made the final, difficult choices, deciding which writing would appear in this year's *Sosland Journal*.

I would also like to thank the many people who answered my long list of questions as I worked through my first year as editor. Without all of you, this journal would not be possible. Thank you for your patience, your emails, and your support throughout the past year. An extra special thanks to the previous editor, Lezlie Revelle, who not only set the bar high for this publication, but also made herself available to answer all of my questions, no matter how bizarre or simple. Lezlie's work in years past and her generosity of spirit were true inspirations to me.

Finally, I would like to thank our benefactors. The publication of this journal is possible due to the philanthropic activities of Rheta Sosland-Hurwitt and her family. For nearly three quarters of a century, she ardently promoted music and the arts in Kansas City. She is remembered as a kind and generous member of UMKC's community of learners, who leaves a legacy that encourages students to engage in discourse that celebrates our curious human nature and transforms our perceptions. The *Sosland Journal* motivates students and teachers to celebrate writing in meaningful ways, and Mrs. Sosland-Hurwitt's kind gift assures this tradition will continue.

Transformations

Every semester I go through the same sensations. In the weeks before the semester begins, I dread the upcoming cycle of classes, not because I don't enjoy being a student and teacher, but because, like many of you, I am sad to see the break, and all its attendant freedom, come to an end. However, as soon as I get back to class, I feel at home once again and am glad to get started on a new semester.

Thinking about this cycle, it strikes me that being a college student or teacher is largely about juggling a constant series of transformations. Every semester, to some extent, we are faced with the same things; the same buildings, the same balancing act of scheduling classes, the same buying of books and planning study sessions and trips to the library. Despite all of this "sameness," each semester is also one of change. We begin new classes, with new instructors, new students, new classmates, new expectations. I find this constant transformation invigorating and refreshing. It is exciting to start a new class, meet the new group of people who will be sharing the classroom experience with you and begin exploring a new world of topics.

Transformations are on my mind because this is my first year as editor of the *Sosland Journal*. I have long been an admirer of the journal, and have loved reading the student writing published in it each year. Last year, I served as assistant editor and compiled the "Teacher's Guide," which gave me an even greater appreciation for the *Sosland Journal*. This year, as I worked through the challenges and rewards of being the editor, I came to a further realization about what a wonderful opportunity the *Sosland Journal* provides. It truly does give students and teachers a forum within which to celebrate UMKC students' writing that is a unique experience not every university is able to provide.

Hopefully the essays in this journal encourage you to celebrate the amazing accomplishments embodied in the writing presented. It is my belief that this writing reflects the cycle that takes place each semester in classrooms across campus through its acknowledgement of writing as a constant process of revision and, of course, transformation.

Enjoy!

Kristin Huston
Editor

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introductory-Level Winner
CAFFEINE: THE NEW COLLEGE TREND
Anitha Luy - pg. 1

Intermediate-Level Winner

IMAGES OF WAR

Katie Sisil - pg. 4

Advanced-Level Winner

EARLY BINARY: HISTORY AND APPLICATION

Jace Ferguson - pg. 13

COMBAT UNSEEN

Joseph Weimholt - pg. 20

SOCIETY AND VALIDATION OF DISABILITY

Katie Sontheimer - pg. 22

AMERICAN HEGEMONY: HISTORICAL MISCONCEPTIONS AND LIES

Heather Nurmikko - pg. 28

EVOLVING EROTICA

Kathryn Hembree - pg. 36

SPREADING THE GOSPEL OF WEETZIE BAT

Laurie Ray - pg. 40

THE NEW ROAD HOME

Claire Stoltzfus - pg. 58

A WINDOW VIEW OF THE CLASSROOM

Rick DeVault - pg. 62

FIRECRACKERS AT NIGHT

Rhia Cooper - pg. 68

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

PROFESSORS

Beginning-Level Winner

Caffeine: The New College Trend

Anitha Luy

There's a test in the morning and you're not prepared. You have no choice but to pull an all-nighter. But how are you going to do this without falling asleep? You go straight for the caffeine.

Many college students in today's society turn to caffeine for an energy boost. There are all types of products now available for those who want or think they need caffeine. These products are found everywhere on college campuses, including UMKC. Freshen's in the University Center sells Starbucks product along with smoothies with Rooster Booster (an energy drink which can also be found as an energy pill) in it. The UMKC Store sells cold coffees, mochas, and energy drinks. When walking into Royall Hall, you can smell the aroma of the coffee coming from Einstein Bros., anytime of the day. Even our UMKC Bookstore sells energizer Snickers, energy bars, caffeine pills, and even a new energizer product in the form of a sucker. Many college students depend on caffeine; and though it might help you get through the night, it can be harmful, and it might not help your study habits.

In our University, it seems to me that caffeine is really promoted. When I go to class every morning, there are always students in Royall Hall sitting there and studying with a cup of coffee in their hand. When I recently went home to visit my family, there was a letter sent from the university. It was addressed to UMKC parents. The subject: Send your student a Final Exam CARE Package. I thought, well I could probably use one. It would be really thoughtful to send out care packages but then I read the body of the letter.

With finals approaching around the corner what else would your child adore than a care package from you, letting your child know that you appreciate and value their hard work. During these last weeks of college, students are: cramming, organizing, researching and/ or finishing up on long term projects. The Student Life Office has come up with the perfect remedy to help alleviate your child's stress... high energy success snacks!

This care package will contain an assortment of high energy snacks that every student will enjoy during those endless study sessions. Packed in a colorfully designed gift bag, this package will provide a blast of edible encouragement.

Please respond with a check in the amount of \$40.00 in a self address envelope by April 21st, 2008. (Williams)

After reading this, I wasn't too appalled by the letter until I read what would be in the care packages. The first thing on the list was Red Bull Energy Drink. Along with that were other caffeine products such as Starbucks products, coffee, and candy bars. There were some snacks that I thought would be healthy; juice, fruit snacks, granola bars, and fruit cocktail. Even so, I still think that the university is promoting caffeine and that students need these products to give themselves energy. It just makes students believe it is acceptable to be dependent on caffeine.

Caffeine is a drug naturally produced in plants (Black, 1). Caffeine operates as a stimulant in a person's central nervous system with the effect to avert any sleepiness or drowsiness and helps keep you alert. Caffeine is the world's most consumed psychoactive substance. Ninety percent of American adults have reported that they consume caffeine daily with most of them consuming more than 300 mg of caffeine a day (Brain, 1). It is found in many beverages including coffee, tea, sodas, and energy drinks. Caffeine can also be found in energy bars, and some candy. Coffee, the most popular caffeine product, contains 200 milligrams (mg) of caffeine in one cup of coffee. The ninety percent of American adults that reportedly consume caffeine daily, intake the caffeine with coffee, which accounts for seventy-five percent of all caffeine consumed (Schardt and Schmidt). Most energy products contain other ingredients also like taurine, sugar, and B vitamins. To give you an idea of how much caffeine is in a product, here are a few common caffeine products along with the amount of caffeine it contains. A typical brewed coffee contains 100 mg of caffeine per 6 ounce cup. If you're running to Starbucks for a caffeine fix to study, it's usually served in 12, 14, or 20 ounce cups. A

typical brewed tea contains 70 mg of caffeine per 6 ounce cup. Typical colas have 50 mg per 12 ounce can and milk chocolate has 6 mg of caffeine per ounce. There are also caffeine pills such as No-Doz which contains 100 mg of caffeine per tablet and Vivarin and Dexatrim each containing 200 mg per tablet (Brain).

As mentioned earlier, coffee isn't the only product that contains caffeine. Energy drinks are becoming more and more popular everyday. These energy drinks include brands like Red Bull, Rockstar, and Full throttle. In alternative to that, the company of CHARMS lollipops invented a new caffeine product in the form of a sucker. The product is called MAXXED energy pop. It is a sucker in a container that looks like an energy drink can. On the label it states, "Alternative energy source" (MAXXED). This product contains 40 mg of caffeine. Another product that recently came out is the Snickers Charged. It is an energy, caffeine Snickers bar. The wrapper states, "with caffeine, taurine, b-vitamins, milk chocolate, peanuts, caramel, nougat" (Snickers Charged). This 1.83 oz candy bar contains 60 mg of caffeine. Companies target college students to buy their products. Students in college are creative so these marketers know what they're doing by putting caffeine in products like suckers and chocolate bars that attract the attention of students. Today's modern students love keeping up with the latest fashions, styles, and products that are trendy; and sadly, that means caffeine products. The companies of these products know exactly how to attract these students too and students will follow the trend without thinking twice. Students here on campus love these products so much that they help promote it. Here on the university campus, there is a Red Bull car that drives around the campus and gives out Red Bull energy drinks. If you haven't seen this car around campus yet, then you'll know it when you spot it. It is a site to see. The car itself is painted with the Red Bull color and design and a large Red Bull can on the top of the car. During Homecoming, courtwarming, and even Student Council elections, some of the candidates bribe for votes with Red Bull Energy Drinks. College students usually will get persuade with the product too. They will consume caffeine products because of the energy and they also think it will benefit them when it comes to staying up to study for an exam.

Caffeine can affect the study habits of a college student. A lot of students take some sort of caffeine to study or while taking a test. Caffeine actually helps you with things that require speed but it's not good with more complex, long problems. It has been shown that doing complicated tasks and word problems, when taking caffeine, worsen performance (Schardt & Schmidt). Caffeine does however helps raise concentration levels. Caffeine might help you stay alert and keep you up to study but does it help you retain the information you have studied? You should know that cramming for a test the night before isn't as productive as studying a few days in advance. Consuming caffeine to cram for a test the night before may also not be a wise choice.

Caffeine can have harmful side effects. It can also make your appearance age faster than normally. There is also a higher risk for pregnant women to have a miscarriage if they drink coffee when they're pregnant (Schardt and Schmidt). Some people also take caffeine pills along with other caffeine products. This can be very harmful. There is a good chance that you can overdose with caffeine which can seriously harm your body. A high dose of caffeine would be about 600mg a day (Brinker), but the effects are different for everyone. A 6 feet tall, 200 pound guy can probably consume about 400mg of caffeine and not be effected by the caffeine as much as a 5 feet tall, 120 pound lady. If you drink coffee or drink energy drinks daily, then you should be careful with the amount you intake. There is actually a condition called caffeinism where you body has a dependency on caffeine. This causes a person to have anxiety, nervousness, and muscle twitching (Caffeine-related disorders).

Some college students consume a large amount of caffeine will also take sleeping pills to crash. After taking so many stimulants, this can also be very harmful. The body has a very drastic change when you take all of these stimulants and then shut down your whole system to sleep. Caffeine can cause long term sleeping problems. The half life of caffeine in your body is 6 hours, which means if 200 mg of caffeine is consumed, about 100 mg of caffeine will still be in your system 6 hours later (Brain, 4).

College students today put it in their mind that they need caffeine to have energy. They have become dependent on these products, but before drinking five cans of Red Bull to keep you up to study, consider the possible side effects. You can mess up your sleeping pattern and your health. Ask yourself, do I really need this? Is it healthy to have these study habits? Is there a healthier alternative? It

is suggested that you take a cool shower or a light jog for an alternative to a quick caffeine fix. Look at the long term effect before you harm yourself with caffeine.

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Intermediate-Level Winner

Images of War
Katie Sisil



Images of War

US Army Veteran
Combat Medical Specialist



United States Army 1987-1991



WARNING GRAPHIC CONTENT

Preface

I have been instructed under duress to review a set of images on the current “war” in Iraq and share with you the reader, how these images do or do not “make real” the experience of war. Being a good soldier/student I will perform my scholarly duty; however, this paper comes with a strong warning to those who are squeamish, who don’t have the stomach for graphic detail in words and photographs. For you see, long before I became a student, I was a soldier. I served in the 2nd Medical Battalion, 2nd Infantry Division, at Camp Casey South Korea; during the student uprisings protesting the American Presence in South Korea -- living only six miles from the De-militarized Zone (DMZ)

and being subject to a constant barrage of propaganda from communist North Korea. I served in Korea during and after the 1988 Olympic games and saw what journalists were not allowed to send back home. Upon returning to the United States I served in the 1st Infantry Division 70th Engineer Battalion and began the process of making ready myself, as well as a multitude of other young men and women for Operation Desert Shield. I am a female combat medical specialist and U.S. Army veteran. In my forty two years of life I have borne witness to, up close and personal man's inhumanity to his fellow man. The images included in this paper, some of which are like those I have seen in my mind over and over again for years now, and in some ways they are a part of who I am today: the good, the bad and the ugly.

In reading Susan Sontag's "Regarding the Pain of Others", there were a few passages that stuck with me and some that, in my own personal experience, are not as accurate as she would lead the reader to believe. I have divided my paper into three sections each with its own photo collage to address excerpts from her book that will open each section. I beg the reader's patience as reliving some of my own nightmares will surely bleed through on to the pages of this essay. However, as we say there are some bells that just can't be un-rung and there is no way that I found to separate the soldier from the student in this assignment.



(1)



(2)



(3)

What they want us to see...

“If governments had their way, war photography, like most war poetry, would drum up support for the soldier’s sacrifice.” (Sontag pg 48)

More often than not governments do have their way when it comes to putting a “spin” on what we as citizens have access to, what we read, what we see in newspapers and other news sources. I was quite naïve when I joined the service, I would have never suspected that the government of my country would infringe on the right to free speech. The first amendment of the U.S. Constitution states: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.” This amendment was ratified on December 15, 1791, long before I was ever born and later disillusioned. So how then; you are asking yourself could I ever suspect my own government of ignoring the Constitution? How is it that any journalist worth his salt would or could allow this to happen? Have you ever stopped to ask yourself why during the current government regime whenever we see images of our service men and women they are smiling, or maybe they look poised and ready for action, more often than not these days what the everyday citizen sees are fathers and mothers returning home from the war, surprising loved ones at work or at school. We see what the government want us to see. Much like the photos on the previous page, we see combat ready soldiers in clean freshly pressed battle dress uniforms (BDU’s), yet oddly enough it is what we don’t see that makes me suspect. Now I know from past experience that you don’t spend anytime at all in what the military calls a field environment and stay that clean and where exactly are they finding starched and pressed uniforms? While it tops on the list of a soldier to maintain his weapon in all situations I don’t recall seeing any quite so shiny and new looking when I was in active duty; not even the officers weapons looked that good. We also do not see the enemy in any of these photos. While I will admit to sizing the photos to fit my collage, I did not crop anything from them. So then, what we as the average American citizen see is one of our brave men or women in combat mode protecting Joe citizen and defending our freedom. Maybe it is just me that this does not sit well with.

Having been present during the 1988 Olympic Games in Seoul South Korea, I was very excited. I saw the running of the torch. I even treated one of the Australian soccer players in our emergency room. Everyone I knew had tickets to at least one event, because whether you were a sports fan or not, how many times in your life would you get to say you were present at an Olympic sporting event? I

personally had tickets to three different events. Sadly I did not see any of them. On my first trip to Seoul I was on the bus heading to the stadium when a band of student rioters began to hurl rocks, trash, and Molotov cocktails at our bus. We were re-routed from the stadium and sent back to our base. My second attempt didn't even see me off the base when the word came down that we were on alert and that there had been a bomb threat at the Olympic arena. Finally my last chance came. I had tickets to an obscure boxing event but it didn't matter-- I was going to the Olympics. Later that morning toward the end of my shift in the emergency room, the doors flew open and several Military Police came in carrying or assisting four bodies; the student rioting that had been for the most part concentrated in the Seoul area had reached Tongduchon, and the four bodies who were later identified as young male soldiers had crossed paths with a gang of rioters while in the village.

Their faces looked like hamburger meat; one of them had been beaten so severely that his left eyeball had become dislodged from its socket. They were bloody, beaten, swollen and their faces unrecognizable. This was not an uncommon occurrence and was certainly not the last to be seen during the time that the games ran. Militant students who were convinced that the removal of U.S. forces from South Korea and the reunification between North and South Korea under communist rule was worth any cost, attacked at every opportunity. Oddly enough no one back home was aware of the problems or dangers that service men and women were facing at a time in history when relations between North and South Korea as well as America were tense. No one knew that soldiers were being targeted and beaten in the streets and fired upon on the DMZ. The media, photojournalists were swarming all over events during this time and yet nothing ever left the country. Could it be that Americans would not have supported the actions of our government had those in the states known what was going on? Was it that Viet Nam was still fresh enough in the hearts and minds of the voting demographic that no politician was willing to risk becoming unpopular? The reality, my reality, was that soldiers during war or peace time put their lives on the line every day especially while serving on foreign soil: and yet what average citizen would know that? Certainly no one I knew.



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They would prefer that we not see this...

“It takes some very peculiar circumstances for a war to become genuinely unpopular. (The prospect of being killed is not necessarily one of them.) When it does, the material gathered by photographers, which they may think of as unmasking the conflict, is of great use. Absent such a protest, the same antiwar photograph may be read as showing pathos, or heroism,, admirable heroism, in an unavoidable struggle that can be concluded only by victory or defeat” (Sontag pg 38)

The photos that I chose for this section depict the more human side of war; while nothing is grossly offensive about these pictures we, the viewer, mourn the loss of life with the loved ones in them. They are the photos that hit me hardest. In looking at the boots of fallen soldiers, one might wonder-- did those belong to a former classmate, friend or lover. During Desert Storm I used to wonder if the flag-draped coffins were those of a soldier that I had medically cleared for combat. I would often see the young faces of men and women many of whom were friends or comrades. Fear that; in some small way I aided in their demise. I found myself asking how much life lost is too much, is it all worth while?

Many of us may not recall or have even paid attention: When America declared war on Iraq, President George W. Bush decreed that photographs and all other media sources be kept from recording the ever- rising death toll of this war. Pictures of flag draped coffins of the fallen are not made public; only brief mention of the “death tally” makes mainstream news and even more rarely on local television. As this war drones on we hear less and less about the human cost on a grand scale. I recently conducted a search of U.S. death tolls in Iraq using www.google.com and just checking the

first page. The most recent story was January 1, 2008, proclaiming 3000 U.S. service men and women have now died. Prior articles were dated August of 2007 and October 2005.

Could it be that our fearless leader knew going into this war that we had the potential for another Vietnam War? That we would be fighting an endless war that we stood no chance of really winning. Being a history major I feel it is important to note that in no country that the United States of America has gone to war with and installed a constitutional government that is patterned after our own, have we or said country been successful; at least not in my 42 years of life. Yet in the grand scheme of things we remain the ever petulant child trying to tell our elders how to live their lives, yes I believe we really are that arrogant.



(13)



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(12)

They certainly don't want us to see THIS...

“Perhaps the only people with the right to look at images of suffering of this extreme order are those who would do something to alleviate it—say the surgeons at the military hospital where the photograph was taken—or those who could learn from it. The rest of us are voyeurs, whether or not we mean to be” (Sontag pg 42)

Former President Jimmy Carter once said, *“War may sometimes be a necessary evil. But no matter how necessary, it is always an evil, never a good. We will not learn how to live together in peace by killing each other's children.”* Yet everyday around the world we do just that. The pictures for my last section of this paper are grisly, I know. They show you, the reader, that war is brutal and ugly. Be thankful that the sounds and smells of death are not forever imprinted in your mind and on your heart. The goal of this assignment was to assess what images of war did or did not “make real” the war. I know war, I know what makes it real-- how it looks, how it smells, sounds, and even tastes. Nothing short of being present can make a war real to anyone. We let our sons and daughters go off to war with the Hollywood idea of war. The graphic violence we see day in and day out in video games, movies, and even on the streets can not prepare one for the horror and devastation that is war.

Sontag says that only those who could do something to stop this destruction and chaos should be the ones to view these images; maybe she is right. Who then has the power to stop such things from taking place? On a grand scale, I am not sure it is possible for one person to influence a nation or even the world -- not where war is concerned. Is it possible, however, that if I as one person affect the heart of one more person by shock and awe or by mere words that they in turn will effect the heart of another...and so on ...and so on.

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Advanced-Level Winner

Early Binary: History and Application

Jace Ferguson

Today, binary (the base 2 number system) is prevalent everywhere. Most people do not realize the impact it has on their everyday lives. The internet, cell phones, alarm clocks, personal computers, and any form of electronic device uses binary. It has become the language of modern electronics. But the first documentation of binary actually dates back to the early 17th century, and throughout the 17th century and into the 18th century people were using binary for practical purposes. Tables of numbers were being constructed using binary, messages were being coded using strings of binary digits, elaborate communications devices were constructed which utilized binary to transmit messages over long distances, and intensive mathematical calculations were made easy with binary. A more thorough understanding of the binary number system can be obtained by examining the details of its origins and early uses.

The binary number system may seem like a foreign language. As such, it is important to understand some of the common terms used when discussing the topic. A **bit** is a singular binary digit. There are two bits used to express binary numbers, namely 1, and 0. Bits can be combined to form **bit strings**. '001100' is a bit string made up of 6 bits. A **period** refers to the patterns of 1's and 0's formed in the columns of lists of binary strings. When numbers in different bases appear together, it is customary to indicate the base of the number with a subscript. For example, 110_2 can be identified as a binary, or base two, number by the subscript digit 2.

Binary has its roots in the early 17th century. Thomas Hariot (1560-1621), an English mathematician and astronomer, was the first person to actually document the binary system [4 p. 14]. However, it was not until 1951 that this fact was known. Until then, the discovery of binary was usually attributed to Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz. In 1951, J.W. Shirley was allowed to examine Hariot's unpublished manuscripts including the one on binary [4 p. 14]; his discovery changed the records and now, Hariot is acknowledged for the first documentation of binary.

Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz was actually the third person to explicitly document the binary system, and the second person to publicly publish his findings. Harriot was, indeed, the first to document the binary system, but his manuscript remained unpublished. The second person to write on binary, and the first to publish anything on the subject, was Bishop Juan Caramuel y Lobkowitz [4 p. 20]. Lobkowitz was a Spanish writer who worked in mathematics and astronomy and was fascinated by number systems. In 1670, Lobkowitz published his *Mathesis Biceps*. Included in this book are two and a half pages of information and commentary on the base two number system [4 p. 20]. In these pages, Lobkowitz showed the decimal digits 0 – 32 encoded as binary [Figure 1]. He implemented an atypical notation for his encodings. Instead of using the symbols “0” and “1” to write his binary numbers, Lobkowitz decided to use “o” and “a”. His reason for the choice was that, “One cannot mistake a binary string for a decimal one” [4 p. 20]. While this makes sense, Lobkowitz’s book remained obscure and consequently the notation did not stick; today binary is denoted using “0” and “1”.

a	1	a000a	17
ao	2	a00ao	18
aa	3	a00aa	19
aoa	4	a0a00	20
aoa	5	a0a0a	21
aoa	6	a0a0a	22
aaa	7	aa000	24
a000	8	a200a	25
a00a	9	a20a0	26
a0a0	10	a20aa	27
a0aa	11	a2a00	28
aa00	12	a2a0a	29
aa0a	13	a2aaa	30
aaaa	14	aaaaa	31
a2aa	15	a00000	32
a0000	16		

Figure 1: Lobkowitz’s table of binary strings from *Mathesis Biceps*.

TABLE
DES
NOMBRES.

o.o.o.o.o.o	0
o.o.o.o.o.I	1
o.o.o.o.I.o	2
o.o.o.o.I.I	3
o.o.o.I.o.o	4
o.o.o.I.o.I	5
o.o.o.I.I.o	6
o.o.o.I.I.I	7
o.o.I.o.o.o	8
o.o.I.o.o.I	9
o.o.I.o.I.o	10
o.o.I.o.I.I	11
o.o.I.I.o.o	12
o.o.I.I.o.I	13
o.o.I.I.I.o	14
o.o.I.I.I.I	15
o.I.o.o.o.o	16
o.I.o.o.o.I	17
o.I.o.o.I.o	18
o.I.o.o.I.I	19
o.I.o.I.o.o	20
o.I.o.I.o.I	21
o.I.o.I.I.o	22
o.I.o.I.I.I	23
o.I.I.o.o.o	24
o.I.I.o.o.I	25
o.I.I.o.I.o	26
o.I.I.o.I.I	27
o.I.I.I.o.o	28
o.I.I.I.o.I	29
o.I.I.I.I.o	30
o.I.I.I.I.I	31
I.o.o.o.o.o	32
&c.	

Figure 2: Table of binary numbers from Leibniz’s

Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646 – 1716) is the most notable figure associated with the origin of binary. His most important contribution to the field is his 1703 essay titled *Explication de l’arithmétique de binaire*. In this essay, published in the *Memoires de l’Académie Royale des Sciences*, Leibniz not only describes the concept of binary, the arithmetic operations in the system, and some specific properties of binary, but he also demonstrates a few practical uses, and makes references to an ancient Chinese book called, *I Ching*, or Book of Changes. Anton Glaser, in his *History of Binary*, notes that evidence exists to show that Leibniz knew of binary in 1702 but choose not to publish his information “until he could supply an application” [4 p. 44]. Predating the evidence cited above, Leibniz corresponded with various mathematicians about the binary system. In two letters written to Johann Christian Schulenburg, a mathematician of the age, Leibniz describes the binary system and, in the second letter dated May 17th 1698, includes a table of the multiples of 3 in binary [4 p. 33]. The observations Leibniz stated in the letter focused mainly on the properties of the periods formed by the columns in the table. This important concept is later described in his explication.

Leibniz uses only five pages to write his explication. He opens the document by immediately describing how to count using binary:

But instead of this progression by tens [referring to decimal], I have for many years used the most simple of all, which goes by twos, having found that it is conducive to the perfecting of the science of numbers. Thus I have used no other characters but 0 and 1, and upon coming to two, I begin again. This is why two is expressed here by 10, and two times two or four by 100, two times four or eight by 1000, two times eight or sixteen by 10000, and so on. [6 p. 85]

The description and textual examples are relatively clear but Leibniz also includes a table [Figure 2] that shows the decimal numbers and the 6 bit binary equivalent. Along with the table, Leibniz includes examples of arithmetic operations using binary. [Figure] He shows addition, subtraction,

Addition	
IIIO	14
IOGOI	17

IIIII	31
Subtraction	
IIIII	31
IOOOI	17

IIIO	14

multiplication and division of binary digits, along with decimal equivalents of the same operations. Concerning the arithmetic operations Leibniz points out that, “All these operations are so easy that one would never need to try or guess, as is needed in ordinary [decimal] arithmetic” [6 p. 86]. This argument is recalled later when he suggests that binary be used for scientific purposes because the operations are easier. However, Leibniz explicitly states that binary will not replace the decimal system and that, “one finds the common counting by ten quicker and the numbers not as long” [6 p. 87].

Leibniz’s examples of addition, subtraction and multiplication in binary [Figure] are easy to understand as the steps to solve the equations are the same as in the decimal system. However, he uses an unusual technique to demonstrate division, called the “Spanish” or “Galley” method of division [2 p. 43].

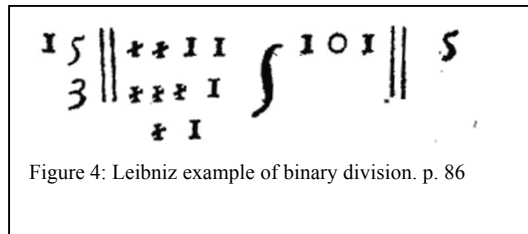


Figure 4: Leibniz example of binary division. p. 86

Leibniz shows 3_{10} (11_2) divides 15_{10} (1111_2) using binary numbers [Figure], but we will not explore this method here.

In the last part of the explication, Leibniz references the book *I Ching*, or *Book of Changes*. In this book, Chinese symbols, called the Figures of Fohy, are formed by three horizontal lines stacked together. Some of the lines have a segment removed from the middle, dividing the solid lines into two parts with a space in between. Leibniz recognizes that these symbols can be arranged in an order similar to his binary numbers. He associates the whole lines to the binary “1” and the broken lines to

000	001	010	011	100	101	110	111
0	1	10	11	100	101	110	111
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Figure 5: Leibniz shows a correspondence between the Chinese Figures of Fohy and the binary number system. p. 88

0	0
1	1
100	4
1001	9
10000	16
11001	25
100100	36
110001	49
1000000	64
1010001	81
1100100	100
1111001	121

binary “0”. Leibniz includes a table to show the correspondence between the symbols, his binary system and the decimal system [Figure]. Leibniz is impressed by the work of the book’s author, King Fohy. Leibniz praises the king, saying, “This accord gives me a high opinion of the profundity of the meditations of Fohy, because that which seems easy to us now was not so in those far-removed times,” [6 pp. 88-89]. Although it is unclear whether Leibniz believed the symbols were used to represent numbers, he was certain that they had some basis in the binary number system.

Leibniz’s interpretation of the symbols of Fohy elicited many reactions from his peers. Wilhelm Ernst Tentzeln, an *I Ching* historian of the age, “considered it most curious that the supposedly intelligent Chinese had lost and then failed to rediscover the meaning of these Figures, so that it took a European genius to do the job for them” [4 p. 49]. He was most impressed with Leibniz’s work and through additional correspondence with Leibniz he published *Curieuse Bibliothec* which contained more information on the Figures. Other critics, declared Leibniz’s work “worthless” and commented that “the task [of interpreting the symbols] was...beyond any European” [4 p. 51]. However, the

evidence of some correlation to the binary number system is incontrovertible. The two types of lines used in the Fohy symbols can easily be thought of as the two different digits used to represent binary numbers. The symbols are formed by three lines stacked together; each line represents one place in a binary string. As final evidence, the figures can be ordered in the same method as binary numbers, utilizing all the symbols without repeating any. This evidence is conclusive in supporting Leibniz's theory that the Figures of Fohy have a binary basis.

Leibniz seemed intrigued by the properties his tables of numbers possessed. In his explication he details the periods that form in the columns of his table of numbers [Figure], "In the first column this is 01, in the second 0011, in the third 00001111, in the fourth 0000000011111111, and so on" [6 p. 87]. He continues to say that "square, cube, pyramid and other figure numbers" have defined periods that would aid in the construction of tables of these numbers [6 p. 87] [See appendix A]. Though he does not provide proof of how he arrived at these observations, he does generalize the concept in his letter to Johann Schulenburg, which contained a table of the multiples of three. Leibniz noted that the length of the period of the n^{th} column was 2^n digits long [4 p. 37]. These periods would make the creation of tables of numbers easier, but a problem exists in actually determining the period. In a 1704 letter to Leibniz, Jacob Bernoulli (1654-1705), referring to a table of squares [Table 2], pointed out, "that the first column has a period of 01, the second is all zeros, and the third has a period of 1000," [4 p. 47]. In his letter he commented that the fourth column had no apparent period. Leibniz responded with the periods, "10100000 for the fourth column and 1101010110000000 for the fifth," though without information on how he achieved these calculations [4 p. 47]. Had Leibniz discovered a method of calculating the periods, the calculations would have proved most useful in the construction of tables of these special numbers.

In another letter to Leibniz, Bernoulli proposed the following string as a binary representation of the 36-decimal digit approximation of pi [4 p. 47]:

11 1100 1000 0001 0011 1111 0110 0110 0011 0110 1101 1001 1000 0100 1111 0010
0101 1001 0101 1011 0110 1010 0011 0111 0010 1010 0000 0011 1101 0000₂

However, Bernoulli neglected to indicate a fraction marker. Noting that the first two bits of the string represent 3_{10} , assume the fraction marker is to be placed between the second and third bit. Another error immediately arises. [The following calculation uses only the fractional part of Bernoulli's binary string starting with the third bit.]

$$1100\dots_2 = 1(2^{-1}) + 1(2^{-2}) = \frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{4} = \left(\frac{3}{4}\right)_{10}$$

Therefore, the first six bits of Bernoulli's binary string (including the assumed fraction marker) represents 3.75_{10} , a number larger than the common approximation of pi. While it is unclear how Bernoulli calculated the string, it is interesting to consider using binary to calculate such an intriguing number.

Simplification of arithmetic and the creation of number tables were not the only uses of binary at the time. Communication was another area that gave binary purpose. Several techniques utilizing the binary system to transmit messages were created shortly after its documentation in 1703. Francis Bacon demonstrated a way to communicate secret messages in plain text by encoding in the text binary representations of the alphabet. John Gamble and John Wilkins both invented devices to transmit binary messages over relatively long distances. Little did these men realize that binary communications would eventually become commonplace.

As a student in Paris, Francis Bacon (1561 – 1626) was interested in the transmission of coded messages [1 p. 4]. Utilizing the simplicity of symbolizing binary numbers he



created what he called “alphabetum biliterarium” or a two-letter alphabet [1 p. 4]. Using only the letters ‘a’ and ‘b’ instead of ‘0’ and ‘1’, Bacon encoded each of the 24 letters of the alphabet into a 5 bit binary string. Bacon commented on the benefits of only using two characters to transmit a message, “For by this Art a way is opened, whereby a man may expresse and signifie the intentions of his minde, at any distance of place, by objects which may be presented to the eye, and accommodated to the eare; provided those objects be capable of a twofold difference onely; as by Bells, by Trumpets, by Lights and Torchés, by the report of Muskets, and any instruments of like nature” [qtd. in 1 p. 4]. Bacon chose to symbolize the binary strings by using two different type faces to encode his message into plain text [1 p. 5] [Figure]. For example, the ‘a’ binary character would be encoded into the message using a script type font, and the ‘b’ character of his binary message would be encoded into the plain text with a standard font. To decode, the recipient need only to group the letters by fives and look at the font to determine the binary character. Then the binary characters can be converted back into the standard alphabet by use of a key.

John Gamble, who studied mathematics at Cambridge, developed a device to transmit messages over long distances. Commissioned by the Commander in Chief of the British armies, Gamble was asked to create an “optical telegraph” that could be used in the event of war [1 p. 4]. Two notable documents on the topic of telegraphic transmissions were written by Gamble. In one, titled *Observations on Telegraphic Experiments*, Gamble outlines the goals for such a device, describes the failures of many attempts at such a device and then elaborates on his own ideas for a device that would work the best. Gamble expresses that he wants to create “an intelligible figurative language, which may be distinguished at a distance...” [3 p. 6]. He goes on to note that the most practical applications will utilize sight or sound, but comments that both techniques have imperfections; sound can be obscured by the wind or lack of “elasticity” of the atmosphere, and sight can be obscured by “thick hazy weather...” [3 p. 6]. As he continues his paper, he describes numerous attempts at such a transmission device, and elaborates on why they are not practical. Finally, Gamble begins to describe his device [Figure]. His description is very detailed and is described using the language and technique of one writing a geometric proof. Essentially, Gamble proposes using a system of “Venetian blind[s]” to relay messages encoded into binary [3 p. 13]. [Figure 8] He will construct a tall tower with five open segments. The segments will be covered by movable wooden slats, these slats resemble those on a Venetian blind. The controls to open and close the slats would be directed towards the bottom of the tower where an operator adjusts the flaps to send the message. Each of the five segments has two states, open and closed. Gamble proposes to let a closed segment resemble “1” and an open segment resemble “0”, thus allowing the device to create 2^5 or 32 combinations of opened and closed segments. Gamble mapped each letter of the alphabet to one combination of opened and closed slats. He proposed that the bottom of the device could be made into a “cottage for the residence of the telegrapher” [3 p. 16] in which they would operate the device. Gamble built an

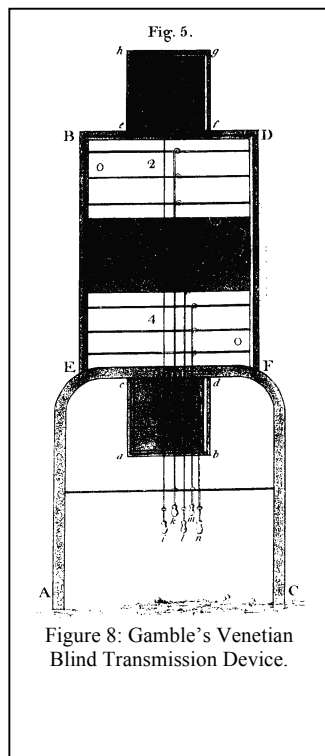


Figure 8: Gamble's Venetian Blind Transmission Device.

Let A. B. and C. D. fig. 5. two upright posts fixed in the ground, and joined by the braces B. D. and E. F. be considered as the framework for nine lever boards working upon centers in E. B. and D. F. and opening in three divisions by iron rods connected with each three of the lever boards. Let a. b. c. d. and e. f. g. h. be two leffer frames fixed to the great one, have also three lever boards in each, moving by iron rods in the same manner as the others. If all these rods be brought fo near the ground as to be in the management of the operator, he will then have five, I may call them, keys to play upon. Now as each of the handles i. k. l. m. n. commands three lever boards, by raising any one of them, and fixing it in its place by a catch or hook, it will give a different appearance to the machine, and by the proper variation of these five movements, there will be more than twenty-five, what may be called mutations, in each of which the machine exhibits a different appearance, and to which any letter or figure may, ad libitum, be annexed.

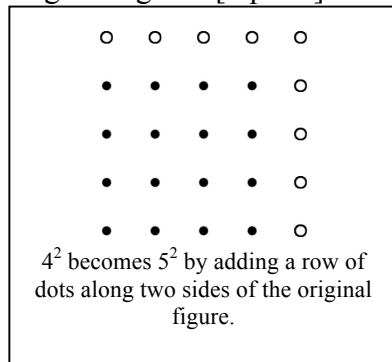
Figure 7: Gamble's description of his telegraphic experiment. p. 14

experimental version of his device and tests proved the device had a functional range of about 9 kilometers [1 p. 5], however, it was never put into operation as a practical communication device.

The origins of the binary numeral system are still surrounded in controversy. For now, Leibniz remains the one attributed with its discovery, but, as evident by his explication, the system may have been created much earlier. While Leibniz was busy writing about its uses in the field of mathematics, men like Bacon and Gamble were putting it to practical use. Even early on, the simplicity of the binary numeral system was being leveraged to encode and transmit messages. The utilization of this number system has changed over the centuries but still today it is being used to transmit messages. Engineers and scientists also continue to study and use its mathematical properties in fields such as electronics and computer science. As technology evolves, the binary system will, no doubt, continue to become an integral part of our everyday lives.

Appendix A Figurate Numbers

Figurate numbers are numbers that can be represented by geometric shapes usually using dots to form the figure. “If you represent a given square in this way—for example, the square of 4—it is easy to see that the next higher square can be formed by adding a row of dots around two sides of the original figure” [5 p. 48].



In his explication, Leibniz refers to tables of square numbers (n^2) and cube numbers (n^3) when he describes the special properties of the periods in the tables. He also refers to pyramidal numbers. Pyramidal numbers are simply the sum of the squares ($\sum_{k=1}^n k^2$). He might also have been referring to triangular numbers. Triangular numbers are calculated by summing the previous natural numbers ($\sum_{k=1}^n k$). Below is a listing of first 32 square and triangular numbers.

n	Square Numbers		Triangular Numbers	
	n^2	n^2	$\frac{n^2 + n}{2}$	$\frac{n^2 + n}{2}$
0	0	000000000	0	000000000
1	1	000000001	1	000000001
2	4	000000100	3	000000011
3	9	000001001	6	000000110
4	16	000010000	10	000001010
5	25	000011001	15	000001111
6	36	000100100	21	000010101
7	49	000110001	28	000011100
8	64	001000000	36	000100100
9	81	001010001	45	000101101
10	100	001100100	55	000110111
11	121	001111001	66	001000010
12	144	0010010000	78	001001110
13	169	0010101001	91	001011011
14	196	0011000100	105	001101001
15	225	0011100001	120	001111000
16	256	0100000000	136	0010001000
17	289	0100100001	153	0010011001
18	324	0101000100	171	0010101011
19	361	0101101001	190	0010111110
20	400	0110010000	210	0011010010
21	441	0110111001	231	0011100111
22	484	0111100100	253	0011111101
23	529	1000010001	276	0100010100
24	576	1001000000	300	0100101100
25	625	1001110001	325	0101000101
26	676	1010100100	351	0101011111

27	729	1011011001	378	0101111010
28	784	1100010000	406	0110010110
29	841	1101001001	435	0110110011
30	900	1110000100	465	0111010001
31	961	1111000001	496	0111110000

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Joseph Weimholt

“Jesus, how much longer we have to wait!”

“What? You afraid everybody’ll be dead before you get there?” Sergeant C says looking up from his map.

Our sixteen Humvees sit one behind the other. Countless more military vehicles are lined up in rows to the left and right for miles in each direction. Thousands of uniformed soldiers surround these vehicles, some sitting on hoods or roofs playing spades, some on the ground beside or lying underneath their trucks in the only shade. Others pace nervously, but almost all of them are eating their last meal before war. This close to the Iraqi border the desert is unforgiving and lifeless. For countless miles only sand stretches across the flat horizon. Aside from thousands of green or of tan military trucks this Kuwaiti desert is empty. The sun bakes down on the scorched and desolate terrain sending heat waves radiating off the ground, blending sand into sky. Sweat drips down my body, soaking into my tan and brown desert pattern BDUs and t-shirt. My eyes sting and all I can smell is my own offensive body odor.

“BREAK, BREAK, BREAK. All units prepare for movement.”

“Alright everybody, let’s get it on,” Sergeant C shouts.

Playing cards and uneaten food fly as soldiers spring to life. In fear of Saddam’s chemical weapon threat orders are to wear the Chemical Protective Over-Garment. First I pull on the heavy charcoal-lined overalls and coat over my BDUs. The quarter-inch thick rubber shoes go on over my tan leather combat boots. I fasten all Velcro and snaps, and tighten the drawstrings around my waist, wrists and ankles. This ten-pound suit is now almost air tight. Next, I shrug into a full torso flack vest. Over 200 rounds of rifle ammunition and grenades weigh heavily across the front of my vest. This added with the weight of the Kevlar helmet pulls my neck down in an awkward cramping angle. I sling my M4 rifle across my chest, and with my gas mask on my left hip and Beretta pistol on my right I now weigh approximately 380 pounds. The thermometer on my watch reads 121 degrees. When the wind picks up it feels like standing in front of a giant bonfire. I must squeeze my eyes shut against it. With no air conditioning and the windows up it’s much hotter inside the Humvee. A line of assorted military vehicles passes in front of us heading towards the boarder as we wait for our place in the convoy. As the end of the convoy draws near each row of trucks files out and joins in the line. We join in about eight miles from the lead leaving scattered soldier trash across the empty desert. The date is March 20, 2003, and we are invading Iraq.

Tanks, armored personnel carriers, and humvees tear a path through the flat desert terrain crushing sand into a fine powder which is churned up into a thick dark cloud that engulfs our vehicles. I feel bad for my gunner sitting out of the open turret in the roof. “Damn, I can’t breathe up here Sgt.” Carr’s words come out muffled through the mask and scarf wrapped tightly around her face. For twelve hours we inhale sand. It mixes with the sweat and spit, and no amount of water can remove the dark brown paste from my mouth. God, I’m thirsty!

We finally pull out of the convoy; our sixteen Humvees staggering across the road and gunners come to full attention behind M249 machine guns and MK19 automatic grenade launchers. They scour the horizon through green night vision for any enemy threat. “Alright Weimholt, let’s f#@*ing do it.”

Heading to the back of the Humvee we unpack the metal detectors. They are thin and green. Just sticks with a flat circular end, made by the lowest common bidder. I’m surprised they work at all. Sergeant C and I adjust the headsets to our ears and make our way into the desert. It is pitch dark now, with only foreign stars to light the sky. “God, please don’t let me step on a land mine,” I pray over and over in my head.

BEEEEEP! The headset is screaming into my ears. Forward movement halts as sweat beads freshly across my brow. I can already see the land mine in my mind’s eye. I’m going to die out here in this empty God forsaken land half a world away from home, I know it. I lean down to inspect the sand in front of me, and there is definitely something metallic and cylindrical there. Getting closer, my pupils adjusting, I see an old pop-top sun-bleached Pepsi can. Every five feet high pitched beeps blast my eardrums and bring fresh sweat to my body and palms, but every time it’s only harmless metal.

Forty-five minutes later SSG C and I snap red Cem Lights and guide in our platoon. Camp gets set up quickly. The OE254 antenna is raised and hasty fighting positions are dug. There are no tents and no cots, only trucks in a wide circle. Dirt-caked faces stare back at me with drooping eyelids, and wet rancid body odor stings my nose and throat with each breath. It's been over 36 hours since we last slept. Still wearing all my gear I slide my feet into an OD green sleeping bag and lie down across the hood of my Humvee, careful not to get caught in the concertina wire tied to the hood.

I dream of bombs. They fall all around me slamming into the ground with frightening explosive force. I'm falling, slamming into the desert hardpan I realize it's not a dream. Looking up, I see the horizon blanketed in an ugly reddish-orange glow as the closest village burns brightly into the night. Three clicks away it is still close enough to knock me out of bed. It's an air raid and the ground shakes with the concussive force of each dropped bomb.

Wide-eyed soldiers scramble through trucks looking for their weapons, Kevlar helmets, and body armor. The LT dashes from his cot. His Kevlar bounces loosely on his balding scalp. He dives to the ground which sending his Kevlar flying off his head and scrambles underneath a Humvee. Sergeant C leans down close to me holding his Kevlar tightly down. "Welcome to Iraq, Asshole."

Society and Validation of Disability

Katie Sontheimer

As people with disabilities continue to develop a voice in this society, it becomes more apparent that they are a group with as much diversity as humanly possible. This diversity is largely due to the inescapable fact that all people have disability (whether nearsightedness, terrible math skills, or limited mobility) or will eventually acquire it whether by aging or by accident. This fact remains invisible to the social consciousness. It is not, however, invisible to the unconscious. Society reacts fearfully to disability and creates the "us" versus "them" mentality as if that separation will stave off the inevitable. Stereotyping is a product of this fear. In a society that equivocates weakness with worthlessness, people with disability set themselves up for failure by internalizing the disabled person stereotype. The expectation society places on the disabled to overcome their disabilities is unrealistic and harmful to

them. By instilling a sense of shame, inadequacy, and self-loathing in people with disability, society hinders them from validating their disability and accepting it as part of who they are.

The idea that a person can overcome a disability is a self-defeating one. Society sets impossibly high standards for what it means to overcome a disability. In Claiming Disability: Knowledge and Identity, Simi Linton observes “news stories about disability are invariably human interest tales of individual accomplishment... of personal triumph over adversity” (144). It is unlikely that one will hear a news story about a person with multiple sclerosis who managed to tie both of his shoes today in spite of the severe discomfort, lack of coordination, or blurred vision. It seems that in order to gain the acceptance of society, someone with a disability must do something so extraordinary that it would be a considerable feat even for someone without a disability. Whether it is surviving a harrowing near death experience, a parapalegic saving a woman from drowning, a man with no legs climbing a mountain, or a savant’s aptitude for math or music, these media-driven images become an artificially high standard against which society judges those with similar disability. In Staring Back: The Disability Experience From the Inside Out, Kenny Fries, who has congenital lower leg abnormalities, states that this “kill it or cure it” mentality held by society “puts the blame squarely on the individual when a physical impairment cannot be overcome” (7). It is simply unrealistic to expect a paralyzed man to learn to walk; yet society holds him to the standard that insists that he could walk if he wanted it enough and condemns him for his “weakness” when he cannot. In keeping with the artificial standard created by the media, Fries’ parents created a “superboy” image of him by telling people that he “learned to walk wearing a cast on each leg” (16, 17). He goes on to say that there was never discussion about the actual hardship associated with his disability, and “[quells] his anger and frustration that [almost thirty years later his] parents still cannot understand the physical limitations of their disabled son” (175). Their image of Fries reflects society’s image of people with disability and does not include a practical concept of his what his disability means for him.

The families of people with disability often reinforce the notion that they have no value in society. Family members can do this by telling a person with the disability, through their actions or words, that their presence is resented or merely tolerated, or insisting that their disabled family member is like everyone else. This insistence on normalcy is harmful to his/her self-esteem because it implies a complete disregard to such a large part of that person’s life--the disability (Linton 21). Many suffer physical, mental, and emotional abuse at the hands of those who are supposed to care for them. Linton says, “Disabled people around the world who are deemed pariahs by their own families and communities have lived through the terrible pain of being denied succor by the very persons to whom it would be most natural to turn” (45). When disability is not the cause of the abuse, it can be interpreted as such when a person with disability has internalized the mentality that they are valueless and burdensome. As related in his memoir Body, Remember, Kenny Fries interpreted the abuse from his father and brother in that way, “Somewhere deep inside me I think I was abused as punishment for all that I caused because I was born disabled” (214). Even though his brother was also abused by their father and he has no way of knowing that the abuse would not have occurred if he were not disabled, Fries doesn’t stray far from the idea that his disability renders him an abject person. By telling him things like, “It could have been worse, you could have been retarded,” and “You don’t have any friends... they just feel sorry for you,” his family does little to combat the negative stereotyping society enforces on the disabled (49).

Stephen Kuusisto’s family completely denied his disability. Though not abused, he was conditioned by his parents to disregard his blindness. His parents operate under the assumption that “the ordinary world can’t accommodate [blindness]” (Kuusisto 13). For Kuusisto to interact with the world, he has to accommodate the world. This attitude had a damning effect on Kuusisto’s self-esteem. “Hell-bent” on making him appear “normal”, his mother made it clear he was expected to do what other kids do, even when it was dangerous for him to do so (Kuusisto 14). Reflecting on his sense of worthlessness to his father he said, “I have no affection for my life, must talk, impress my father, become a being of value” (Kuusisto 41). He must pretend not to be blind to gain value in his father’s eyes, and learning from his parents who are agents of larger society, Kuusisto projects that mentality into the world around him.

The pressure family and society put on a person to look and act “normal” is enormous. Families pressure people with disability to hide it or to have painful or risky medical treatments not for the

benefit of the individual but to “fulfill their families’ wish to make them appear “more normal” (Linton 20). The desire to live up to this false image is prevalent among people with disabilities and especially harmful to children who are forming an identity and trying to find a place in a society that tells them they have none. According to social identity theory, “a person’s sense of who they are (or who they are not) is derived from their group membership” (Harris 343). By looking or acting as “normal” as possible, children with disability identify with the mainstream society group. The alternative is “to ‘belong’ to a negatively valued social group [which is] unremittingly negative for their self-esteem” (Harris 343). To escape that connotation, people with disability will often avoid others within that social group. Passing, creating an image of oneself that holds higher social value, in this discussion a nondisabled image, is a result of internalizing the pressure of society to seem as normal as possible. Unfortunately, dis-identifying with the disability community cuts them off from others with similar experiences and the support that community offers (as discussed below).

When passing, many people with disability feel that being outed to society leaves them vulnerable. Being outed is often compared to the shame associated with being naked in public. When asked by someone he wanted very much to like him to read his poetry about being disabled Fries says, “It was worse than being naked” (202). Kuusisto saw using a white cane as “an invitation to be nude in public” because it would immediately identify him as blind (100). In “Carnal Acts”, Nancy Mairs, who wears a leg brace due to multiple sclerosis, states that, “The idea of going around with my bare brace hanging out seemed almost as indecent as exposing my breasts” (56). This attitude did not persist after Mairs became affirmed in her identity. Nightmares in which one suddenly finds oneself naked in a room full of people, on public transportation, or at work are common for many. But for many living with disability who cannot or do not pass, this nightmarish scenario follows them through their daily lives. Passing has a huge emotional toll. Linton calls passing an “unchecked impulse spurred by internalized self-loathing” (20). This impulse often leads people with disability into the cycle of self-loathing and self-destruction.

The need to pass creates more hardship for those with disability and is psychologically, emotionally, and potentially physically harmful to them. Kuusisto’s life exemplifies the pattern of self-loathing and self-destruction. Because he spends so much of his life denying his blindness, he doesn’t compensate for the disability and learn to effectively navigate through the sighted world. He lives in anxious anticipation of what he couldn’t see coming and how people were reacting to him. He moves in a world where dimly lit settings “tighten [his] chest” and is “disconcerted by what it felt like to belong so thoroughly to other people, to be...in their possession” (11, 21). Half of every day is dimly lit and people are everywhere. Those anxiety-inducing situations are constant in Kuusisto’s world before he validates his blindness. Those anxieties fed his self-loathing and thus his self-destructive behavior. He compares passing as a sighted person to “the exhilaration of walking the top of a steep fence without falling” (41). He plays chicken with the world, and the world repeatedly swerves around him. He illustrates what a precarious path that fence is by riding a bicycle into his thirties, driving a boat, running headlong into wet cement, and nearly walking into cars, trolleys, and trains; all potentially destructive behaviors. He is overweight from comfort eating and then emaciated from starving himself. He is stooped from the frantic way he moves through unfamiliar places, pulls hair out of his body, and abuses substances he knows can make his eye condition worse. The need to pass only makes his life harder.

Passing as nondisabled is emotionally draining for a person with disability. Linton states, “The loss of community, the anxiety, and the self-doubt that inevitably accompany this ambiguous social position and the ambivalent personal state are the enormous cost of declaring disability unacceptable” (Linton 20). In her memoir *Nobody, Nowhere*, Donna Williams describes committing “emotional suicide;” her division into socially acceptable characters to hide the real Donna away from the world which ostracized her. Williams states, “My hatred became my only realness, and when I was not angry, I said sorry for breathing, for taking up space, and even began to say sorry for saying sorry... This total denial of a right to live was a consequence of learning to act normal” (79). Her characters, Willie and Carol, allow her to pass as normal in the nondisabled world by being social and assertive where Donna is unresponsive or anxious. As Willie she allows herself to express anger where Donna represses, as Carol she allows herself to be charming where Donna is shy. Williams reveals that it was “like an out-of-body experience [that] had been happening so long that, as an actress in [her] body, in a state of

automation, [she] had lost sight of the controls that could bring [her] back to earth” (Williams 138). The anxiety caused by the reemergence of Donna makes her agoraphobic, unable to work, prone to physical manifestations of stress, and leaves her in a constant state of panic. The characters she develops to ease her communication with the outside world also embody her self-loathing and judge Donna by the standards of that world. She is able to validate her disability and become the whole person only after the characters accept Donna for who she is.

Engaging in unfulfilling or even toxic relationships is a harmful pattern associated with passing. Kuusisto lives in “guilty expectation” that God would judge him unworthy and feared that if loved ones found out the extent of his need for assistance they would loathe him as he loathed himself (125). As a result, he never reveals the extent of his disability to his lovers. His “disabled man’s impression is that [he is] ugly” and “it’s hard for [him] to understand how... women can find [him] attractive” (123). This leads him to feeling guilty for deceptively seducing women into romantic relationships. He often runs away from the relationship, and abuses substances in an effort to run away from himself. Fries once asked a former lover how “he felt about having sex with a disabled man” and the man replied, “I just concentrate on the good parts” (200). Hearing that, Fries felt like “a whole part of [him] had been erased” (200). Because both of these men have yet to self-validate their disability, they don’t expect others to validate it either. Neither of them have the expectation that someone will love them for who they are, as they are.

The most common triggers for self-validating a disability seem to be crisis and the acceptance of others. For Kuusisto the crisis was injuring his better eye, which rendered him helpless to a degree he had never experienced. He simply could no longer pass. Kuusisto is “denied [his] mastery of a disability that [he’d] grown to believe [he] could always govern” (132). The coping mechanisms he uses to mask the extent of his disability are suddenly unavailable to him. Because of his need to pass Kuusisto has not learned any blind skills; he has no compensatory tools with which to temper his disability. This crisis leaves him at a point where he must be outed to survive. For Williams the crisis was the reemergence of Donna, the emotional character of herself, and the self-conflict that created with the other characters and the social conflict it presented in general. Her inability to function in this state leads to her a psychiatrist who once recognized that there was Donna, “the frightened little girl” in Williams, even though she was still in hiding. These crises have a common connection; they recognized the need for and seek out support from others.

The validation of others is a crucial component for self-validation of disability. For Kuusisto, meeting Barry through the Iowa Commission for the Blind provided a rare connection because Barry recognizes him in an honest way; he recognizes the whole, disability included. It comes as a surprise to Kuusisto that “here’s a stranger who understands me [...] the guest who really is a god, but a god who has known you all along” (98). Kuusisto’s experience with blindness in other people is limited, but now here is someone he can share the hidden part of his life with. Williams unexpectedly meets a man on a train who recognizes and exhibits her language of autism and she “felt so ‘found’, she could have cried” (169). What a relief it must be for them to not have to pass for these people and just be the person they are, disability and all.

As stated above, an unfortunate cost of passing is disidentifying with a community of support. As social identity theory explains, community identity plays a crucial role in personal identity. In “Seeing is Be(liev)ing”, Deborah Peifer, who is blind, describes her feeling of disconnection from the lesbian community once she becomes blind. Because she cannot see other “lesbians [see her] as a lesbian, [it is] more difficult [for her] to see [herself] as one” (34). Similarly, many with disability have a difficult time viewing themselves as a person of value in society where disability is a “difference [that] is not valued, but mocked” (Clare 135). Joan Tollifson, who was born with only one arm, dis-identified with others with disability. After immersing herself in the disability community she states, “Finally identifying myself as a disabled person was an enormous healing” (107). Her experience with disability, while unique, stops feeling like a personal problem in a community of others with similar experiences. Tollifson’s concept of social standards changes to be specific to the disability “mini-society” where disability could gain stature (107).

In his quest to acquire a guide dog, Kuusisto also connects with an entire community of people who validate his disability. Peifer describes the important influence a sense of community has on the creation of a strong sense of self, and how important it is to receive “regular validation” for that self

(33). The reassurance that comes from Barry's familiarity with blindness becomes available from many sources. At Guiding Eyes, a training school for guide dogs and their handlers, Kuusisto is "among sighted people who respect blindness" (171). His accomplishments are given the credit they are due. Kuusisto makes a strong connection in the world he once believed he had no place in. Having that support makes his progression to validation less intimidating. After a lifetime of anxiety and self-loathing, Kuusisto validates his disability and becomes someone who "has been returned to life" (175). He is excited about moving through the once daunting environment with confidence and travels all over the country, all the while publicly outed and immediately recognizable as a man with a disability. The fear that once crippled Kuusisto lost its power over his life.

Self-validation also affects the way one is viewed by the world. Peifer observes, "I had not been seen as a dyke by other dykes until I came out to myself" (31). As surely as individuals reflect society's expectations, so does society reflect the individual's. After Kuusisto self-validates, he finds that the public is generally more accepting of his blindness. After Williams self-validates, she becomes more socially functional than ever before, and reaches out to children with autism with the sensitivity of an insider. About connecting with community, Nancy Mairs declares, "Speaking out is an antidote to shame... I can subvert its power...by acknowledging who I am, shame and all, and, in doing so, [raise] what was hidden, dark, secret about my life into the plain light of shared human experience" (58). Subverting the power of shame in one's life lessens the power society has to turn that shame against the self, and neutralizes shame as a weapon.

Mainstream society creates and family enforces unrealistic standards by which those with disability are judged unfairly. This creates the need to pass, a situation which is harmful to people with disability socially, psychologically, and emotionally. Passing is a situation in which people with disability are guaranteed to fail. Linton explains that the true challenge to overcome for people with disability is the struggle to "overcome social stigma" and self-validate the disability as part of the whole person (17). It is indeed a challenge as many agents of society, the family chief among them, relentlessly apply the negative disabled person stereotype. Overcoming the social stigma is strongly aided by the support of community and others who also validate disability. Leonard Kriegel states, "To create an independent self, a man has to rid himself of the myths that nurtured him and the myths that held him back" (46). That is the difference between self-destruction and self-deconstruction. Deconstructing the disabled self, and the influence society's myths have on it, diminishes the need to pass and enables self-validation, the constructive counterpart to passing. It is important, or perhaps necessary, that a voice in society be coupled with self-validation, because, ultimately, we are who we say we are, whether others acknowledge it or not.

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American Hegemony: Historical Misconceptions and Lies
Heather Nurmikko

“One is astonished in the study of history at the recurrence of the idea that evil must be forgotten, distorted, skimmed over. We must not remember that Daniel Webster got drunk but only remember that he was a splendid constitutional lawyer. We must forget that George Washington was a slave owner...and simply remember the things we regard as creditable and inspiring. The difficulty, of course, with this philosophy is that history loses its value as an incentive and example; it paints perfect men and noble nations, but it does not tell the truth.”

-W.E.B. DuBois

The tall, grizzled professor, in a booming voice, asked the American History class, “Raise your hands if you learned in high school that Pocahontas married John Smith? And, how many of you believe that Betsy Ross created the American Flag? Raise your hand if you learned that the pilgrims founded America at Plymouth Rock.” Immediately after the fall of all 30 students’ hands, the professor announced in a serious tone, “Pocahontas did not marry John Smith. Betsy Ross never created the American Flag. America was not founded by the pilgrims. And you have all been lied too.” The bombshell, my American History 101 Professor dropped, told us everything we learned in high school about American History was false. It took me the entire semester to not only digest those words, but to fully realize what he was talking about. I, along with thousands of students enrolled in universities throughout the United States, believed that our high school education had accurately portrayed the American story – happily ever after, the end. Upon further examination, a degree of effort, and an open mind, students come to understand their high school education was really the political indoctrination of the dominant ruling class. Unraveling the fallacies of historical events may shed light on the most challenging issues plaguing humankind.

During settlement in the seventeenth-century, voluntary schools were established in towns to teach children to read the Bible (Shafer 22). However, a century later, school curriculum was altered to teach students literacy and basic mathematics (Gatto). But, by the nineteenth-century, due to massive immigration, school attendance became both universal and mandatory. The dominant ruling class believed that mandatory education was “...the most effective way to Americanize the collection of varying cultures and religions” (Shafer 22). Thus, schools indoctrinated America’s youth with hegemony; ethnocentric beliefs designed to portray America and its political system as a superior governing organization. According to Gregory Shafer, author of *“What’s Literacy Got To Do With It,”* hegemony stopped education from being a tool of liberation, creating “a device of domestication, acting to stave off rebellion and silence the individual” (22). The belief that the policies governing social order as the best form of rule, was predicated to instill social order, control behavior, and ensure power stayed in the hands of the governing elite.

Hegemonic ideas penetrated scholastic curriculum, including: English, Social Studies, Language Arts, Science, and American History. In fact, in 1925, the American Legion proclaimed that American history should only teach children patriotism and success (Loewen 302). Modeling the belief of the Legion, America’s history was edited to exclude any events that portrayed the nation as unwelcoming, historically racist bigots. Instead, students were to be taught one central theme; America is a land of freedom and toleration, striving for egalitarianism. Historian James Loewen claims that history became predominately used for domination because:

How people think about the past is an important part of their consciousness. If members of the elite come to think that their privilege was historically justified and earned, it will be hard to persuade them to yield opportunity to others. If members of deprived groups come to think that their deprivation is their own fault, then there will be no need to use force or violence to keep them in their places (304).

American History curriculum became the prevailing tool in the transmission of hegemony, starting with the naive minds of the very young.

In kindergarten, students are taught – *pilgrims, seeking religious freedom, sailed across the ocean on the Mayflower and landed at Plymouth Rock. Those pilgrims, with the help of Squanto and the Indians, established a town and cultivated the land. After the first harvest, the pilgrims invited the*

Indians to a feast to celebrate their bounty and continue peaceful relations with the natives. This story, as I recall it, laid the framework that America is a land of great toleration and freedom, and that the pilgrims and Indians coexisted in a world of peace and harmony. But in reality, the pilgrims were not the first settlers in America, and they did not hold the first Thanksgiving with the Indians at Plymouth Rock.

American pre-history states that the first inhabitants, the Native Americans, arrived in the country by either crossing the Bering Strait or traveling by sea. The natives lived exclusively on the continent until an African slave colony was established by the Spanish in 1526 (Loewen 71-73). By the early 1600's, colonies were established throughout the continent by the French, Dutch, and Portuguese (Framework 226). The new settlers introduced livestock to the continent and brought with them disease such as typhus, cholera, smallpox, influenza, measles, and the bubonic plague. Because of their limited outside contact, the Native Americans lacked a resistance to the Old World diseases brought by the settlers. As a result, diseases ravaged the native population, killing the Indians with a 95% attrition rate, before the English reached America (Loewen 78-79).

Furthermore, the first English settlement was commissioned by the London Company in 1607 and was located at Jamestown, Virginia (Loewen 72). So, why are American students being taught that Plymouth Rock in 1620 was the first settlement? According to historians, the English at Jamestown spent more time exploiting the resources of the New World and enslaving Indians than cultivating crops for their survival. The settlers, desperate for food, began to systemically wage chemical warfare against the remaining Indians and practice cannibalism. Meanwhile, the pilgrims, upon landing at Plymouth Rock, which was actually the Indian village of Patuxet, discovered already felled land, planted crops, and streams of fresh water. Thanking God for their good fortune the pilgrims settled and established Plymouth with Squanto, the sole survivor of the disease ravaged Patuxet (Loewen 84-85). Since the history of Jamestown did not support American-hegemonic perspective, the dominant ruling class appointed Plymouth as the foundation of America. However, they edited and re-wrote the history of Plymouth to portray the pilgrims as heroic, moral founders, perpetuating the mythic origin of America. (Loewen 83-84).

In early American history, students are taught that the founding fathers were great visionaries who believed that "all men are created equal" (DOI). Unfortunately, no matter how often these men are idolized as egalitarians, they practiced white supremacy by owning slaves (Shafer 26). Thomas Jefferson, our most prolific founding father, was an ardent slave holder, owning around 200 slaves when he penned the Declaration of Independence (Loewen 147). Following Jefferson's white supremacist beliefs, America's most sacred document should actually read "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all *white* men are created equal" (DOI). In addition to owning slaves, Jefferson and other fathers were responsible for the both the expansion of slavery into the Western states and genocide of the Native Americans (Loewen 124, 147-148).

Founding Father, Andrew Jackson, introduced and executed the policy that would be responsible for the American Indian Holocaust. Starting in 1815, Indians, commonly referred to as *savage beasts*, were forced to leave their lands and migrate along the Trail of Tears in order for Americans to have more *Lebensraum* (Loewen 124; Hunt et al. 1044). Jackson justified the land seizure and relocations when he stated:

The United States would have been justified by the Great Spirit, had they taken all the land of the nation...Listen—the truth is, the great body of ...chiefs and warriors did not respect the power of the United States—They thought we were an insignificant nation—That we would be overpowered by the British...They were fat with eating beef—they wanted flogging...We bleed our enemies in such cases to give them their senses (qtd. in "A People's History", 128)

During relocation, Natives experienced grueling conditions and were forced into concentration camps, which would later be admired by Adolf Hitler and his Third Reich. According to John Toland, his personal biographer, Hitler "often praised to his inner circle the efficiency of America's extermination—by starvation and uneven combat as the model for his extermination of Jews and Gypsies" (Loewen 124). However, the concentration camps were the smaller evil committed against

the Natives. During the relocation, defenseless Indians were systematically slaughtered by the government at places like Wounded Knee (Phillips). But you won't find this taught in any secondary history class! Instead, the founding fathers are patriots that fought for our country's freedom and their dark deeds are either minimized or left out.

During the Civil war, students are taught that people widely disagreed with slavery and this caused Abraham Lincoln to issue the Emancipation Proclamation. We are taught Lincoln was a great president who believed in the equality of all men. However, contrary to hegemonic teachings, Lincoln, like the founding fathers, also believed in white supremacy. In a presidential debate, Lincoln stated:

...there is a physical difference between the white and black races which I believe will forever forbid the two races living together on terms of social and political equality. And inasmuch as they cannot so live, while they do remain together there must be the position of superior and inferior, and I as any other man am in favor of having the superior position assigned to the white race (qtd. in Rose 178).

In addition to learning hegemonic lies about Lincoln, students are taught that America was still "a government of the people, by the people, for the people" (Lincoln). However, racist beliefs did not disappear with the war. In the Democratic Presidential Campaign, hundreds-of-thousands of leaflets were circulated nationwide with an official theme song. Do you recognize the following song? Did you learn this version in school?

*Yankee Doodle is no more,
Sunk his name and station;
Nigger Doodle takes his place,
And favors amalgamation.
Chorus: Nigger Doodle's all the go,
Ebony shins and bandy,
"Loyal" people all must bow
To Nigger Doodle dandy.
The white breed is under par
It lacks the rich a-romy,
Give us something black as tar,
Give us "Old Dahomey."
Chorus: Nigger Doodle's all the go, etc.
Blubber lips are killing sweet,
And kinky heads are spending;
And oh, it makes such bully feet
To have the heels extended.
Chorus: Nigger Doodle's all the go, etc (Loewen 155).*

Sadly, the presidential candidates were Abraham Lincoln and Stephan Douglas, co-creators of Lincoln-Douglas debate, a widely respected high school activity. These men, worshipped as heroic pillars of American history, transformed a patriotic, Revolutionary tune into a racist anthem. However, Lincoln and Douglas are remembered as great debaters who believed in the equality of all men!

Following the war, students are taught about the Reconstruction era and the Civil Rights movement, which is briefly covered during Black History Month. Students are blinded to Jim Crow laws, regulations used to segregate blacks from white society. In addition, American history curriculum does not cover the race riots leading up to the Civil Rights movement. Students are led to believe that race relations, after the war, were civil and nonviolent. In truth, the decades following the war were filled with blood, violence, and murder. One of the bloodiest race riots edited out of high school history was the massacre of the Greenwood Section of Tulsa, Oklahoma in 1921. In 18 hours of racist violence, the whites of Tulsa had murdered 300 blacks and burned the houses of "Little Africa," leaving 9,000 African Americans homeless. In November of 1920, using Jim Crow laws, over 3,000 blacks were denied the right to vote in Florida. The local government, along with the KKK, claimed that the "niggers" were trying to be equal, which resulted in the slaughter of 200 blacks standing in line to vote (Tuttle). This violence does not make the curriculum of high school history. Why? If students were taught the truth, America would no longer be the country of acceptance, equality, and freedom.

By high school, students begin to learn about evil Communism and the scary domino effect. Starting with the Bolshevik Revolution, known religiously in America as the Red Scare, students are drilled with the idea that Communism is *bad*. Since the 1980's, the teaching of Communism has decreased and the history of the Vietnam War garners no significant attention. Students are merely taught that Communism had spread from Russia to China, causing President Truman to anticipate that Communist ideology would extend to Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines. As a result of the Domino Theory, America went to war with Vietnam (Loewen 254). Believing the hegemonic teachings of the curriculum, students are ignorant of the monstrosities committed against the Vietnamese people and the anti-war movement that would influence American culture.

After learning the hegemonic version of the Vietnam War, students believe that America upheld its patriotic duty by entering Vietnam to save the country from *Commies*. Even with America's loss in the Fall of Saigon, and the loss of the country to Communism, students are taught that heroic America tried to assist the innocent civilians of Vietnam. However, this couldn't be farther from the truth. Former presidential candidate, John Kerry, testified before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in 1971 about the war crimes committed in Vietnam. He stated that American troops had:

...personally raped, cut off ears, cut off heads, taped wires from portable telephones to human genitals and turned up the power, cut off limbs, blown up bodies, randomly shot at civilians, razed villages in fashion reminiscent of Ghengis Khan, shot cattle and dogs for fun, poisoned food stocks, and generally ravaged the countryside of South Vietnam (qtd. in Loewen 250).

In addition to editing out war crimes, American curriculum leaves out the shocking war images. For example, students never see pictures of the Buddhist monk on fire in the street, the naked girl running down the highway fleeing a napalm air strike, or civilians being pushed away from a rescue chopper during the Fall of Saigon (Loewen 247-248).

Students are also oblivious to the anti-war movement in America and the remnants embedded in our culture. For instance, children believe the chant "Hell No! We won't go" was created by sports enthusiasts for football games. Students are never told that these chants along with "Hey, hey, LBJ, how many kids did you kill today?" are products of the anti-war movement (Loewen 252). As a result of those lies, students are ignorant of the past forces that shaped their culture. By editing the facts, leaving out the crimes, and hiding the pictures, American history curriculum is treating the Vietnam War as if it never happened. Students learn two things about Communism and the war: America is the ideal, heroic country and Communism directly threatens your freedom! One might be left with the questions of whether Communism threatens American freedom or whether it really threatens the power of the dominant ruling class.

Since hegemony's introduction into American History curriculum, schools are graduating individuals with a diploma in the form of a lens—a filter that influences their perception and comprehension of the world so they willingly obey laws of the ruling class. Curriculum teaches students that our government was created by men that believed in the right to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," and that America was a tolerant, peaceful, accepting country that offered "liberty and justice for all" (DOI, Baer). Unfortunately, America's past is stained with blood and violence, artfully edited by the ruling class to teach passive conformity. According to Mike Rose, author of Lives on the Boundary, students are taught the white canonical curriculum of the dominant ruling class because:

[A] canonical uniformity promotes rigor and quality control; it can also squelch new thinking, diffuse the generative tension between the old and the new. It is significant that the canonical orientation is voiced with most force during times of challenge and uncertainty, for it promises the authority of tradition, the seeming stability of the past. But the authority is fictive, gained from a misreading of American...history. No period of that history was harmoniously stable; the invocation of a golden age is a mythologizing act (238).

Following the mythologizing of America's past, schools are producing individuals that have an unwavering belief in American supremacy. Students are taught to support the actions of the

government, fulfill their patriotic duty, and to never challenge the system. However, by supporting hegemony, America is producing apathetic followers who are historically and culturally ignorant.

According to Historian Howard Zinn, college American history classes are inundated with students that have been politically indoctrinated in high school. As a result, history professors spend gross amounts of time teaching against the hegemonic lies of secondary education. In his book, Howard Zinn on History, he states:

When I taught American history, I ignored the canon of traditional textbook, in which the heroic figures were mostly presidents, generals and industrialists. In those texts...Christopher Columbus and Andrew Jackson and Theodore Roosevelt were treated as heroes in the march of democracy, with not a word from the objects of their violence (123).

Furthermore, Zinn states that students graduate high school believing they must be an “obedient citizen, participating happily in the nation’s limited pluralism” (“On History”, 126). Therefore, University instructors are greeted with students possessing a submissive mindset. When given an assignment to criticize a government action, students often refuse stating “You can’t criticize the President... You’ve gotta support your president even if you don’t agree with him,” or “I learned our government must be strong, it’s always right and never wrong...” (qtd in Rose 190, qtd in Loewen 219). However, instructors are not the only individuals that witness the political indoctrination of the dominant ruling class.

A couple of years ago, during the 2004 presidential election, I was a volunteer for a campaign call center. I spent my time calling local citizens to engage them about the issues surrounding the presidency. For hours, I endured personal attacks by unhappy citizens, or would be hung up on by angry supporters of the incumbent party. After hours of call time, I became disheartened to learn that people were voting for the status quo—regardless of apparent political spin on the Iraq war, the Halliburton Scandal, rising gas prices, tax cuts for the wealthy, and decreased educational funding. I couldn’t understand why the American public was voting for an administration that continually misled the country and undercut the working class. One evening, during one of my routine calls, I was discussing the Iraq War with an older gentleman who was going to cast his vote for the present administration. Exasperated, I asked him, “How can you vote for a President that lied about nuclear weapons and plunged our country into a war over a personal vendetta?” The man personified the mindset I was encountering so perfectly that I will never forget his response. He replied, “Well, it’s like this. You don’t switch quarterbacks in the middle of a football game and you don’t switch Presidents in the middle of the war.” Astounded, I asked, “Even if that President lied to you about the war? Even if you don’t agree with him?” He angrily replied to my questions, “I support my country! You don’t go against the government! It’s unpatriotic!” Afterwards, I sat in the call center thinking about his comments. I couldn’t believe that so many Americans thought they would be labeled unpatriotic if they voted for the opposing campaign.

More recently, during a college composition course, the topic of Communism was introduced in a peer discussion group. One member, during the conversation, became defensive and stated, “When you talk about Communism you sound like you actually believe this crap!” I tried to explain that just because I believe Communism is viewed differently in America than other countries, doesn’t make me a radical *Commie*. I continued to explain that in order to view Communism objectively one has to consider the conditions and history of a country prior to its change to Communism. Later in the discussion, I was shocked when I learned this member believed that the Bolshevik Revolution was globally called the Red Scare and was led by General MacArthur during WWII. After explaining that the Bolshevik Revolution happened two decades prior to WWII and was led by Vladimir Lenin, I asked the student, “Did you learn these facts in High School? Where were you taught that discussing Communism was *bad*?” The angry group member ignored my questions and I ended the discussion by stating, “You weren’t born knowing Communism was bad. You learned that information from somewhere.” Through our discussion, I could see the effects of hegemonic training in this individual’s perspective on Communism. Instead of being liberated by education, the individual was a product of political indoctrination, ensnared in hegemonic lies. As a result, the individual was culturally and

historically ignorant, shutting down when their hegemonic training was challenged. However, a submissive mindset is a small evil in comparison to the damage of learning an inaccurate history.

At the beginning of a college history course, the first question students are asked is “Why is the study of history important?” Many students often respond by stating they think history is *stupid*, or that it is just a bunch of random dates and facts. Unfortunately, most students take minimal interest, only completing the course because it is a university requirement. The purpose of studying history is lost to most students, leaving the fallacious historical recount in tact. On the other hand, for students truly interested in history, the material transforms from regurgitated facts into applicable lessons.

Through history, we learn:

...the past is most usable as a way of suggesting possibilities we would never otherwise consider; it can both warn and inspire. By probing the past we can counter myths which affect the way we act today. We can see that it is possible for an entire nation to be brainwashed; for an “advanced, educated” people to commit genocide; for a “progressive, democratic” nation to maintain slavery; for apparently powerless subordinates to defeat their rulers...for oppressed to turn into oppressors; for “socialism” to be tyrannical; for a whole people to be led to war like sheep... (“On History”, 204)

By the end of the semester, students learn that we study history to learn from the past; to make sure we do not the commit the same mistakes twice. To learn to apply history to modern day is to gain an understanding of where we came from, where we’ve been, and where we’re going!

The impact of our hegemonic system is grave, and consequences of its implementation can be seen through historical analysis, and more significantly, through an evaluation of our everyday lives. It only takes picking up a newspaper to see America is plagued with current situations paralleling its past. After America invaded Iraq under the presumption of nuclear threat, our soldier’s have been charged with illegally executing noncombatants and torturing prisoners. Notice the similarity between Vietnam, where the US scalped and murdered innocent civilians. The pictures of the flag-covered coffins are federally censored, reminiscent of Vietnam War photos. Dozens of books fill the shelves of the local Barnes & Noble, pointing out parallels between the Iraq War and Vietnam. If we look to another international tragedy, we see that America is turning a blind eye to the genocide in Darfur, even though we vowed “Never Again” after Rwanda. Days ago, in New York City, three police officers were acquitted of murdering a young man. As the three officers left the court a black woman from the crowd yelled out, “quit working for the masters.” This week, Hillary Clinton invited Barack Obama to a Lincoln-Douglas style debate. It only takes a moment to see where lessons of the past were missed, and how the life of an average citizen is affected by historical misconceptions and lies. Perhaps a public awakening to the American hegemonic system is in order?

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Evolving Erotica Kathryn Hembree

Like many elements of history—art, music, dress—writing, too is constantly evolving. The various ways in which people write is constantly under scrutiny, and women are not excluded from such critical analysis. Women, writing for self-satisfaction, or posterity, in private or before a public audience, are committing life to paper for a multitude of reasons in endless ways. Erotica is a genre of literature including sexually explicit details as a primary feature, yet not exclusively aiming to arouse (Wiehardt). Classic erotica—from Sappho's examples of homoerotica, to Kate Chopin's, "The Storm" seem vague and flowery as compared to more recent writings within the genre. Twentieth century author and journalist Anaïs Nin explores erotica through much of her work, bringing stylistically blatant diction and a newer, bolder precedence to a subtle, classic genre. It is Nin's ability to express

comfort in her own sexuality through lyrically beautiful forms that has inspired female authors to take risks in writing on the often socially controversial topics of pleasure and sex.

Hailed as one of the first modern women to explore the realm of erotic writing, Anaïs Nin was born near Paris in 1903 to parents of Danish and French ancestry. Her father deserted the family when Nin was a young girl, and the disengaged family relocated to New York. It was at this time that Nin began keeping a diary, the work that later fueled her explorative interest in erotica and writing as a whole. Recorded were her feelings about life without a father, in addition to her thoughts on love, passion, and various self-exploratory matters. Of her diary she wrote, “[...it] is my kief, hashish, and opium pipe. This is my drug and my vice” (Bloom 56). Throughout her work, Nin is constantly concerned with establishing and accepting a feminine identity by exploring the relationship between this identity and eroticism. Nin writes of the modern female writer, “we are unveiling our thoughts, we are unveiling our feelings, and for that we need extremely expressive, articulate women who will at least know themselves, know what they are trying to tell others, know who they are” (Hinz 79). Perplexing is the consideration of genre/audience interaction and relations. Has this genre changed in response to an evolving audience, or rather, has the material always existed, and has now gained popularity as a result of this *modern* audience? For Nin, even if such thoughts and concealed writings existed, it is the sense of published acceptance and comfortable embrace that distinguishes her outlook and hopes for future female writers.

Sexuality throughout Nin’s writing is forthcoming and less abstract from the writing of her predecessors. In her work, *Children of the Albatross*, Nin writes:

[...] the full-blown petticoat, the tight-fitting panties [...] he put his arm around her skirt that swelled like a huge flower. She laid her hand on his head like a queen acknowledging his worship. He remained on one knee while the skirt like a full-blown flower opened to allow a kiss to be placed at the core. A kiss enclosed in the corolla of the skirt and hidden away. (Evans 114)

Readers resonate with the way sex is woven throughout Nin’s writing. In the act detailed above, sex is not crass, offensive, or defiant, but rather a part of life. Aggression, dominance, and violence—stereotypically masculine associations—are neglected from this excerpt, which imaginatively emanates femininity and captures innocence and beauty. The writing is comfortable and inviting, gentle yet enticing. It is this natural methodology that ultimately creates an acceptable awareness for future writers to further investigate.

Rather than man being the primary focus of concern, the female psyche and pleasure satiety are themes prevalent in Nin’s writing, as well as later works of erotica. In Nin’s writing, the male role is constantly undermined by the female counterpart. The men have little to no dialogue throughout Nin’s work. Male characters typically portray creative beings—doctors, astrologers, and psychiatrists. Their knowledge is used to strengthen and reveal a deeper understanding of women. Rather than reacting to what *is*, Nin argues that women should focus on bringing light to a ‘new woman,’ one who is free and who thrives on free love, in need of no pattern (DuBow 93). Feelings of guilt have often been attributed to the lack of honesty and directness in women’s writing. Literary critics explain that women were encouraged to place their personal life as chief priority, and writing rather as a back-burner interest, only to occasionally function as a means of self-expression (Hinz 82). Nin breaks free of these socially induced confines in her short story *Mandra, II* from *Little Birds* as she writes, “I am so wet that I am afraid it will show through my dress” (Nin 580). No longer do we see a female writer censoring the way she connotes sexual bliss.

In the past, women’s writing has been dominated with what Nin calls ‘soft focus,’ a diffused awareness. Women, as sensory beings, feel with their whole bodies, making their views less easy to communicate and express than masculine ideals. When approaching a question, one should ask ‘how did you feel about that?’ rather than ‘what did you think?’ For less articulate women, the problem lies in this lack of intuitive explanation (Hinz 81). Nin writes:

I would like to see women become very articulate about their feelings so that they can talk—try and make men see the point of view that we would like them to be aware of [...] I would like to see women creating their own language. Not fighting like men, but trying really to find a language for their feelings, a language for these things which come from the unconscious, which are instinctive. (Hinz 80)

This new language that Nin wished for future generations of women writers has finally become a reality. Erotica expert Michele Slung discusses in her work *Slow Hand: Women Writing Erotica* the notion that modern women know what they want and are less concerned with revealing such desires in the way of erotic stimulation and satisfaction. The genre that Nin worked so hard to revive is reaching even bolder heights as the modern woman is taking Nin's conceptions to a new level. These recent works contain material that is "frankly carnal, full of explicit language, deeds, and thoughts of the sort that some people may term 'pornographic' and others dismiss as 'dirty'" (Slung xx). Such interpretations, either muted or tawdry may simply vary in extremity from conservative to liberal readers.

Slung explains that to be erotically aware is to understand that women are capable of receiving more pleasure than men from the act of love—both physically and emotionally. This realization has gained popularity since the 1980's, as more women are both writing, and purchasing erotic fiction. Literary scholars explain this rising trend as a means for women to explore an area of human experience that has previously been dominated by male principles. This new wave of modern writing offers an embrace of acceptance, as women are acknowledging their once hidden desires, and tossing self-consciousness astray. In her own quest to uncover the evolution of erotica, Slung describes her delight at how these works broke free of the tyranny of physical beauty and the desirability of youth: [...these stories] ventured into the adjoining territories of betrayal, jealousy, loneliness, rejection, insecurity, they always kept clearly in the foreground *real* women—not nymphets or sex goddesses, not unblemished starlets or virginal misses, but women with both bodies and histories that were not free of imperfections. (xvi)

Readers were able to appreciate a new sense of change in the stories presented.

Modern erotica by female writers presents an obvious element of egalitarian ideals. The issues of age and physical attractiveness assume distinctly unique precedence as these women are writing of issues that may appeal to one's own insecurities. New England writer Susan Dooley begins her erotic short story *In the Prick of Time* (published 1992) with a woman saying that she is "too fat," to which her husband replies, "just right." The couple proceeds to engage in sexual titillation as Dooley writes: he played with her nipple, running a finger back and forth until the flesh hardened beneath his hand [...] feeling the pleasure of his weight as he slid on top of her, rubbing himself against her inner thigh before pressing inside of her and beginning to move slowly back and forth, finishing at last what had started their day. (7)

Dooley's story regaling "first man [she] ever fucked" is much more descriptive and abrasive in word choice than writing from centuries prior. Use of the word 'fuck' was likely not a common mode of communicating sexual intercourse in the early days of erotic fictitious writing. Erotica is no exception to evolving genres—changes in time elicit a change in what is considered acceptable language.

The modern erotic excerpts are much more vivid in their capacity to present a mental image for the reader. The specificity in naming body parts seems to be a relatively new phenomenon within the genre. In earlier examples of erotic fiction, imagery and bodily features were masked by symbolic language and ambiguity. For example, Emily Dickinson's *Come Slowly Eden* discusses "the fainting Bee—/Reaching late his flower, /Round her chamber hums" (Oxford 569). This is much less obvious when juxtaposed to Nin and other works, such as the aforementioned Dooley excerpt. Literary scholars believe such differences to be a likely result of comfort levels in writing that reached new heights during and after the women's suffrage movement (Lombardi). Female frontrunners who forged a place for this genre sought an outlet to vent their pent up desires, emotions, and thoughts – big and small, serious and futile, barefaced and pensive.

In addition to insecurities, modern female authors are writing of their personal sexual exploration, and how one comes to reach a self-ignited existence. Carolyn Banks writes in her short story *The Shame Girl* (published 1992), of a narrator's sexual coming of age within sight of a party her parents are throwing at their shore home. The narrator swims away from the house, out to the rocks where she introspectively analyzes her maturing life. Banks describes the pleasure obtained from touching underwater as being much "slower, silkier" and "sexier" than arousal on land. She writes, "[...] I felt a hand snake between my legs and across my buttocks, the radiance, the glow, the *heat* increased [...] I gave myself to the water [...]" (75). While an earlier writer may have used water as a descriptive façade, Banks uses the hydra imagery to enhance her erotic tale and deliver an embellished

sensation to the already sensuous act.

The shift to modern erotic fiction, fueled by Anaïs Nin and later adapted by writers like Susan Dooley and Carolyn Banks, has been a slow and tedious plight aimed to propel women into the future of egalitarian expression. These works are truly “visualizations of an inner necessity, [truths] shaped and fashioned into art [forms]” (Knapp 149). For some, reading such fiction creates uncomfortable feelings and demands a call for privacy. The past has created a standard of acceptability in the perception of erotica and intimate writings. We are private beings, and our “private thoughts” should be concealed to the outside world. However, these women have overcome society’s socially acceptable barriers and stated openly “we are like you, you are like us—and self-consciousness at least be *damned*, if not wholly dispelled” (Slung xv). Perhaps author Bettina Knapp said it best regarding this genre, “[...these] writings interweave the visual and the aural into complex universal designs. Reader and protagonist converge, as do viewer and painting in an art gallery, in preparation for a physical and mental involvement” (149). Such writing and the excerpts utilized are likely to be thoroughly embraced and accepted by the reader who is truly comfortable in his/her own sexuality. Yet for the conservative or inexperienced, the words of Nin and her followers are sure to engage the wary reader, who may just find a piece of pleasure hidden here—in the unfamiliar.

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Spreading the Gospel of Weetzie Bat Laurie Ray

December 2, 2007

Ms. Linda Berube and Ms. Jane Crigler
American Association of University Women
Kansas City, Missouri Branch
P.O. Box 33009
Kansas City, MO 64114

Dear Ms. Berube and Ms. Crigler:

I have been researching a book series titled Weetzie Bat, written by Francesca Lia Block, and I feel that this series may be of interest to you. For several weeks I have been reading and researching tabloid/celebrity magazines. I've noticed that the same stories tend to run within days of each other, and that they are centered around a handful of people: Britney, Paris, and Lindsay; occasionally one might see Katie Holmes and her daughter Suri or a newly pregnant Nicole Richie. However, the majority of the stories are about young women in Hollywood, and they are almost always negative or condescending.

These magazines are some of the most popular publications in America. They have an enormous amount of influence; not only are people reading them at home or in line at the grocery store, they're visiting the websites and re-reading the same information. While other news publications may have seen lower numbers in the last two years, sales for Us Weekly, People, and Ok! Magazine have skyrocketed. Because the content of these magazines is so exploitative and anti-feminist, I'm concerned that they are laying an unstable foundation for reading and internalizing what one has read.

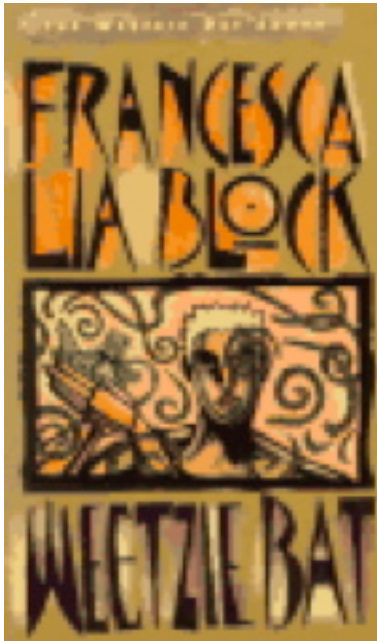
Clearly, girls across America are reading these articles. Paris Hilton and Britney Spears are the most searched people on the web, and putting their faces on your covers is guaranteed to sell copies. My concern lies in the manner that these women (and others in these magazines) are represented. Why so much focus on their personal lives? Why the scrutiny over their bodies and clothes? Why the voracious need to judge their romantic and platonic relationships? The message being sent is that women are here for entertainment and that they will be judged on a purely physical basis. They must adhere to strict physical standards and allow their private lives to be dissected. I feel that this is extremely harmful to girls and that encouraging positive, educational reading could make a difference.

The book series I mentioned above is a fantastic read. Weetzie Bat features characters from all walks of life, and Ms. Block does a fantastic job of showcasing alternative lifestyles. She is a voice for readers who may have felt isolated, unaccepted, or altogether different from their peers. I have compiled a variety of sources that back up my argument, and I am confident that you will see the benefits of reading Weetzie Bat and use them to set a positive example for other young women. Thank you for your time, and I wish you all the best.

Sincerely,

Laurie Ray

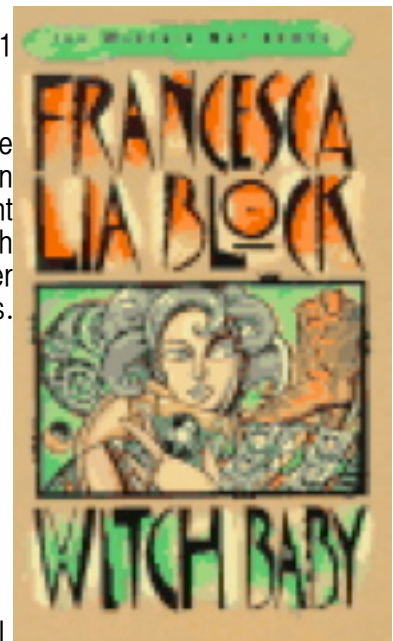
Who are you, Weetzie Bat?



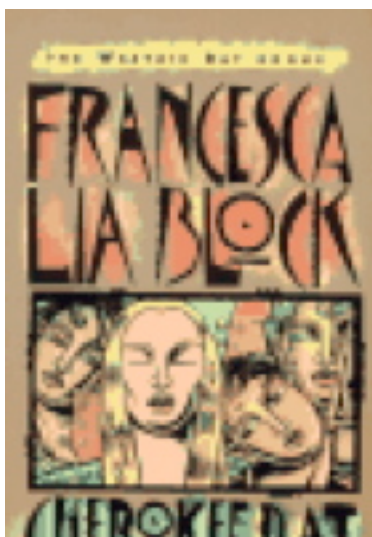
Weetzie Bat, 1989

The first book in the series, Weetzie Bat introduces us to the strange and loving Bat family: Weetzie, the punk princess; Dirk, her best friend, and Duck, Dirk's longtime lover; and My Secret Agent Lover Man, the love of Weetzie's life. The four of them share a home, friendships, and even children: Cherokee is born out of a love triangle with Weetzie, Dirk and Duck. Witch Baby, fathered by My Secret Agent Lover Man, is deposited on their doorstep by her mother, a Jayne Mansfield impersonator. A weird and wonderful family is finally pulled together, and their many adventures begin with the end of this first book.

Witch Baby, 1991



Witch Baby and Cherokee are caught in the throes of early adolescence, and we begin to understand Witch Baby's pain surrounding her almost-mother, Weetzie, and her distant father, My Secret Agent Lover Man. She feels detached from her family and sets off to find her birth mother. Along the way, she learns many interesting things about herself and her almost-family, discovering that true love isn't always contained within bloodlines.



Cherokee Bat and the Goat Guys, 1992

Cherokee, Witch Baby, and their friends Raphael and Angel Juan form a band called the Goat Guys. They play their instruments wildly and dance like warriors, and word spreads like wildfire about their talent and awesome performances. Fame isn't all it's cracked up to be, however, and the

four young members are faced with enormous first decisions dealing with sex, drugs, and rock 'n roll.

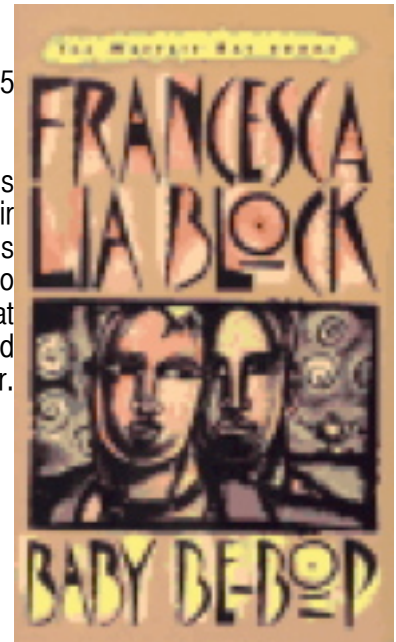


Missing Angel Juan, 1993

Angel Juan, Witch Baby's beloved significant other, sets off for New York to find himself, and she is left alone with her thoughts once again. She follows him to the Big Apple, set on seeking him out, but a ghostly encounter shows her how letting go can truly set you free.

Baby Be-Bop, 1995

The last book in the series, Baby Be-Bop is more of a prequel than a sequel. This book centers around Dirk, Duck, and how they came to terms with their homosexuality. We learn about the ghosts in Dirk's past and the obstacles his family worked to overcome, and we get a glimpse into Duck's painful decision to leave his own family behind. Block dives headfirst into the emotional storm that being true to oneself entails, and readers cannot help but follow loyally behind her.





AN OFFBEAT HEROINE SHARES A HOLLYWOOD COTTAGE WITH THREE EQUALLY QUIRKY COMPANIONS; IN PW 'S WORDS, "BLOCK'S FIRST BOOK IS RELATED IN A BREEZY, KNOWING VOICE; HER STRANGE AND SPARKLING TRIBUTE TO GROWING UP IN L.A. IS A RARE TREAT FOR THOSE SOPHISTICATED ENOUGH TO APPRECIATE IT."
PUBLISHERS WEEKLY

"Blowaway great."

Village Voice

"Transcendent."

The New York Times Book Review

"...She writes gay [men and/or] lesbians as characters rather than poster children. Books such as these can help bridge the feelings of isolation that some young adults may be experiencing."

Susie Wilde, Children's Literature

"One of the most original books of the last ten years."

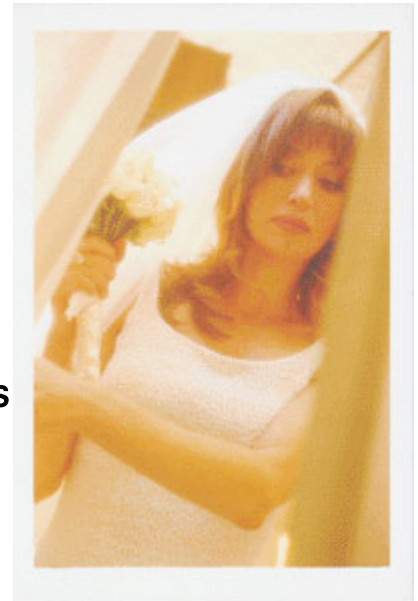
The Los Angeles Times Book Review

"A poetic roller coaster swoop".

The New York Post

"Block's writing style is a dream, minimalist yet poetic".

Sassy



A brief, off-beat tale that has great charm, poignancy, and touches of fantasy. Weetzie, now 23, is a child of Hollywood who hated high school but loves the memories of Marilyn Monroe and Charlie Chaplin, plastic palm-tree wallets, and the roller-skating waitresses at Tiny Naylor's...Weetzie and her friends live like the lilies of the field, yet their responsibility to each other and their love for [Cherokee] show a sweet grasp of the realities that matter. " 'I don't know about happily ever after. . .but I know about happily,' Weetzie Bat thought."

Anne Osborn, School Library Journal

Ain't that the truth?

Sex education is a hot topic across the country. Many school districts are facing criticism for teaching it in classrooms, and the current trend is to have children bring in signed permission slips that allow them to listen to such "raunchy" talk. While parents may argue that school is not the place for children and teenagers to be learning about sexual intercourse, those same parents are more than likely *not* talking about sex in their homes. Lots of schools have opted out of teaching sex education entirely, and those that do often skim over the most basic topics in sex ed: menstruation and "wet dreams". So where exactly are kids learning whatever it is they know about sex? Various unreliable sources: friends, television, movies, *Playboy*, an older sibling's pornography collection, and my personal favorite - the bathroom wall. Call me crazy, but I don't think that ignoring sex will make it go away. It certainly won't make people not want to do it. Sex and sexual feelings are inevitable for young men and women, and they should be acknowledged and discussed without shame.

The Weetzie Bat books have been highly controversial for a number of reasons, but one of the strongest has been its sexual content. Not only does the book feature young girls contemplating sex for the first time, it also features a gay male couple that (gasp!) has children. I will discuss Weetzie Bat and homosexuality in another article; for now, I want to focus on girls' sexual desires and their dismissal in sex education and discussions.

Females think about sex just as often as males; we want to have it, we're curious about it, and we want to know how to satisfy our desires. Yet "appropriate" sex education rarely touches on this subject. In Girls: Feminine Adolescence in Popular Culture & Cultural Theory, Catherine Driscoll discusses how girls' bodies and desires are left out of the standard sex education. Sex is portrayed as dirty and uncivilized, something to be avoided until one has entered the so-called "sacred marital contract". Surely, if sex were so wrong, then our natural inclination would be to avoid it like the plague. Ha! Hardly the case - sexual desire and curiosity are no less a part of human nature than communicating or learning. Debra Tolman, a quoted author in Driscoll's book, sums it up nicely: "Rather than being 'educated', girls' bodies are suppressed under surveillance and silenced in the schools" (151). Can you not recall the fits of stifled giggles during "Our Bodies, Our Selves" filmstrips in elementary school? Surely every grade school girl's budding breasts were the target of sexual taunts, whether they be large or small. Periods were (and still are) seen as disgusting, dirty, and completely unexpected; there was nothing more embarrassing than being seen carrying around maxi pads at school. Girls' bodies are taught as either mysterious objects of male sexual desire or anatomically alien, and Driscoll feels that this void in our standard sex education is causing developmental harm. She quotes feminist Joan Brumberg, saying:

"I don't believe girls are getting honest guidance in the way sex education is taught today...From menarche- when the focus of discussion is personal hygiene rather than the social and emotional meaning of sexuality-onward, little attention is paid to the psychological and emotional needs of girls. Sex education programs focus on either 'just say no' or how to hold off male advances or practice safe sex. These technical

approaches don't help girls decide what is a fair, pleasurable, and responsible use of their bodies" (Bromburg quoted in Winter 16, 154)

When girls have no way of knowing what is appropriate or healthy for themselves, how can they be expected to make smart decisions? How will they feel if they have sexual desire for women, having only been taught that sex with men is correct? How will they feel about saying yes to wanted sexual advances when all they have learned is "no"? I find it hard to believe that parents are shocked when their

"abstinence-only" policy produces a pregnant teen daughter (or a teenage father). I find it even harder to believe that girls are expected to remain sexless and virginal while



being fed messages about how looking sexy is top priority. Besides being ridiculously outdated and highly unlikely, being virginal "designates girls' maturity as something gifted by men" (Driscoll 141). The consequences of a lacking sex education then are twofold: it fails to adequately prepare girls for inevitable sexual activity and keeps them submissive within the male power structure.

With this attitude so deeply entrenched in our culture, it is hard to find positive role models for female desire. This is precisely why I love Francesca Lia Block: she goes where others fear to tread. In Cherokee Bat and the Goat Guys, Witch Baby and

Illustration 1: Cartoon courtesy of www.aboutmyrecovery.com

Cherokee are experiencing many firsts: performances, independence, desire, love. Cherokee's feelings for Raphael are changing, and her thoughts and fears flow in a steady stream for pages. She ponders her body and her emotions, wanting bigger breasts and darker skin or hesitating when Raphael comes to her bedroom (193). Though Cherokee may be nervous she is in control, and when she and Raphael finally do make love she is transformed.

"...Cherokee and Raphael stayed together in his bed or her tepee. She hardly slept. There was a constant tossing and tangling of their bodies, a constant burning heat. She remembered how she had slept before - a caterpillar in a cocoon, muffled and peaceful. Now she woke up fragile and shaky like some new butterfly whose wings are still translucent green, easy to tear and awaiting their color" (206).

Witch Baby finds her own feelings for Angel Juan changing, saying "I want to take his picture naked in the fog" after watching him stroke an alley cat (256). It is rare to hear female characters make such sexually bold statements, and Block weaves them artfully into her stories. Her confidence in young girls taking control of their sexuality is refreshing. Even Weetzie Bat is portrayed as an intelligent and informed woman, explaining to the girls that they need "to use birth control" (195).

By promoting readership of the Weetzie Bat series, girls and young women can draw on the strong attitudes of Block's female characters. These characters provide a positive alternative to tabloids and gossip rags, which often hint at the archaic ideas about female sexuality discussed earlier. Cherokee and Witch Baby are exemplary of modern, sexually confident young women - precisely the characters that are missing from today's mass-marketed literature.

i wanna be a supermodel: the true price of fame

What does Weetzie Bat have to do with gossip magazines? In one word: everything. Here's why.

It is no secret that people are easily influenced by what they see in the media. We want to wear what the stars wear, look like supermodels, live in fabulous Hollywood mansions, and be adored by millions of fans. But where does wishful thinking stop and the need for approval begin? Why is it that your magazines can evoke love and desire for unattainable bodies and hate for what we were blessed with at birth at the same time? Is it truly healthy to be sending these kinds of mixed messages? Girls are especially vulnerable to just such messages from various media outlets, and these commercial clouds don't always have a silver lining. It should come as no surprise that a slew of research studies have found strong correlations between "thin, ideal models of beauty, typically used in the mass media and advertising, lead to increased body dissatisfaction among adult women" (Dittmar 1). One in particular, centered on the development of body image in girls, found that commercials, TV, and movies were largely responsible for perpetuating the ideally (and unrealistically) thin body image (Dittmar 1). Surprisingly, the participants in the study were not all adult women: the "girls" were as young as four and as old as nine. In our beauty-obsessed society, is it really so shocking to see eight year old girls worrying over weight and wrinkles?

It's not only body image that has young girls in a tizzy. Research has proven that girls and boys with lower self esteem are far more likely to experience date rape and violence than their self confident peers. As if that weren't bad enough, date rape and violence are also positively correlated with eating disorders, suicide, and cyclically abusive relationships (Ackard and Neumark-Sztainer 1). A double whammy indeed: not only do those covers of Paris and Nicole make girls feel bad about themselves, they also set them up for rape, abuse, and bulimia.



Illustration 2: Mirror, mirror, on the wall...

Speaking of Paris, I find it interesting that she has made a name for herself by hypersexualizing her look, attitude, and business ventures. She's famous for partying in next-to-nothing, changing dates like she changes purses, and being the star of a seedy, homemade sex tape with a man ten years her senior. "One Night in Paris" has become a household name, and Hilton is now synonymous with sex instead of luxury hotels. Since when did such raunchy images become common enough to end up as grocery store literature? Have we really desensitized ourselves to the point of total oblivion? Parents are quick to buy Hilton's books, CD's, perfume, and clothing for their daughters; I doubt they give a moment's notice to what Paris Hilton has really come to exemplify. Britney Spears, another tabloid target, graces the cover of gossip rags on a daily basis. Her post-baby body has become the topic of choice in high school cafeterias and office break rooms alike. Everyone wants to weigh in on Britney's weight (pardon the pun) or crack yet another joke about her "unbe-weave-able" fake hair. Why is it socially acceptable to put women's bodies on display for all the world to criticize? Have we all forgotten that Britney's famous buzz cut was a reaction to having her entire life under a microscope? Most importantly, what are we telling girls when we sanction this behavior by putting it in national publications? That constant judgment of their bodies is what they have to look forward to?

It would be easy to dismiss the power that gossip rags wield over the American public. Unfortunately, they have far more influence than most people give them credit for. Jake Halpern, author of Fame Junkies, digs deep into our addiction to celebrity culture and unearths some fascinating (and discouraging) information. The Rochester Survey, given to 150 teenagers, found that girls who felt lonely and under appreciated would choose having dinner with Paris Hilton - the landslide winner - over Jesus Christ, Albert Einstein, or the current president (Halpern 116). He also discovered that gossip magazines sell so well precisely because they depend on this sense of detachment that many girls feel from their friends and families. Showcasing celebrities and discussing their personal lives allows readers to form "friendships" with actors, actresses, musicians, models, and the like (Halpern 152). So the obsession has come full circle: by selling an unattainable, overly sexualized body image, these magazines suck readers in *and*, at the same time, lower their self esteem enough to keep them craving the celebrity pseudo-friendship.

This would explain how celebrity weeklies are experiencing soaring sales while real news publications are feeling the burn. According to a Reuters article in *The New York Times*, circulation for *Us Weekly* "jumped 7.2 percent...while circulation at *People* magazine...rose about 1.2 percent" for the first six months of 2006 (Reuters 1). In 2007, the numbers were even higher: *Ok! Magazine* was up 54 percent, with *Us Weekly*, *In Touch Weekly*, and *Life & Style Weekly* all enjoying jumps of 5 to 10 percent from 2006 figures (Perez-Pena 1).

So, the question remains: exactly what does Weetzie Bat have to do with celebrity gossip magazines? Absolutely everything. Right now, these publications are negatively impacting an entire population of girls. *Us Weekly* is more popular than any newspaper in the country, and if celebrity sightings are the most insightful readings that girls are internalizing, then we have a major problem. Why not stop reading them altogether? Instead of picking up *People*, pick up Weetzie Bat. It is a rare gem indeed; it promotes healthy female relationships, tolerance, and self confidence, things that are nowhere to be found in most gossip rags. Our culture is one of celebrity worship, and that isn't likely to change anytime soon. I realize that Lindsay Lohan may sell issues, but you can't put a price on the emotional health of a human being. What is it really costing us to feast on the mishaps of famous women? And who is truly paying the price - us or them? No one wants their daughter to grow up and be the next Britney Spears, but girls will never know the difference if Britney's bald head is all they ever see. Let's give girls something good to really devour and inject a little Weetzie Bat love into their malnourished reading diets.

"lesbian" is not a four letter word!



Does this picture surprise you? Offend you? Chances are good that it caught you off guard; you may have even found yourself angry or repulsed by it. Now imagine I had used a photograph of a man and a woman kissing - what kind of reaction might that have evoked? More than likely, it would have evoked nothing at all. Homosexuality is a very controversial topic and often stereotyped or portrayed negatively in the mass media. There is an enormous population of people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, or queer, and yet cultural representation for them remains limited. Enter Dirk and Duck, two of the main characters in the Weetzie Bat book series. They are openly gay and involved intimately with each other, something that is rarely seen in young adult novels. While many parents and organizations have worked to get the books banned at certain libraries, others have praised Block for painting a different depiction of a stable family life. For her to weave two gay men into a young adult novel is fantastic, and readers everywhere are singing her praises. In an interview with graduate students at Sam Houston State University, Block revealed that an 11 year old girl had written her a letter saying that her books "expressed to her that it's okay to be gay...she eventually wrote to me later that she is

gay" (Chance 254). By writing about homosexuality, AIDS, and other hot-button issues, Block has provided positive role models for people living alternative lifestyles.

While the stereotypical, effeminate gay man has been gaining popularity in TV series like *Will and Grace* and *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*, lesbians have remained untouchable. You rarely see intimate female relationships in books, magazines, or television; the only lesbian images I've ever come across are softcore porn websites strictly for male enjoyment. Elizabeth Payne, a professor at Syracuse University, wrote a lengthy article about lesbians and their high school experience. Across the board, these girls were taunted, abused, and made fun of by their peers. They felt out of place and isolated, and had trouble connecting emotionally with most other girls. Many of them stated that they weren't interested in typically feminine things like makeup and clothing and chasing boys, and that this lack of interest alienated them from the popular girls at school. Amy, a high school senior at the time she was interviewed, said, "It's [popularity] all about you look and your [heterosexual] relationships and I didn't have either" (Payne 5). Most of the girls shared her sentiment: because of their sexual orientation, they were ostracized by their classmates. Those who sought help from teachers or counselors were often disappointed. June, another high school student, said that her volleyball coach kicked her off the team; when June confronted her about it, the coach told her it was because she was gay. Even if the girls did experience success in female friendships, rumors would often spread that the girls would have "orgies in the hallway" or be otherwise involved in sexual activity, even when the other girls were straight (Payne 10). For these girls, trying to fit into the heterosexual culture at their school was out of the question. They all expressed concern over being "bombarded with [heterosexual guidelines] though the media and widely read teen and women's magazines" and felt that there was no place for them at their schools (Payne 2).

Without equal representation in our culture, it is not possible for people in the LGBTQ community to become healthy, secure, and emotionally grounded adults. Block has done a fantastic job of portraying homosexuality as a part of life, and her books have provided a way for people of a different sexual orientation to identify with characters in literature. A large part of any reader audience is likely gay, bisexual, or trans gendered, and these books are an awesome way to tap into these readers. They will promote tolerance and acceptance of alternative lifestyles and give members of the LGBTQ community a positive, realistic voice, something that is long overdue. Homosexuals are not just overly flamboyant characters on TV shows; they are real people with real lives, and Weetzie Bat has given them a positive place within our literary culture.

On discovering francesca lia Block...

"Well, just to start a little discussion on the list, how did everyone first discover Ms. Block? I first read her in my second year (I think) of college. A *sparkly* girl in my dorm knocked on my door one Saturday morning, shoved two books (Weetzie Bat and Witch Baby) into my hands and said, "I think you will like these", then she left. I have been in love with her writing since. I found out that there were more Weetzie books and found them as quickly as I could."

"I read something in *Sassy*... the old, good *Sassy* :) They had a book review about Weetzie Bat, and I thought it sounded neat. I finally found it at my local library and ended up reading/buying the *Dangerous Angels* series, one by one. I'm working on collecting the rest..."

"Ok my turn! My name is Josalee, I'm 16...anyway my friend first got me into FLB stuff and so far I've read the first two novels in the Weetzie Bat series...but I also did a cute little brochure on her stuff for English last year. Well, ta ta."

"All of my friends in high school were obsessed with the Weetzie Bat books, so I borrowed theirs until this girl named Meghan gave me my very own set. I have copies of all of FLB's other books..."

"Legally my name is Ophelia Lurel Hamley...my fave FLB book is, well ok all of them."

"Hello, I'm new here and I just wanted to say hello...I love Francesca Lia Block, as you all may know. She is a goddess. I love all her books."

"Well, you were all incredibly gentle with me. I feel like a girl at a new school and everyone wants to be my friend, which is a dream come true! Judging from what I've read about all of you and your thoughts, this should be a really excellent experience...I discovered Francesca the Great through a Toronto zine called mad cow..."

"Hey, everybody! I just joined the list, so I figured I should introduce myself...my name is Shannon, and I'm 16... I love writing poetry, reading (especially Francesca Lia Block)...my favorite books include anything by Francesca Lia Block..."

"Not the only one who has heard of Francesca Lia Block...Hi! My name is Maryann and I am so very pleased to be a part of this ML! I never even thought to look for an ML pertaining to my favorite author (Ms. Block) but then I stumbled onto the Witch Baby ML page! The first book that I read from Francesca Lia Block was I was a teenage fairy and I just love it! And the most recent of her books that have graced my fingertips is Violet & Claire."

Name: melissa~ Age:20~ Fav Band:Bikini Kill~

Any tattoos: yep! a big butterfly on my lower back that i got a week ago for my birthday~ Any piercings: ears 9 times,navel,and tongue~ Favorite book: weetzie bat~ Favorite color: pink with glitter or black~ Hair Color: today-blonde~if you want to know more about me, just ask and if anyone is on, let's chat- I'm really bored!"

"Hello! I got my friend into reading FLB books too and she hates reading. but no one else has ever heard of her so we use some of Ms. Block's phrases between us..."

"I love Cherokee Bat and the Goat Guys too. I'm sure all of us do. :) I love all the wild animal stuff, and I love when Cherokee and Rapheal have the same dreams. I wish I had a boi or grll to dream with like that, sigh..."

On why they like francesca lia Block...

"Francesca writes real issues about real people...she writes them in fairytale-like form. She's amazing. I do recommend Dangerous Angels which is the Weetzie Bat series...so yeah, that is my input on the goddess."

"I just wanted to say that you're right that she talks a lot about little people. It's funny though because I always loved how she talked about small beautiful people. I'm fifteen years old and only 4'10", which is such a difficult thing to be especially in high school. Whenever I go places with my friends everyone's like 'Oh is that your little sister', and I

hate it when I go to a restaurant and they give me kids menus that say "For our customers 10 and under". So I guess I see her having little people as sort of a boost, like, "HEY! YOU'RE LITTLE AND SO IS THIS CHICK, SHE KICKS ASS, SO CAN YOU!"

"She does have one girl in Girl Goddess #9 named Alabaster Duchess, aka Anna, who was made fun of by some dumb boys. And Francesca wrote this inspiring line referring to Alabaster's figure; "Too voluptuous and womanly and goddess-like for nasty scuds to appreciate"- I underlined that line in pink. ^ _ ^ "

"Hey guys I know what you're saying about FLB's goddess sizes verse fairy size. I'm a 5'4 goddess sized chick and I agree with what ivy says about not having to fit in FLB's world and just making up your own. I feel that the point of her books is that it doesn't matter if you're fat or thin, you're still beautiful and cool and that every girl really is a goddess. "

"I guess what I love most about FLB is her talent for describing every minute detail with such passion and luster. I become hungry EVERY TIME she describes a meal...FLB makes me more optimistic towards life. I mean, a person who finds plastic palm tree wallets fascinating HAS to be a goddess, don't you think? ...and remember: in every girl is a goddess!"

"I really enjoyed Violet and Claire...and it reminded me a lot of my relationship with my best friend...I think that's what I love most about a lot of FLB's books...that I can relate in a way to the characters."

"I am glad Safe Love (one of FLB's short stories) is getting out there in a magazine that a LOT of teenage girls read so that they can know that 'love' doesn't just mean romance, and that love *shouldn't* just mean romance. I know my life is happier loving everything rather than being depressed cuz I don't have romantic love...I love FLB!...Life is the big romance!"

"That is something I have always said: that there isn't just 'one' love, and that being 'in love' does not necessarily mean in a sexual way or even with a person...I wonder if [people] know how limited their lives are when they think there is only one kind of ultimate love, and I challenge them to be as happy as I am."

"I was so excited to see Safe Love in *Seventeen*! In my English class we were supposed to do a speech on ourselves and the first thing I did was read them the last two paragraphs of that short story. It's the part about how Eloise loves everything and how she has so much passion about everything that she possibly can...Life's too short to not enjoy every second you can..."

"I printed and read Blood Oranges yesterday and I loved it. It was very neat because it talked about beauty and obsessiveness with wanting to be beautiful. Just a random question, but are any of you truly happy with how you look? My friend asked me that the other day and I thought about it, and the truth is I'm not. I just wondered if anyone is really satisfied, even the lanka models with the pineapple hair and stringbean legs with their movie star statue boyfriends? And who made up what beautiful is anyway?"

"I don't feel happy with the way I look and I know a lot of 'beautiful' girls who aren't happy with the way they look...it's society, they make us feel unhappy with the way we look."

"I think it really sucks when girls try to say you need to 'bring out your eyes' or whatever with makeup...I mean it is not like we have to try to make ourselves look prettier. Guys are horny enough as it is without us trying to play ourselves up. I always thought it was weird that GUYS aren't the ones that try to make themselves up to impress US."

"[FLB] talks a lot about how things look and how things feel and there is a lot of the time I feel like my world looks nothing like hers but still feels similar. I do not live in a teepee or live in L.A. or have friends named Coyote Dream Song, but sometimes life just seems like a weird fantasy. I hope that doesn't stop."

"I see what you mean about the sadness, I wouldn't want to be in her world either except for some exceptions but sometimes I wish I could make my world as magical as hers."

On how Weetzie Bat has inspired them...

"I am in a riot grrrl mood today, like I need my voice to be heard. Lots of thinking about my zine, but no work so far. I think I'm gonna make a hand art zine. it will be lots of pictures of hands and what people write on them. I got Dangerous Angels (the Weetzie Bat books) from the library today."

"I started a new list called The_Pixie_Playroom. It is for girls that like...Glitter..Francesca Lia Block ..Lipstick ..Punkrock.. Starlets..Tori Amos.. Tattoos.. Piercings... L7....Faeries..Hentai..Butterflies..Wicca..Funky Coloured Hair..Bi-Sexual or Les..Pink sparkelies..Anime ..Jncos.. Mohawks....individuality..Sex..Freedom..Vampires..Pixies....Bondage..Drugs..Eyeliner..Glam Rock..and Comic Books..And All That Other Stuff!!!!"

"Hey people. Sorry this is off topic, but I started a Francesca Lia Block web ring, and would like to get tons of people to join it. The one catch is that your page MUST have something to do with Francesca Lia Block. Even if it's one page in your site that's dedicated to her, that's good. But anyway, please please either sign up, or get people you know to sign up for it! I would really appreciate it!"

"Well dah-ling, you need to get some old wire hangers or some sort of sturdy wire. Bend them into the shape that you want your wings to be. Get a pair of tights, whatever color you want, and you can put the tights over the wire. It works to put the tights on the wings like you would on your legs so both sides are covered, ya know what I'm sayin? After that, you can decorate them with whatever you want. If you put feathers, you just get some good glue and glue the tips to the tights. And glitter on feathers works especially well when you hairspray the glitter on. To attach them you can twist the wire together before covering them with the tights or tying them together with extra tights, though the first works best. You can get some elastic and sew them on and do some major prancing and frolicking! Good luck, they're mucho fun to do/have!

"I'm trying to put together an online store of Weetzie-esque clothing. Of course I am only one person. I'd really like to do some stuff for all of the Dangerous Angels characters. If anyone out there is a hardcore Weetzie fan who's into fashion and serious about this PLEASE contact me."

On spreading the gospel of francesca lia Block...

"Chat live with popular teen novelist Francesca Lia Block as she discusses her latest book Violet and Claire on gURL.com! Tuesday November 2nd, 6pm ET (3pm PT) <http://www.gurl.com/events/flbchat/>

"Hey guys, I don't know if anyone has mentioned it but Ms. Block is featured in the magazine *Noise* which can be picked up free at JCPenny. So pick it up."

"The lady that did the slinkstericious photos for the covers of [I was a teenage fairy](#) and [Dangerous Angels](#) has these websites...look at them!"

Weetzie-inspired poetry...

Three Poems to the Unicorn

Part I

Virginity is such a cold, white word
that I long to sacrifice
to the flame -
ignite into crimson.
But would it burn my
wings
(Icarus falling from
the sun)?
Would it destroy the
pure freedom that
binds you to me,
gives me poetry,
catches unicorns?

Part II

Caged in suburbia,
The spectators beckon to you
through the bars with
tidbits of temptation.
You must sacrifice pride
to partake-
sliding the ivory spiral
between metal.
Enchanted by its pure,
lightning-white ferocity,
they tug at it
trying to prove falsehood,
to strip you of your glory-
as if you had much
left
in your box of iron.

Part III

Come to me!

Through the pine needles
and the pools of murky light
that pale
beneath a thunder of singing falls-
through the air
pregnant with green-smoke scent-
over the rich humus soil
and the wild tangle of roots.
come to me!
Your body plays the forest
like an instrument,
strumming the mirrors
of light, the mesh of
leaves.
You are wilder than the wind-
come to me!
I await you with
amber blossoms
and tears.
In my lap you surrender
a fall of dark hair.
Your defenses are fading,
crumbling into the dust of
memories...
Come to me!

Girl

I know you
Girl on the garden bed
Sleep rests upon you like a silver cloud
Your reason is abandoned to dreams
I know you
And your dreams
I see your tears behind your eyes
I feel your electric anger
And I hear your breath
You are a girl
Female even in your thoughts
You are a woman
And your body changed your mind
Strong feminine warrior
Beaten with a sword
Only to counter with music
Degraded with words
Only to sing
Washed in sorrow
Only to be cleansed
You wrestle with beauty
And what you are to others
Woman, lady, girl, female...

Why do you never scream?
Isn't it better sometimes to be ugly, angry?
I wonder about your body
And how much of it you think is you
If you put lipstick on your soul
And spray perfume on your spirit
If your mind wears jewelry
And your thoughts enjoy the company of men
Are you female?
Or is your body just a female machine?
Does your mind decide who to love
Because of your body's attractions?
Do you really like pink?
They identified you, labeled you from birth
"Girl."
"It's a girl."
And you remain beautiful
Silver and sleek
Gentle, rosy, musical, light
Eyelashes and fingernails
Long hair and pierced ears
Identified with goddesses and queens for all time
Aren't you angry?
Aren't you a person first?
All your real beauty
Goes with you first
Not with your silk stockings
Why are you so afraid to give this up?
Why must you add false beauty?
I know you
You are a symbol
You are a girl

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The New Road Home

Claire Stoltzfus

“Wow Clarita, I can’t believe you’re up and going at 7:30 in the morning. How is the drive so far?”

“*Callaté, mamá.* It’s great. I have a full tank and a full pack of cigarettes. Couldn’t be better.” What I was really wondering is why she wasn’t there with me, coaching me through the steps of this huge change in my life. “We’re heading through Tijeras canyon now.”

I had driven through that canyon more times than I could remember. It signaled the beginning of the trip to Grandma and Grandpa’s house every spring break, summer vacation, Thanksgiving and Christmas. As I lit my third cigarette of the morning I realized that this would be the last time I’d be driving through the canyon as a child. My Jeep was loaded to the roof with boxes of my belongings, while my Grandfather’s old pickup truck carried my furniture on the road ahead of me. My goldfish slobbered in a large Rubbermaid tub that was placed carefully on the back seat of my car. I turned my Ipod as loud as my cheap speakers would tolerate and thought again that this was the last time I’d see the red stone walls of the canyon towering on either side of me. The next time I’d drive through it I’d be an adult: financially and emotionally mature, a new woman of the Midwest.

Chingado, this it is. What does this mean, really? I actually begin to panic as I consider about all the responsibility and uncomfortably unfamiliar situations that I would inevitably experience in my maturity. *Dios mío*, where is my mommy during this my journey of my independence? She had to work and sent her boyfriend, Don, in her place. She was the all encompassing mother: kissing my *ya-yas* and taking me to soccer practice; helping me with homework and teaching me the secrets of her kitchen; showing me how to pitch a tent and start a campfire. She was both my mother and my father, even when she was married and gave me stepfathers. And now rather than have her navigating our way across the green desert, it is he who driving the truck that I am following.

Carnuel, Sedillo, Tijeras. The familiar exits whizzed by me as I drove further and further away from everything I’d ever know. Am I really doing this? *Mierda.* Why am I moving again? Nursing school, right. *Joder.* An opportunity to experience a new city and culture and climate. That’s what I wanted: the chance to start over. Or start at all, really. At twenty-one I had experienced nine different countries and innumerable cultures, but never permanently. I had never moved out of my home state of New Mexico. And now I’m moving my entire life to a city I’d only been to twice before. Damn me and my impulsivity.

Dios mío, I think I might pass out. I feel warm tears running down my cheeks now, and my hands are shaking at I try to light another Red. What’s wrong with me? Two weeks ago I couldn’t stop talking about my new apartment in the new city with its two huge bedrooms and front porch. The big red brick building with bright white columns that represented my passage into adulthood, to fiscal responsibility and going to bed early. And now I was having a miniature breakdown as I drove through the canyon I admittedly hated because it’s snaking pattern made me carsick every time.

What strikes me as I calm myself is the dichotomy this move has presented. On one hand all I’d wanted to do is assert myself as an individual, different from my friends who would stay in ease of New Mexican lifestyle for the rest of their lives. I wanted to be separate from my mother, emotionally mature and financially independent; able to move the 789 miles on my own. I wanted to be able to do it all by myself, like a big girl, like a young woman should. But I felt misguided without her there with me.

When I first made up my mind to move, I expected that she would be there to hold my hand along the way. She fostered my desire to experience new places from very early on, so it was just natural that she'd be with me on this voyage also. When she told me that she'd make sure Don would be available to help me move I was stunned. Don? The man who'd only been in our lives for a year? *He* was going to help me pack up my life and move it halfway across the country? Ok, *madre mía*, sounds great. I'll do this alone like I've done everything else. I'll pretend not to care that you've shoved me out of your nest. When baby birds fall from their mother's care they either die or learn to fly, right? Even if I don't fly right away, I've learned the invaluable skill of pretending. *No te preocupa, mamá*. I'll be fine.

Calmaté, Clarita. It's my voice talking, but it's her I hear in my head. It's not fair for me to be upset with her for not physically being there: I never actually asked her to be. I just assumed she would be, and I didn't let her know that I really wanted her there when she told me she wouldn't be. I didn't want to ask for her help because I had never seen her ask anyone else for help. She never hounded my father for child support, she never showed her pain when another significant other would leave, she never cried when she would separate her things from their things. She was so emotionally rich, but yet she never let me see her pain; she was always strong for me. I never saw her fear or grieving through all of the disappointments and regrets. I wouldn't show my fear because I had never seen hers, and letting everyone know how I was truly anxious would be showing weakness. Asking her to change everything in her schedule so she could help me would be completely counterintuitive: my moving was about *mi individualismo*.

Every time we stop I rush to the back of the Jeep where my fish rested. I open the lid and ask them how they are doing, let them know that everything was ok. We are just taking a little trip and we'd be there soon. Their bulbous eyes look up at me and assure me that they're really ok. I stick my fingers in their water and check the temperature to make sure they're comfortable. They swim to the top of the tub and nibble on my fingers, all the while gently rocking side to side even though the Jeep was stationary. They must be terrified, I keep thinking. With all the stress of going from their tank to a tub in the back of a moving vehicle they'll surely die. While we're driving my heart skips with every unexpected lane change and bump in the road. I look back to check on my babies with every draw off my cigarette. *Pinche madre*, I'm already down to three from a full pack and it's not even noon. We'll have to stop soon so I don't go into shock from lack of nicotine in my bloodstream. I need to check on the fish soon anyway.

What I didn't realize then was that with every reassuring word to my *pescaditos* I was really comforting myself. I was my mother, talking to my grossly dependent four year old self. Besides the typical emotional rift that happens in adolescence, my mother and I have always been very close. Rather than the typical sisterly bond, ours is far beyond that. She didn't shield me from everything, but instead let me experience them on my own. Sometimes I felt very alone, but anytime I'd doubt myself I could feel her presence urging me not to give up.

Yes, *mamá*, I'll be brave for you, like you've always been for me. Every time we stop I check on the fish and feel a quick wave a relief that they're all still alive. Just keep swimming, that's all I want. I talk to them soothingly but loudly and draw stares from the truckers at the gas station. I don't care that they hear me and continue telling the fishies that they are doing really well, what fearless *pescaditos* they are.

I haven't questioned my impulsive decision to move until this moment. It really was real. All my planning and pinching pennies were all leading to this moment of me dragging all my belongings across the green and yellow map. When I stretch my girlish hand across the roadmap it didn't seem all that far. Only a fingers length, really. But that finger is going to take a total of fourteen hours and four tanks of gas to navigate along. Was I going to be ok living on my own in a different world than I'd known? Of course, Claire. I hear my best friend's voice reassuring me. You'll make so many new friends when you move, Yadi had said to me over and over. My mind wanders to our last round of karaoke my last night in

town. It seemed that everyone I'd ever been acquainted with came to wish me luck. We all drunkenly sang "*Lean on Me*" and "*Friends in Low Places*", toasting each other between the songs. I brought the house down with my brazen, off key rendition of "*I Will Survive*." I was going to survive, right? I kept telling them not to worry; I'd be back in no time. But we all knew that I wouldn't be. Rarely a wanderer like me will leave the comfort of home and ever really want to go back. The only person I was sure I'd see again was Yadi, *mi mejor amiga*. She is the Puerto Rican version of me, and I the Irish-German edition of her.

The hums from the crevices in the side of the road tell me I've been dazing off again. *Ay joder*, how many miles is Kansas again? *Jesús Cristo*. The monotonous green pastures were putting me to sleep and already making me crave the mountain and valleys from home. Mom calls again. *¡Maldito mamá!* I almost resent her checking in on me, and wonder why she bothers to at all. If she wasn't physically there I didn't want her to be at all. I am an adult now; she doesn't need to start checking in. As I let the call go to voicemail I realize what a child I am. The more and more I try to grow up, the less I accomplish. Moving was the first step I'd actually taken to become an adult. But the internal fight with my mother continued. I turn off the music and roll down the windows, hoping the sounds of the road would bring clarity to my emotional constipation. *Pendejo*, why can't I just admit what's happening?

I wasn't fighting with my mother; I was fighting with the child inside myself that kept screaming how scared I was. I was ignoring the little girl and telling my adult self that moving was no big deal, but the little girl got the better of me. The little girl cried while the young woman stifled her sobs with puffs from the cigarette that shook between her unsteady fingers. The reality *es que tengo miedo*.

What I keep thinking about is how excited I am to see the person I would be in this new place. No one knew me; I would be Claire without all of the preconceptions and biases that my friends had already established. It's a natural process that occurs in our lives: the phenomenon of conformation. I would be able to break the "rules" that I had followed so diligently back home. I wouldn't have to quiet my excitement anymore. It is such a liberating realization: I could completely be myself. I felt like a character in Chelsea Grigery's "Our Last B Flat" graduating from high school. I was the awkward geek who was finally able to break away from the stereotypes my friends had forced on me as I desperately tried to develop emotionally.

There were things that I didn't like about myself growing up, and moving into unknown soil was the perfect way to change those things without people commenting on my different behavior. No other city will replace *mi Albuquerque*, but sometimes the people there are so comfortable with the person they know they don't allow you to change. I will always be *Clarita* to my mother, *Claire* to my family, and *Claire Bear* to my friends. This allure of being able to be myself, even though I wasn't really sure who that person is, is almost intoxicating.

As we pull into a Motel 6 I roll my window down and a thick blanket of humidity slowly wraps itself around my body. It took twelve hours of driving for me to realize what my emotional constipation was about. Twelve hours, alone with my thoughts, for me to figure out that this move represents me establishing myself as an individual, and it is testing my concept of myself with every single mile. One thing that is clear to me is how much I do want to move. I feel like a perpetual inexperienced adult if I don't experience living in another place, a place very different from the comfort of my *desierto*. I am as emotionally ready as I'll ever be. But I'm still anxious and scared, scared that no one will like this *nueva mexicana*. I am scared the Midwest rains and humidity will dissolve everything I know about myself.

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A Window View of the Classroom Rick DeVault

I'm headed to Center High School for the first of three days of classroom observation. Our class has been assigned an ethnography paper requiring us to assess literacy education firsthand. I had considered observing at my daughter's middle school in our more affluent suburban district. However, I settled on a lower income district in part because I'm interested to see what differences the socio-economic setting brings since my preconceived notion is that kids are kids and much alike wherever you go.

I briefly lived in the district's neighborhood many years ago in the chaotic early days on my own after high school. Since I have a few extra minutes I detour and drive up and down the rundown streets I had frequented years earlier. The houses are marked by chipped paint, bare, weathered wood, sagging roofs, corrugated patches and missing porches. Just like I remember it...Wow, a lifetime ago. The area was rough, working class when I lived there and it has gone downhill since. Now peppered with multi-story apartment complexes, enough time has passed that they too have fallen into disrepair. I make my way back toward the school as memories of that time return. In the distance I see the school building and a long forgotten night comes to mind. Could it be? *No way*. Turning into the parking lot the front face of the building comes into view. Unbelievable. It's the same school.

My mid-life college assignment has brought me face to face with one of many youthful indiscretions from my tumultuous transition to adulthood. One night back then a group of us were cruising the neighborhood, dangerously drunk, and ended up in this parking

lot. We were drinking, roughhousing, swearing, name-calling and drinking some more. Someone got the bright idea to throw their empty bottle at the long row of windows that covered nearly the entire face of the school. The same face I was looking at now. The shot fell well short but spurred others into the act. Several missed entirely or hit the adjacent brick. Finally, a couple hit windows and the shattering glass broke up the party. Everyone dove into the car screaming and hooting. In the squeal and smoke of burning tires we were gone.

Parked, I stare at the long row of glass remembering that night, that time. Finally, I decide it wasn't a lifetime ago – it was a different world. I can't even remember who I was, coming out of my broken childhood, or how I made it out of that shattered world into this one so far removed. A little somber, I head up the walk and into the school.

When my contact arranged my observation, she wanted me in her advanced Language Arts class but the schedule wouldn't work so she told me I'd be in Brandon Jones's class, with the "normal" kids. The escort security has called arrives and we navigate the metal detectors and make our way to the classrooms. She describes the district as "...a community really. As an independent district, nearly all the students live within 15 minutes of here." We're early for my class so we briefly sit in the advanced 10th grade class where students are working on punctuation. Within one or two problems I conclude that my 7th grade daughter could correctly complete all of the exercises on the worksheet. The bell rings and I'm escorted to Brandon's classroom.

Brandon Jones is an affable young man. Tall, bearded, with a warm, engaging smile and a face that says this is someone easy to be friends with. He welcomes me, expresses interest in my project, and briefs me on the class plan for the next several days. Today, Wednesday, after morning announcements we'll move to the library where the students will begin typing a rough draft of their writing assignments. They've already spent some time in earlier sessions working on prompt sheets. Brandon has been leading them through a compare/contrast essay using a series of template pages, each prompting them for a part of the writing.

In the classroom I sit against one wall, not really the back of the class, since desks are aligned so one half of the room faces the other half. Immediately I notice one difference from our suburban district – the classroom is largely barren, with little instructional material on the walls, and bookshelves that appear to have numerous copies of the same book and little else. Students take note of me as they fill into the class over the next several minutes. They are made up of mostly tenth graders - sixteen students, thirteen boys and three girls, ten black and six white.

Today is March 14th, "pi" day, and the announcements are interspersed with various pie jokes that animate the students with groans, laughs, and a steady banter of interjections. Afterwards, we move to the library. As we pass through the library's detectors a student, Donald, begins arguing loudly with Brandon. Donald says he isn't allowed in the library while Brandon tells him to stay with the class. Donald continues protesting, "I can't use the computers." Brandon finally quashes the dispute and we make our way in. Later he tells me that Donald has lost his computer privileges for the year by getting through the firewall. "He must have had multiple offenses and accessed forbidden material for such severe punishment," Brandon observes.

We settle into the library. All of the kids except Donald are at desks with computers. Some get right to work but many talk or stare at the assignment or off into space. Brandon circulates, nudging them to get started, running his fingers in a typing motion and telling them "lets go." Eventually most are working. I take a couple minutes to survey the room. The library appears new and very neatly kept. It has an open, expansive feel, with high ceilings, an atrium style, and a long wall with rows and rows of windows – the inside of the windowed face I saw earlier from outside.

Away from the computers, Donald sits at a table with pencil and paper, not working but his eyes following Brandon around the room. Several of the students sit doing nothing,

one with his head lain on the desk. Brandon stops at each, asking a question about their paper, making a suggestion, telling them to get started, anything to get them going. He stops at the boy with his head on the desk and asks him about his essay. After several attempts to interest him in discussing the paper, Brandon instructs him to get started. The boy sits still, no response, so Brandon tells him again, "Come on, get out your papers." Finally, the boy retrieves the papers and pretends to look at them until Brandon moves on.

Fifteen minutes into our library time a rather plain girl with straight brown hair enters, speaks with Brandon, then takes a seat at a computer and gets right to work. I watch her for a bit and note that she seems to be a hard worker. She is typing away in no time and throughout the period she works diligently, never getting distracted or talking to the other students around her. I resolve to ask Brandon her name and mentally file her as a good student.

After class Brandon and I talk for a few minutes. This is his second year at Center High School. He taught the previous two years at Rockhurst High School, also in language arts. "Differences?" I ask. Motivation is one he says. At Rockhurst, it was more like a college prep class and the students took responsibility for their own work. "Here," he said, "I spend a good deal of time trying to get them to just *do* the work. A lot of the kids don't have a great home life and they don't get the support at home." After our brief chat Brandon is off to his next class as I head out to leave for the day.

The hallway between classes is a gauntlet, navigated by turning, side-stepping and dodging the hustle and bustle of students rushing to meet their friends, greeting each other and milling about. There is strong security presence here. Uniformed guards seem to know all the students and walk the halls chatting and joking yet maintaining visible authority. As I wind my way toward the security desk a man who looks like a coach, wearing a school golf shirt and shorts, spies me and breaks off his conversation to come toward me. "Can I help you with something?" he asks. Before I can respond he follows with, "Who are you here for?" After eyeing my visitor tag and hearing my explanation he makes sure I know the way to the security station within sight fifty feet away.

Thursday I'm permitted in without an escort since I had provided security with my schedule for the three days. I wait outside Brandon's class when the bell rings and we chat between periods. "Whew" he says sounding exhausted, "that was a wild one. They're getting a little antsy since spring break starts after tomorrow. Hopefully this one will be better." In spite of the difficulties he'd had getting the kids to work, and the altercation with Donald, everything was pretty orderly yesterday so I figure he's embellishing a little.

Brandon prepares and I watch the students interact as the room fills. The plain girl comes in and while the rest of the kids talk or mill around, she immediately sits down, retrieves a hardback library book from her backpack and starts reading. For the first time I see that unlike most of the girls, she doesn't appear to be wearing makeup, which accentuates the plain image I first observed, and I realize she is actually pretty. And, very studious I note. I remind myself again to ask Brandon about her.

We are reviewing vocabulary words for tomorrow's test. After that we'll edit the essays so they can be finished Friday at the library. Brandon asks the kids to get out their vocabulary worksheets and walks the class calling out words. Students volunteer the definitions or he calls on someone. Most of the kids don't have worksheets out. "T.J. where is your review sheet?" Brandon asks. T.J. replies, "I got your words," and pulls out the page. A few more dig out the pages after some teeth pulling.

Midst a continuous stream of student commentary and chatter, Brandon attempts to maintain order and elicit effort from the kids. "Fast, the word is Fast, Rennell?" "I can go fast," one boy calls out. "No, it means to go without eating," Brandon replies. Rennell slowly and with difficulty reads the vocab sentence for "Fast" as Donald throws in, "You want me to fast?" "Shut up boy," Taylor hollers at Donald across the room.

"Brianna, back to your assigned seat please" Brandon instructs. Brianna mumbles a protest and Brandon replies "I would still like you over here." She slowly gets up and returns to her seat. Anthony, sharply dressed and adorned with chains, passes an MU brochure to his

friend. "Put that away please" Brandon says. Anthony very slowly folds the brochure and puts it away, never breaking eye contact with Brandon. Haltingly, we make our way through "tarnish," "vault," and "whimper," which triggers a minute or two of mass whimpering that Brandon must eventually break to keep moving. Finally, Brandon completes the review and reminds the class of tomorrow's test. By this point its clear the class is getting harder to manage.

We turn to the work on essay sheets and Brandon exhorts "There are five points for completing each page in the draft...twenty-five easy points, so don't blow this off." A few begin work and Brandon circulates attempting to get everyone started. The kids are to bring their essay sheets to him for feedback. Meanwhile the work, such as it is, goes on. Taylor is up, walking around. T.J. walks over to Brandon to hand him his essay and fakes falling, hitting one of the boys, everyone laughs. Few are actually working. As T.J. returns he grabs Taylor. "Stop grabbing my fat, dog," she shrieks pulling away. "You got dogs," Donald calls out. "I got like nine dogs," Taylor replies. Taylor walks toward Donald and he continues, "How do you feed them?" Taylor says, "I ain't ate in two days...we got some bread but no peanut butter and jelly...I ain't ate at home in two days...I had some lunch yesterday at school." Taylor is now standing at Donald's desk and most of the class is watching their exchange. Brandon momentarily breaks off from the student he's helping, "All right, Taylor...this is the fourth time I've had to ask." "I ain't heard you," Taylor replies. "Selective hearing," Brandon responds and Taylor repeats, "I ain't heard you once." She makes her way back toward her desk.

Brandon stops to tell Johnny, who sits watching the classroom theatrics, with nothing on his desk, "Johnny, get out your essay sheets and get started." He does nothing. Brandon tells him again and Johnny replies "I'll do it over break and turn it in on the 25th." "No, get started now," Brandon insists. "Why do I have to do it now, I can do it over break," Johnny maintains. Brandon attempts to reason with him and finally Johnny gets out his paper. Brandon moves on to another student, repeating the exercise, and Johnny lays the sheet on the desk and keeps watching the class.

Taylor has made her way back toward her desk and stops to argue playfully with Moses shrieking an insult in response to some comment he's made. Classmates start encouraging him to hit her, four or five saying, "do it," "do it," and a couple others saying, "bet he won't." Taylor, catching on, asks, "Bet he won't what?" "Hit you," someone replies. "I bet he won't too," she responds threateningly. Moses stands to face her. Anthony stands up behind Taylor and grabs her from behind, pulling her back into him. She turns on him, and Anthony glances my way to see how I'm reacting to the charade. I'm smiling at his play attack and he grins and shoves Taylor back toward her desk. This stuff is better than reality TV.

Brandon attempts to bring Donald's nonstop chatter under control. "Donald, seriously, work on your rough draft." He physically stands between Donald's desk and the other side of the class, spreads his arms as if to block Donald's shot, and says, "I am a wall...you focus." Order is never really gained and Brandon does what he can to help the kids that are working.

Maintaining discipline is a matter of how far to let things go. It doesn't appear possible to simply maintain quiet and steady work. The kids press, challenge, and defy, constantly testing where that boundary is. Brandon attempts to maintain a balance between gently prodding them to participate and a mild discipline that achieves conformance from most while avoiding confrontation with the uncooperative students as long as they aren't outright disruptive.

Once the bell moves the free-for-all to the halls, I have to rush off to my classes so I won't be able to visit with Brandon. I've picked up on half the kid's names and am anxious to ask Brandon more about them, but that will have to wait until tomorrow.

Friday begins much like the previous day. As the classroom fills the studious girl repeats her ritual of arriving early and immediately entering a hardback library book. By

now I've noticed something else. This is the third day and I've never seen her speak to or even make eye contact with another student. Now I'm starting to wonder.

It's my last observation day, and the last day before spring break for the kids. Brandon starts with the vocab test, "Everything off your desk except a pencil and paper." After various objections Brandon responds, "Guys, do you want a zero on your quiz?" "No," Donald interjects. Brandon continues, "...then keep talking." The class responds, "Then keep talking?" Donald jumps in, "What? Then keep talking? That didn't make no sense." Brandon tries to stifle the chatter with, "Keep talking if you want a zero on your quiz," and finally the class quiets down and works on the quiz.

Afterwards we make our way to the library and Brandon comments on the classroom discipline. "At first I tried to really clamp down on the kids and it only made them want to challenge me. Half of it is selling the kids on me....so that they'll work for me. That's a lot different than it was at Rockhurst." I tell him, "Your job reminds me of the quote I heard about mothering, that it's like being pecked to death by small ducks." I add, "Only with mothering, at least they're your ducks."

At the library the students work to finish their drafts before spring break. I finally get to ask Brandon more about the students. "What about the girl with straight brown hair who's always reading?" I ask. "Kim" he replies. "Is she one of the better students?" I ask. "Well..." pausing, he says, "she reads constantly so I thought she'd be a better writer, but I've had a hard time keeping her focused and on task. There are some issues at home. I don't know the whole story and I've never seen her parents. Her brother is a freshman in college and he came to her parent-teacher conference and was concerned about her." I realize now that what I had interpreted as her being focused and undistracted by the other students was actually her isolating herself.

Brandon continues to describe the environment. "A lot of the kids live in apartments in the area and often only have one parent at home. Some of them don't see the other parent, or even know them. They have brothers and sisters that are from different dads. It's a real mix of situations. Moves are common. The boy that I was going over the papers with before we came to library just enrolled last week. He hadn't been in school at all this year, and it's March. And since he enrolled last week this is only the second day he's been here."

"I read what they write and sometimes they talk to me about things. Things that come out shock you. One kid in the class had been shot last semester. I was like...*you've been shot?* Kids lose family members to drugs and violence – one kid's brother was killed. And pregnancy is a big issue. A girl in my other class has had two abortions this year. She came and asked me what I thought she should do."

Brandon returns to helping the kids with their papers and I watch the class. Donald sits at the table without a computer, working on his essay. Taylor works hardest and fastest, and then uses the extra time from finishing early to wander and flirt. Anthony, once again sharply dressed with chains and sunglasses on his head, types away at his keyboard. His father is a teacher at the district's alternative school. Anthony pushes Brandon too, but only so far. He hides his respect for authority but it's there. He must have plans if he's carrying around an MU brochure. Kim spends the entire class staring at her computer screen. I never see her work, read, or talk to another person, and I wonder even more about her world. At one of the computers away from our class sits a boy working on a form on the computer and I see over his shoulder that it is the FAFSA.

Sitting with these kids for several days you glimpse their worlds and begin to care about them. I think more discipline is needed but Brandon says that didn't work as well, and you can't help but have faith in the guy. And, the disruptions probably are worse because of impending spring break. The one certainty is that he cares. He patiently wages a battle each day to show respect and concern for each kid while trying to maintain order and class activity. I admire the way he tries to enter their worlds, as much as he can or as much as they'll let him. Looking around the room, there is potential in each face, and troubles in so many of them; Brandon can see this, and cares. The kids are the same everywhere, but it's obvious these kids face different challenges than do many in our

more affluent suburban schools. These challenges carry into the classroom affecting all facets of education, including safety, nutrition, curriculum, instruction and discipline.

Finally the bell rings and the kids head out to finish the day and start spring break. I thank Brandon for letting me observe and we leave the library together. As we do I take a last glance back and see the one or two remaining kids gathering their things, and Kim, still sitting, unmoving, staring at her computer screen. Brandon heads to his next class and I down the hall through the gauntlet of kids and their social turfs and the mingling security guards. On the way out I'm again stopped, this time by a fellow with a crisp dress shirt and tie, who asks if he can help me. I tell him thanks but I'm just leaving and he watches me make the remaining thirty steps to the security station.

I walk out to the parking lot and sit on a bench in front of the school making notes and thinking about the past three days. The overwhelming security at the school is saddening, but necessary. It's warm for March, and bright. The sun reflects off the school's windowed face and mirrors back to me a portrait: the flagpole flapping at my right, the walkway and row of benches on either side, and me, sitting there, staring back at me. I had been in the same broken world as some of these kids. How did I make it out? It must have happened gradually but I can't reach it and put together exactly how I overcame the shattered glass. Somewhere on the other side of that shattered glass sits Kim, staring blankly at her computer screen, her broken world also unreachable. I wonder if she will get out. I cry.

Firecrackers at Night Rhia Cooper

I was just about to turn ten years old when we moved away from there. I realize now that we were only there for a short time, but it really felt like an entire lifetime to me. The corner of 59th and Tracy in Kansas City was my home, my world, my entire life. There was a decent elementary school across the intersection, a crack house across the street, another crack house down the street, people playing spades on the corner, and people shooting craps in our driveway. The neighborhood teens would gather at the corner to talk about school or to plan the next fight on the block. When the girls were preparing to fight, they would braid back their hair to keep it out of reach, pull off their jewelry, and put Vaseline on their faces, necks and arms to make it hard for their opponents to land punches. It probably wasn't the best surroundings to try to raise three little girls, but it had to suffice until we could move to a better place.

Reading Patricia Smith's poem "What It's Like to Be a Black Girl (For Those of You Who Aren't)" brought back a whole river of memories of living in the 'hood. I was instantly transported back fifteen years in time to the two-bedroom white house with green shutters, and a slightly crumbling stone porch where my mother and father raised me and my two younger sisters. We would jump rope on the concrete strip in the front yard with a girl that lived next door, make friendship bracelets on the front porch, and on a good day, we could watch the boy down the street ride his horse as he got ready for the Black Rodeo shows. The front yard was a great place, but the backyard was our jungle, a place where my sisters and I could truly let our imaginations run wild, but we couldn't go play back there. "You could cut yourself or catch some crazy disease!" was Daddy's explanation. I discovered later that there were bullet shells and other random debris; the addicts from the crack houses were throwing their needles back there, and the alcoholics were tossing their bottles. I can see now that my father was really just trying to protect us from the dangers of the 'hood, but I thought he was oppressing us. However, he was simply scared of the bullets.

Every Fourth of July and New Year's Eve, my father would pack all three of his little girls into the back of his old light-green Buick, with its lightly tattered and worn bucket seats, and take us to see the fireworks displays around the city. We would go to wherever the fireworks were being shown, like the Royals Stadium, or Worlds of Fun. However, my favorite was down at the Riverfront. The loud popping as the firecrackers burst into brilliant beautiful blues, greens, purples, and reds made us cover our ears and shriek in utter delight, running around fascinated with these colorful dry raindrops and shooting stars. When it was time to leave, there was always the tearful, "But can't I take it home, Daddy?" Yet, the firecrackers never came home with us.

Prior to our move from the 'hood, I had only actually seen the kids in our neighborhood playing with firecrackers in the street once, but they did it all the time—not just on holidays, but all throughout the year because they had bought too many. They were yelling with glee and running around trying not to get popped or burned by the glowing showers of firecracker smithereens. My sisters and I couldn't have our own fireworks like the other kids on the block for fear that we might hurt ourselves, or burn the house down. What was even more terrible was that we couldn't even go watch as the other children popped their firecrackers. Instead, we were forced to stay in the house, away from the windows, with the lights off and curtains drawn, and come up with other ways to entertain ourselves, like watching the fireworks displays from around the nation on television. We would lay in bed at night, listening for the firecrackers; they didn't always come on holiday nights though. More often than not, we would hear firecrackers on some regular night, followed by the screeching of tires and then complete silence. Instead of a lot of laughing, we heard absolutely nothing. Sometimes after we heard firecrackers at night, the next morning one of my friends, or one of their family members would disappear. I thought perhaps, they went to follow the firecrackers to the place they went once they faded away, because they never returned.

One night in particular, after firecracker-watching, was extremely difficult for me. We had just returned from the absolute best fireworks show I had ever seen; I thought the sky would be gold and purple and blue for days after that show. After returning home, disappointed by not being able to bring firecrackers with me, my friends invited me out to pop bottle rockets. Much to my dismay, my father was not allowing any of his daughters out to "pop out their eyes or burn off their fingers." Devastated, I tried to satiate my need to see and hear these magnificent little balls of fire by playing card games with my sister. However, I easily tired of playing Egyptian Rat Slap, and War, and Go fish! I grew restless and just couldn't shake the feeling of being deprived, so I decided I was going to see those firecrackers that night.

As I waited in my bed for the house to get quiet, I thought about how wonderful it would be to see the fireworks up close. I was giddy with excitement. Then I heard the signal to get up; my father was sound asleep, snoring. I carefully got out of my bed, slipped into my shoes, and inched out of my room toward the front door. Just as I was starting to slowly

turn the knob, I heard the popping. *The firecrackers!* Fearing that I might miss them, I flung the door open and raced onto the porch. I was almost at the steps, feeling the exhilaration of success, when I saw the black car with the black windows and no lights stopped, facing the wrong way, on the other side of the street. There were people hanging out of its windows and they had firecrackers! But their firecrackers weren't bursting into color; they were leaving huge holes in the house across the street. Suddenly, I felt myself being jerked back into the house. My father was breathing hard and had tears in his eyes. "Are you ok? Are you hurt? Answer Me! Are you ok!?!?" he was yelling and asking questions at the same time, all the while patting me down and turning me around. "I'm ok, I just wanted to see the firecrackers, but they didn't look the same. Why didn't they look the same?"

That night, I found out what a bullet was and what it did. They sound like firecrackers, but instead of creating beauty and happiness, they carve out images of death and terror. We moved from 59th and Tracy shortly thereafter. Looking back, I now understand why my father kept us indoors, away from the windows, drowning in darkness. It wasn't that he wanted to keep us from having fun, we could always have fun. He wanted to protect us from the dangers of growing up in a Black neighborhood. He was protecting us from the firecrackers at night.

About the Authors

Anitha Luy is a freshman Pharmacy student.

Katie Sisil is a non-traditional student. She lives in Kansas City, but is from a small town in Southeastern Kansas. She served in the military and worked in the medical field from 1987-2002.

Jace Ferguson will begin his senior year at UMKC in the fall of 2008. He is majoring in computer science and secondary education – mathematics. Upon graduating, Jace plans to teach computer science courses at a local high school.

Joseph Weimholt joined the army out of high school, where he served for five years. Afterwards, he decided to get his BSN. He has been going to school for two years now. Joseph enjoys writing and telling this story really helped him to express emotions and fears that he had been harboring for years.

Katie Sontheimer is from Kansas City and is majoring in Chemistry.

Heather Nurmikko is a sophomore studying History with plans for graduate school. She lives in Kansas City with her husband and Great Dane.

Kathryn Hembree is pursuing careers in medicine and law. She enjoys poetry, reading, romance languages, and traveling. She hopes to eventually focus her passion for writing into the publication of a novel.

Laurie Ray is a pre-Law student. She is out to change the world, loves her feral cat William Wallace, and hopes one day to see tabloid journalism become a thing of the past. FIGHT THE POWER!

Claire Stoltzfus was born and raised in New Mexico and attended the University of New Mexico until her desire to experience a new way of life brought her to Kansas City. She is currently working on her BSN and BA in Spanish at UMKC. Things she misses about New Mexico include her family, good New Mexican food and mild weather.

Rick DeVault is an Economics major. He is a non-traditional student who spent twenty years in software development before embarking toward law school. He and his thirteen year old daughter will spend the fall 2008 semester in Cambridge, England on study abroad, partly funded by the IFSA and Eddie Jacobsen / Hy Vile Scholarships.

Rhia Cooper is a senior majoring in Physics. She enjoys math and science, but also has a really strong interest in creative writing. She grew up in Kansas City, and has lived here for 25 years. Upon graduation, she plans to work with Teach for America before continuing her career pursuits in the aerospace industry.

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