

2019
Sosland Journal
of Student Writing

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Presented by the University of Missouri-Kansas City English Department
through the generosity of Rheta Sosland-Huwitt and the Sosland family.

2019
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of Student Writing

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Submission is open to UMKC students in writing classes. Guidelines are available at our website:

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Advanced Level

Ilus W. Davis Writing Competition Winner

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Editor's Note

In the following pages, thirteen talented writers not only demonstrate their command of writing, research, and academic scholarship, but they also ask us to rethink our attitudes and actions in light of their effects on the future of our communities. Although *The Sosland Journal* has a tendency to attract submissions that surround current events and issues—due to both the structure of many writing classrooms as well as the personal interests of our writers—the UMKC and HSCP writers for this issue highlight the interaction between social topics and the physical space of Kansas City in a unique way. From the poignant discussions of the Troost Avenue racial divisions to examinations of local monuments, such as the Liberty Memorial, these writers show us again and again that they take seriously the space in which they live, the ways they influence it, and their desire to leave the communities they touch a little better than they found them.

It is the hope of the editorial team that the essays can be used to spark classroom conversations about such issues. To that end, we have included content-related discussion questions at the end of each essay. Since this journal is often a part of writing classrooms, however, we have also included style-related discussion questions that highlight the strategies and techniques these talented writers have employed throughout their work.

In addition to the print edition, current and past issues of *The Sosland Journal* can be accessed online through our new website home: info.umkc.edu/sosland_journal/. If you have comments or ideas about pedagogical tools or other ways to make *The Sosland Journal* more accessible, please feel free to send your comments to soslandjournal@gmail.com.

This journal would not be possible without the support of Rheta Sosland-Huwitt and the Sosland family, whose generosity supports a number of programs and awards at UMKC. We have also been grateful for the direction and support of Interim Director of Composition, Dr. Crystal Doss, as well as Dr. Dan Mahala, who formerly supervised the production of *The Sosland Journal* until his retirement from UMKC in December 2018.

Additionally, we so appreciate the work of our judges: Annie Liljegren, Lerie Gabriel, and Rebecca Adams, who read through each of the entries we received this year. I am personally thankful, as well, for Mary Henn, whose kindness, perspective, and collaboration has made the often-stressful process of taking a journal from submission to print into something truly enjoyable and beautiful.

Most important, however, I want to thank all who submitted to the journal this year. I feel so privileged to have been able to read your writing and interact with you over the last several months. Each of you have given me new ideas and perspectives that will follow me through everyday life—and that is, I think, one of the marks of excellent writing.

Sincerely,

Brynn Fitzsimmons

Editor, *The Sosland Journal*

ESSAYS

INTRODUCTORY CATEGORY WINNER

REFLECTION OF A REFLECTION

Savannah Simpson

The most precious things in life are often the most valuable because they don't last forever. Time, for example, is valuable because it is limited, there is only so much of it in a lifetime and eventually, it runs out. In the poem, "A Hand-Mirror," Walt Whitman conveys how important it is to cherish time by relaying the horror and the regrets of a person as the life fades from their body. The author asks the readers to look at themselves in the mirror and reflect upon their lives, trying to make them see their own loss of self and youth, in hopes of depicting the significance of a clear self-image. Through the use of metaphors, hyperbole, and synecdoche, Whitman questions how time escapes us, using the prism of a hand mirror.

In "A Hand-Mirror," the entirety of the poem serves as an extended metaphor for the way one views oneself, or, quite literally, their reflection. The reflection that the mirror gives off is not only a reflection in the literal sense but also in the figurative sense since it is both showing the change of the viewer physically over time, and also depicting the self-image that can only be seen by the one looking at oneself in the mirror. Whitman describes what the figure sees in the mirror, claiming that the figure has "Joints rheumatic, bowels clogged with

abomination / Blood circulating dark and poisonous streams” (l. 8-9). In these lines, the author is attempting to emphasize the change of not only the exterior appearance of the viewer but also the way he has changed inside over time. By stating that his blood is poisonous, the author could really be saying that the viewer’s actions in life, whatever they may have been, have taken root to his very core, affecting his health, his lungs, and even his blood. These attributes of the figure are things that cannot be seen by simply looking into the mirror. Even though they do share similarities with other physical descriptions listed in the poem, they are actually things that are hidden inside the body, hence not something that can actually be seen. Therefore, the author is also hinting that these descriptions are actually observations about what the viewer, or the one who is looking into the mirror, thinks about himself stressing the importance of the viewer’s self-loathing. This metaphor of self-reflection serves as a lesson to teach others that they too will reach a point like this in their lives and that if they hope to avoid this fate, they must either change or choose to look at themselves differently.

The metaphor for the reflection in the mirror is mostly seen as a literal thing in the poem, since the author is prominently describing the physical attributes, but the reflection in this sense can also be attributed to the way the viewer is looking back on his life and the author is merely telling the story of the personal experience of that person. In the poem, the author describes the viewers outside appearance by stating, “Outside fair costume, within ashes and filth” (Whitman l. 2). While it seems that the author is making a comment on the viewers clothing, the author is actually relaying the personal opinion of the viewer. Since the figure is the one seeing himself in the mirror, he is the only one who can see certain things about

himself, and so he links his current appearance to his past experiences, revealing the reason for his self-loathing. For example, while the figure is looking in the hand mirror, he sees that he is wearing nice clothes (Whitman l. 2), but only the viewer—the one looking at himself—is aware that the clothes are merely a cloak to hide their tainted self. The various descriptions of the ways in which their soul has been corrupted is hidden within the one looking at themselves. Not even the author, nor anyone else for that matter, would be able to see in the viewer what he sees in himself. The viewer is using the reflection of the mirror as a metaphor for a reflection on his life, looking back to all the ways the viewer came to be what he sees now.

Hyperbole is also a very prominent form of figurative language that is present in the poem considering that most of the poem is a description of the viewers' reflection. The author describes this reflection as though the person is some sort of decaying creature that been corrupted, something that is being drastically exaggerated (Whitman l. 5-10). Whitman describes the change of the viewer in several sentences by listing the things that the viewer has become in contrast to what he was. Whitman describes the change saying, "No more a flashing eye, no more a sonorous voice or springy step, Now some slave's eye, voice, hands, step, A drunkard's breath, unwholesome eater's face, venerealee's flesh," (Whitman l.3-5). What the author appears to have meant by this was that the viewer used to have a sparkle in his eyes, a voice that would demand attention, and an energetic, confident outlook on life. Now, the viewer has lost all those qualities and has become weak and broken, attributes that the author compares to those of a slave. He also claims that the figure's health has been demolished by alcohol and that his unhealthy eating habits are even having an effect

on the viewer's skin (Whitman l. 5). The author is giving the reader insight as to the way the viewer used to be or what his life used to be like and then, he paints a different view on top of it, breaking any connection to the viewer's former self. By doing this, the author is trying to make a point about the inevitable change that awaits everyone at some time in their lives.

Whether that change is from aging or whether that change is the influence of others on the person, the author's seems to be trying to get us to look at ourselves and confront the change.

Whitman makes a point to emphasize time in "A Hand-Mirror" as the reasoning behind the grotesque change in the viewer's appearance to himself and to others. At the closing of the poem the author states, "Such from one look in this looking-glass ere you go hence / Such a result so soon--and from such a beginning!" (Whitman l. 12-13), ending the poem with a direct comment to the viewer instead of a description or conclusive description of the viewer. Here, he is saying that all that he has observed in the poem can be seen with just one glance in the mirror and this is also where he emphasizes the poem's main theme being the loss of time. He does this using hyperbole to emphasize the change of the viewer, highlighting how the viewer started off so pure, healthy, and innocent, only to end corrupt, in devastation, with nothing but regret. The author made the choice to exaggerate this ending to use it to express the importance of time and to convince the reader to use their time wisely.

"A Hand-Mirror" is all about emphasizing the importance of the way people see themselves, which the author uses throughout the poem using multiple figurative devices. The poet even uses synecdoche in the poem, to draw the reader's attention to look closer at the words and look for the deeper meaning within. This is achieved by Whitman when he

exaggerates that the viewer had “No brain, no heart left, no magnetism of sex” (Whitman l. 11). The purposeful emphasis on this phrase shows the immense loss of self over time. In this line, he is masking his words, making the phrase seem simpler than it really is. When taking a closer look at this phrase, however, it’s a bit more complicated. The viewer is relaying that he cannot think clearly, that his mind has become clouded over time. He finds it difficult to get in touch with his feelings, like he is just the hollow shell of what he once was. Even his sex appeal has been greatly diminished in his old age. All these experiences the author relays about the figure tells the story of reflection. By claiming that the figure no longer has any of these attributes, the author reveals the true suffering within him and it is that suffering in the poem that the reader can either relate to or heed as a warning. The author’s purpose in the poem, however, is not just to emphasize suffering.

The purpose is to get people to reflect on themselves and their own lives, and to change something about it for the better. Even though things like old age and death are inevitable, the way these changes are seen can be altered. Instead of mourning the passing of the time, the author wants the reader to make a difference in their lives, so that in the end, they will have cherished their lives, not regret them.

Work Cited:

“A Hand-Mirror,” in *Leaves of Grass. The Walt Whitman Archive*. <https://whitmanarchive.org/published/LG/1860/poems/152>. Accessed 29 July 2019.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

Context

1. Whitman’s poem deals with a number of themes that are commonly addressed in art across time and space. What are other pieces of media (whether poetry or not) that cover themes similar to those addressed in Whitman’s poem? How do such pieces explore similar themes? How might the methods of these pieces be similar to or different from the ways in which Whitman explored his subject?

Style

1. What specific parts of the essay help readers see Whitman’s poem on a level that a single or first reading might not allow? What pieces of evidence support the author’s reading of Whitman’s text?

INTERMEDIATE CATEGORY WINNER

BEYOND TROOST
ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE AS A NECESSITY

Anne Bolin

In 2011, the state of Michigan took control of Flint's budget in an effort to squash a multi-million dollar deficit. Soon after, the state attempted to cut water costs by installing new pipes to source the city's water from Lake Huron, but the Flint city council instead authorized a switch to the Flint River, one of the most polluted rivers in the country. Then came a years-long saga of old cast iron pipes, high levels of lead in drinking water, widespread sickness and multiple deaths, class action lawsuits, millions in reparative dollars, and environmental activism. According to 2018 U.S. Census Bureau estimates, Flint, a city with a majority black population at 53.9 percent, has a poverty rate of 41.2 percent ("U.S. Census"), the highest in the country among similar-sized cities (Adams). While the causes for this widespread racialized poverty are debated (Adams), Flint's more famous affliction, its water crisis, was born out of its financial struggles and allowed to flourish due to environmental racism. This kind of situation isn't unique to Flint, as minority populations in cities across the country experience crippling environmental crises. The answer to this is environmental justice, the antithesis, or more accurately the solution, to environmental racism. With Flint, environmental justice, a movement

born out of sanitation protests during the Civil Rights Era, was making its way into the mainstream media, and it hasn't left since. Since then, similar situations across the country, including the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Harvey as well as the racial divide surrounding Highway 71 in Kansas City, have entered the national conversation on environmental justice. Supported by countless scholarly and government studies, environmental racism is prevalent across the United States and has a direct connection to the systemic and historic oppression of racial and socioeconomic minorities. Without environmental justice, those with less social power—those of minority races and low socioeconomic status or SES—will continue to suffer.

Since the Flint crisis, both the federal and Michigan state governments have experienced backlash for decisions regarding the city's water supply and treatment policies. Since 2016, 12 people—state workers, water plant officials, and emergency workers—have been charged in a criminal investigation into the crisis, and in 2017, four other state officials were charged with involuntary manslaughter after a Legionnaires' outbreak in Flint that killed 12 residents ("Flint"). In the midst of this legal action, though, environmental justice activism on behalf of Flint made its way throughout the country. According to the EPA, environmental justice is "the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income, with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies" ("Environmental"). This very definition brings into question the idea of intersectionality, culturally understood as the connection between social identities such as race, gender, and socioeconomic status. In a 2019 study on disparities in drinking water quality as it pertains to nitrate levels in the United States, researchers found upon examining data from

the EPA that while racial and ethnic minority populations, specifically Hispanics, are more prone to disparate drinking water quality, socioeconomic status may have more of an effect on these disparities (Schaider et al. 11). The researchers responsible for this study concluded that their findings support the idea that improved efforts to alleviate environmental burdens are needed when it comes to socially vulnerable communities (Schaider et al. 13), which, upon comparison to the EPA's definition, is precisely the goal of environmental justice.

These findings build upon conclusions reached in a 2018 study that analyzes violations of the Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA) per demographic (Switzer and Teodoro 1). SDWA violations were the backbone of evidence in the criminal investigation into the Flint water crisis, and again bring into the conversation about racism the concept of intersectionality. In this study, researchers found that racial and ethnic minority populations, like the majority black, low-income population of Flint, experience these violations more often than others:

We find that a utility's compliance with the Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA) varies according to the racial and/or ethnic composition of its service population. But critically, we find that the negative relationship between race/ethnicity and SDWA compliance is strongest in communities with very low SES (Switzer and Teodoro 1).

These findings affirm the idea that race or ethnicity and socioeconomic status are connected, but specifically states that in cases of environmental crises, like the one in Flint, there are some communities of color that do not experience environmental crises or burdens as often as others due to differences in SES (Switzer and Teodoro 11). In more modern understandings of racism, socioeconomic status is considered both cause and effect when it comes to how one's race affects their own and fu-

ture generations of their family's income, which is exemplified in Flint. This kind of intersectionality has also manifested in places outside of Flint: New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, Houston after Hurricane Harvey, and Kansas City after the building of Highway 71. Like in Flint, in these places, environmental racism presented and continues to present itself in many different ways.

When the levees broke on the day after Katrina ripped its way through New Orleans, it was the city's poorest residents who suffered the most. According to the Data Center, 80 percent of New Orleans flooded after Katrina, largely sparing the business district and popular tourist areas but ravaging neighborhoods (Plyer). Before Katrina hit, 40 percent of New Orleans residents were already living below the poverty line, and by 2013, the poverty rate had dropped to 27 percent (Berube and Holmes), but only after 600,000 households had been displaced (Plyer). So, where does environmental racism come into the picture here? According to a 2019 study on a similar event, Hurricane Harvey, and its implications for environmental justice, after Katrina, the government failed to properly address the devastation while considering the specific communities it affected, black and low-income residents of New Orleans (Chakraborty et al. 244). Before Katrina, blacks made up roughly 66 percent of New Orleans Parish, and whites roughly 26 percent (James), and considering New Orleans' poverty rate of 40 percent, the connection between race and SES is clear. Of Hurricane Harvey, Chakraborty et al.'s "findings indicate that both race/ethnicity and SES play a persistent explanatory role in the spatial distribution of flood extent across neighborhoods, even after controlling for housing-related factors and the effects of clustering" (248). Obviously, except for comprehensive climate change legislation, no government action can affect where, when, or

upon whom these natural disasters take their toll. However, in situations like Katrina and Harvey, the government failed to acknowledge how the intersectionality of race and SES might have compounded the storms' lasting impact. With low SES typically comes less access to information and resources, like emergency and evacuation alerts or tips on where to find shelter, food, and clothing under dire circumstances. Additionally, according to the same Data Center report, out of the \$120.5 billion in federal spending in 2005, \$75 billion went to emergency relief instead of rebuilding efforts (Plyer).

In Kansas City, the placement of Highway 71, while one of the most traveled north-south roads in the city, brought with it division almost as pronounced as the Troost Divide, Kansas City's racial dividing line between white in the west and black in the east created by Troost Avenue. According to KCUR, in 1951, city officials proposed a version of what is now Highway 71, or Bruce R. Watkins Drive, that ran along the streetcar tracks near Brookside Boulevard (Hogan). Shot down by the Brookside area's residents, the city then chose a cheaper route, and decided to place the highway on the Eastside near Prospect, a decision that caused "the feeling that 71 freeway is going to divide a segregated area," said Mamie Hughes, a community organizer and ombudsman who tried to ease neighborhood tensions as 71 was being constructed (Hogan). During that time, neighborhoods were starting to integrate, spurring white flight and blockbusting as a response to the redlined nature of the city that came about under J.C. Nichols' real estate empire (Hogan). However, with the building of 71, which took almost 50 years, came more division. Between classes on campus at UMKC, an internship in south Kansas City, and a job in Raytown, I cross Troost and drive 71 frequently. The disparities in living conditions, sidewalk maintenance, and bus stops between west and east of Troost are

shocking, and even more jarring are those disparities surrounding 71. Hughes noted that some residents east of 71 felt the highway was built right in their front yards. Another longtime resident of the Eastside, a retired police officer, said that during the 1950s and 1960s, when it came to city projects, “whenever compromise was made, if a compromise had to be made, most of the time the minorities had to pay the price” (Hogan).

But not everyone can see these disparities. In two separate articles, one in the *Weekly Standard*, a conservative magazine, the other published by Brookings, a think tank known for its brilliant minds, two authors take issue with the idea that environmental racism exists at all. In the *Weekly Standard*’s “Structural Nonsense,” Jonathan Bronitsky claims that environmental racism is a myth that was popularized by the Flint water crisis, and that young liberals, public educators, researchers, Hollywood elite, and politicians exaggerated the situation to fit their agendas (Bronitsky). While he admits that structural racism exists and is prevalent among Flint’s majority-black and poor population, he believes that environmental racism is just a rallying cry, and that a concept like environmental classism would be better suited for explaining situations like Flint (Bronitsky). He explains this view by noting that two of the worst environmental crises in modern American history largely affected predominantly white, working-class agricultural towns (Bronitsky). It seems as if Bronitsky has an understanding of racism as only manifesting as deliberate malice, violence, outward discrimination, or direct policy when he begs the question: since there are no obviously racist perpetrators of the Flint crisis, how can we say that this was environmental racism? His answer to why environmental justice advocates point to environmental racism in these cases is best explained with the following:

Is it possible that incidents involving, for example, landfills

and smelters affect African-American communities more than white communities because the former are more prevalent and concentrated in urban settings, which tend to have greater number of landfills and smelters? (Bronitsky)

Similarly, in Brookings' "...And Environmental Justice For All?," Christopher Foreman argues that environmental racism is a myth perpetuated by environmental justice advocacy groups. Like Bronitsky, Foreman admits that racism does exist, and, taking it a step further, notes that, yes, racial minorities and the poor suffer from illnesses disproportionately and are less likely to have adequate healthcare, but discredits EPA studies confirming the existence of environmental racism as the cause for those issues since they were conducted after the surge in environmental justice activism (Foreman). Foreman focuses on discrediting these advocacy groups themselves with ideas that they are too diverse to function collectively, that their grassroots lobbying efforts disqualify them from being taken seriously, and that their origin is faulty in and of itself (Foreman). It's this focus on the identity politics of environmental justice groups rather than their actual substance that puts Foreman at a fault himself. Foreman's ploy to prove his point is scapegoatism, obvious in statements like the following: "Prioritization of environmental issues is at variance with what makes the EJ movement tick: egalitarianism. In the realm of such activism, the downgrading of any concern amounts to something intolerable to many activists: victimization" (Foreman). Some of Foreman's claims used to discredit these groups are presented without evidence, and his use of academic studies that dispute the existence of environmental racism is very selective. One of these studies debunking environmental racism, an unnamed, uncited study Foreman says was completed by researchers at the University of Massachusetts, Foreman

used solely for the fact that the study was based on census tracts rather than ZIP Codes, noting that most studies confirming the existence of environmental justice use ZIP Codes (Foreman). However, Foreman wrote his article in 1997, and many more recent academic studies that confirm the existence of environmental racism do so using census tracts.

In a 2019 study of disparities in air pollution exposure published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* journal, researchers concluded that blacks and Hispanics disproportionately breathe polluted air, and this air is polluted by businesses and practices majority-owned and carried out by non-Hispanic whites (Tessum et al. 6001). Unlike Foreman's claim that studies that confirm the existence of environmental racism use only ZIP Codes instead of the more-accurate census tracts, Tessum et al. based their study on census tracts throughout the United States, and still found that "in the United States...air pollution is disproportionately induced by the racial-ethnic majority and disproportionately inhaled by racial-ethnic minorities" (6003). They introduce this finding by explaining that while residential location or geography does explain some of these disparities in exposure to air pollution and similar environmental toxins, "income...is an important factor in determining how much pollution a person causes" (Tessum et al. 6003). Coupled with their conclusion that the non-Hispanic white majority, including Asian-Americans and Native Americans, creates most air pollution while blacks and Hispanics disproportionately consume it, this finding fortifies the idea that race and class or socioeconomic identities intersect to contribute to living conditions and susceptibility to environmental crises, thus confirming the prevalence of environmental racism. Experts removed from this study added after the fact that Tessum et al.'s findings confirm what grassroots environmental

justice leaders have worked to fix in their advocacy (Rice). To further refute Foreman's claims, the structure of this study—a quantitative approach using a pollution inequity formula based on census tracts—could be used to further investigate similar instances of environmental inequity in other locations (Rice).

From a more sociological point of view, the idea that environmental racism doesn't exist because poor white people have experienced environmental crises, too, is eerily similar to the idea that racism ceased to exist—or at least has never been as bad—since the passing of the Civil Rights Act in 1964. To ignore thorough evidence based on demographic trends throughout the United States and counter with select instances of white suffering is irresponsible. According to the Center for Sustainable Solutions at the University of Michigan, “people of color comprise 56% of the population living in neighborhoods with [Toxic Release Inventory] facilities, compared to 30% elsewhere”; “the average income of residents living within three miles of a coal power plant is \$18,400 compared to the national average of \$21,58”; “roughly 3% of the country's oil and natural gas reserves, 15% of coal reserves and between 37-55% of uranium reserves are located on Indigenous land”; and “low-income communities are more likely to be exposed to climate change threats (e.g., flooding, storms, and droughts) due to inadequate housing and infrastructure” (“Environmental Justice Factsheet”). Still, if denial of the existence of environmental racism are presented without trace levels of logic, how is one to rebut them with actual logic? Even as a white woman, in my experience, those not affected by racism may become defensive when presented with real-world examples of racism, likely a result of not wanting to feel any responsibility or acknowledge their own privilege, and thus it's no surprise that those same people become even more defensive when presented with

specific, current examples, such as environmental racism. Both Bronitsky and Foreman write with a hint of victim-blaming, with Bronitsky entertaining the idea that because most racial minorities are poorer than whites, they choose to live in places prone to toxic environmental use (Bronitsky). To give them the benefit of the doubt, racism is indeed very complex. It's difficult to tackle racism as a whole without examining its history or recognizing the many ways in which it manifests—environmental inequity, police brutality, voter suppression, unaccredited schools, residential segregation, and more.

Therein lies an important factor that might have changed these authors' views of environmental justice and the crises the movement seeks to repair: still thriving today are the results of historical residential segregation, legally executed in the early 20th century through local and federal practices such as racial covenants and redlining (Jan). These consequences of historical decisions are obvious in my own hometown of Kansas City, where the residential segregation is so pronounced that it's visible aurally (O'Higgins, "Data Maps"), largely thanks to notorious practitioners of racist housing policies, like J.C. Nichols (O'Higgins, "How Troost"). Still, both Bronitsky and Foreman seem to take the issue lightly, perfectly exemplified in particularly inflammatory statement from Foreman: "If only corporations would propose to burn tobacco in urban incinerators, or to bury it in minority-neighborhood landfills. Now that would be an environmental justice issue!" (Foreman). It seems that Bronitsky and Foreman take the position that environmental racism doesn't exist because they can't see it, regardless of whether their inability to see it is due to lucky removal from these situations or selective ignorance.

These denials do not go unnoticed, but the work of environmental justice advocates flourishes in spite of attempts to

discredit them. The spectrum of their work is as diverse as the advocates themselves as they tackle issues like the Flint water crisis and natural disasters, most recently Hurricane Harvey, and their effects on people of minority races and low SES. In Flint is Mari Copeny, the 11-year-old environmental activist known as Little Miss Flint. After writing to President Obama about her hometown's struggle with high lead levels in their drinking water at age eight, Copeny started a fund-raising campaign to provide bottled water to Flint residents affected by the crisis (Lowry). Her nonprofit, Pack Your Back, has raised over \$240,000, donated over 850,000 bottles of water (Copeny), and distributed 15,000 full backpacks to young students since 2016 (Lowry). After Hurricane Harvey, groups like Texas Environmental Justice Advocacy Services raised over \$100,000 to address the toxic flooding in Houston, a city known for its "concentration of chemical and plastics plants, oil and gas refineries, superfund sites, fossil fuel plants, and wastewater discharge treatment plants" ("Hurricane Harvey: Toxic"), along with the displacement of over 6,000 residents ("Hurricane Harvey: The Biggest"). And these efforts, though not always as loud, are tenfold in other parts of the country where environmental racism is affecting communities. While still largely grassroots and local, the necessity for comprehensive environmental justice, according to the EPA, is substantial enough that the agency has an environmental justice office with a "commitment to addressing the environmental and public health concerns of minority, low-income, and tribal and indigenous communities" (Dravis 1). While strides have been attempted since the office's inception 26 years ago, certain social groups in the United States still experience the brute force of inequitable and racist environmental policies: the situation in Flint isn't fully resolved, folks displaced during Katrina 14

years ago are still suffering, reparations are still needed in parts of Houston, and some residents of Kansas City's Eastside still live next door to a highway. Without the work of environmental justice groups, and without the attention of those with social power and control over public policy, environmental racism will continue to thrive, affecting those at the most complicated intersections of social identity.

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QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

Context

1. Were you familiar with the history and persisting situation known as the Troost Divide? Do you find the details of such divide shocking? Why or why not?
2. Can you think of other instances or places where environmental justice is impeded by minority and socioeconomic status?

Style

- 1 How does the author juxtapose the crisis in Flint, Michigan, Hurricanes Katrina and Harvey, and the Troost Divide? What effect does this juxtaposition create within the essay?
2. The author provides an extensive amount of scholarship and statistical data within the essay. How are such sources interwoven in a way that is organizationally coherent?

ILLUMINATING KAFKA

AN ANALYSIS OF JEWISH LITERARY CULTURE IN KAFKA'S WORK

Joseph F. Allen

While Franz Kafka's dramatic stories have captivated audiences around the world with their strange imagery and curious, parable-like tales, the obscurity of their meaning has left scholars divided as to the intent and Jewishness of his texts. Many critics overlook an essential aspect of Kafka's work by not addressing the connotative nature of his words. Here we will examine two of Kafka's texts—*The Trees* and *Jackals and Arabs*—to demonstrate how he uses Jewish literary themes and techniques to embed several layers of meaning beneath his words.

Although Judaism was not always a primary part of his life, its influence on Kafka runs through his entire career. Born into a German-speaking Jewish family, Kafka was brought up with an understanding of Jewish culture, yet during his childhood, he was apathetic to the traditions of his heritage (Sokel). At the age of 28, he discovered the Yiddish theater which prompted him to take an interest in his Jewish roots. History, tradition, culture, lore the theater showed him a side of his Jewishness that he had never experienced before. The humor and tragedy found throughout the plays were a way for the Jewish people to cope with the political, economic, and social issues of their day

(Ausubel). The plays were written in the Yiddish language which is, according to Evelyn T. Beck, “especially rich in idiom and nuance,” (28). Beck explains the significance of these linguistic traits: “because Yiddish is laced with Hebrew, the ‘holy’ tongue, the language can create layers of meaning and suggest ‘a world that exists beneath words’ ”(28). This style of layering is derived from the combination of Hebrew phrases, references to tradition or religious matters (*via* metonymy, idioms, metaphors, euphemism, synecdoche, etc.), and secular vocabulary. Critics have found that many of the Yiddish proverbs draw similarities with Kafka’s narratives, including, “What will become of the sheep if the wolf is judge?” and, “The hat is fine but the head is too small” (Furman). Through the Yiddish language, Kafka discovered how he could use words to fill his writings with the irony, paradoxes, and symbolism that characterized Jewish literary culture and the plays that he loved. With the motivation to create, and the influence of what he considered to be authentic Judaism, he wrote, eventually developing a style that was so distinctive the term *Kafkaesque* was coined to describe it.

Despite the abundant evidence to support the influence that Jewish culture had on Kafka, several literary scholars have questioned the role that it takes in his writing due to the “virtual absence of direct allusions” (Scott 7). Unfortunately, such statements arise from a lack of understanding of Jewish culture, and more importantly Jewish literary devices. These critics fail to recognize the multifaceted nature of the literary technique that Kafka employs. It is for this reason that much of Kafka’s work is shrouded in debate and mystery. As Clifford Geertz demonstrates in *Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture*, culture is a semiotic concept; a set of signs and symbols that allow individuals in a society to communicate with one another. When an individual from another culture observes

the symbolism, he or she may not recognize or understand the meaning that is associated with that symbolism. It is important to note that many modern Jews have difficulty interpreting and understanding traditional Jewish literature given the cultural shift that has naturally occurred over time. In the case of Kafka, the challenge becomes greater because he weaves multiple literary cultures together and presents them with a dramatic flair of his own. Furthermore, depending on the text, Kafka evinces variation in the symbolism he uses and the cultural style dominates.

In the case of *The Trees*, Kafka employs Jewish literary devices to speak to the plight of the Jewish people in an unfavorable political and economic situation. He wrote the short work in Prague, during the early part of the eighteenth-century, when anti-Semitic mentality prevailed in the German-Czech society (Cohen). During this period, there was a great deal of uncertainty for the future of his people, his religion, and the way of life that he had grown to love. With that context in mind, he wrote:

For we are like tree trunks in the snow. In appearance they lie sleekly and a little push should be enough to set them rolling. No, it can't be done, for they are firmly wedded to the ground. But see, even that is only in appearance. (Kafka, Translated by Willa and Edwin Muir, Glatzer 382)

In the first sentence, two interpretations may be derived from the symbolism behind the trees: (1) The trees represent man in the general sense, as in, any human being; or, (2) they represent the Jewish people. Given the context in which Kafka wrote the text, the latter may be a more favored interpretation.

Trees as symbols for people is common throughout

Jewish literature, and its origins can be found in religious texts as is the case with most Jewish symbolism. The fifth book of the *Torah*, *Devārīm* (Deuteronomy), uses trees as an idiom for man (20:19). This metaphor comes from the parallels that the holy text draws between human beings and trees; both require nourishment, room to grow, firm ground to stand on, and roots that run deep (*Yerimiyahu* [Jeremiah] 16:8; *Tehilim* [Psalms] 1:3). The *Pirkei Avot* (Ethics of our Fathers), a section of the *Mishnah* that is fundamental to Jewish oral law, states:

A person whose wisdom exceeds his good deeds is likened to a tree whose branches are numerous, but whose roots are few. The wind comes and uproots it and turns it upside down.

But a person whose good deeds exceed his wisdom is likened to a tree whose branches are few but whose roots are numerous. Even if all the winds of the world were to come and blow against it, they could not budge it from its place. (*Avot* 3:22)

In this passage, trees are symbolic of human beings, and like Kafka's text, the rooting of the tree is the focal point of the message. Given the prominence that the *Pirkei Avot* holds in Judaism, it is plausible that Kafka may have read this text before writing *The Trees*.

Throughout the *Tanakh* (Hebrew Bible), roots and branches symbolize a single person and all their descendants. "And a shoot shall spring forth from the stem of Jesse, and a twig shall sprout from his roots" (*Yisheyah* [Isaiah] 11:1-2), "for like the days of the tree are the days of My people...for they are seed blessed by the Lord" (*Yisheyah* 65:22, 65:23). It is for this reason that one may

view the trees in Kafka's text as a reference to the Jewish people. The fact that these trees stand in the "snow" serves to indicate the location where the people in Kafka's narrative reside. We are left to ask why he did not use a term that relates to the earth, soil, or ground. Why snow? It is reasonable to consider that Kafka is using the snow as a metaphor for the Austro-Hungarian Empire or in a general sense, Europe. Its northern latitude gives the cold climate a distinctive feature. Whether or not this is his intended connotation, I do not know. But, this reading certainly fits with the theme of the narrative. Thus, the first sentence gives us the character and the setting, and from that we can understand the context in which we are meant to view the rest of the text.

The last three sentences of *The Trees* offer an interesting paradox by stepping back and forth between the trees being rooted or unrooted. A simple chiasmic structure can be seen in the way that Kafka returns to the initial idea in the last sentence, completing the symmetry. This technique is used throughout Jewish literature to add emphasis through repetition. By including this structure, Kafka is indicating that the instability of the trees is the crucial aspect of their nature. From this, we are able to conclude that Kafka is speaking about the difficult situation that the Jewish people are facing in the German-Czech society. The Jewish people inhabit the Austro-Hungarian Empire, yet only in appearance; the anti-Semitism that exists throughout the region has prevented them from setting roots. The discord that Kafka witnessed between the Jews and the German-Czechs is further perpetuated in his short work, *Jackals and Arabs*.

Jackals and Arabs was published in the periodical, *Der Jude* (The Jew), in October of 1917 (Rubinstein). Many early critics of the work were reluctant to recognize *Der Jude's* nationalistic Jewish leaning, instead electing to interpret the story without a Jewish-based context (Shumsky). Because of this, controversy has surrounded the meaning of the text as well as the identity of the characters involved. One such critic, Herbert Tauber, said, "in the character of the Arab the unalterable, inexorable law of the World is opposed to all vain dreams of [humanity's] redemption" and later he states that the jackals' desire for cleanliness is "a parody of the human dream of light and cleanliness." Walter Sokel claimed that the conflict between the jackals and the Arabs correlates to aspects of Kafka's relationship with his father. With the Jewish-based context of the periodical in mind, both interpretations seem contrived.

It was not until 1947, when André Németh published his work *Kafka ou le Mystère Juif* (Kafka or the Jewish Mystery), that the story was recognized as a commentary on the relationship between European Jews and non-Jews. This became the dominant view among scholars in 1967, after William C. Rubinstein published a thorough analysis of *Jackals and Arabs*. Though the text's Jewish context is relatively well accepted, few critics beyond the founding scholars seem to understand *why* the text is Jewish.

In Kafka's narrative, one can argue that the jackals are meant to symbolize the Jewish people. Per Beck, this choice of symbolism may have been intended as a pun. In Hebrew, the word for jackal, *tan* (pl. *tanim*), is phonetically similar to the word for the Rabbinical teachers of the oral law, *Tanna* (pl. *Tannaim*). At this point in time, though it is believed

that Kafka had not attained fluency in Hebrew, it is likely that he was familiar with these words. *Tanna* is used throughout the *Elisha ben Abuyah* and *Bar Kokhba* per oral tradition. In *Elisha ben Abuyah*, Elishe's contempt for the Jewish people's insularity and the passivity of the Jews in *Bar Kokhba* draws parallels with the main ideas presented in *Jackals and Arabs*. This passivity can be seen in the old jackal's statement, "We're not proposing to kill them. All the water in the Nile couldn't cleanse us of that" (Kafka, Translated by Willa and Edwin Muir, Glatzer 409).

The Jewishness of the jackals can be easily seen through their glorification of cleanliness in contrast to the 'dirtiness' of the Arabs. This alludes to *kashrut* (Yiddish: *treif*), a set of dietary laws that require the Jewish people to consume only *kashér* (kosher) foods:

We want to be troubled no more by the Arabs; room to breathe; a skyline cleansed of them; no more bleating of sheep knifed by an Arab; every beast to die a natural death; no interference till we have drained the carcass and picked the bones clean. Cleanliness, nothing but cleanliness is what we want... Filth is their white; filth is their black; their beards are a horror; the very sight of their eye sockets makes one want to spit; and when they lift their arms, the murk of hell yawns in the armpit. (Kafka, Translated by Willa and Edwin Muir, Glatzer 409-410)

By *halakha* (Jewish Law), the *tumah* (clean) must be set apart from that which is *taharah* (unclean). During that period, many Orthodox Jews took this to mean that non-Jews were inferior religiously, culturally, and racial-

ly. With the theme of *Jackals and Arabs* in mind, Kafka does not share these views, rather he may be emphasizing these beliefs as a critique of the Jews in his community who were taking a role in perpetuating societal dissention. From this line of reasoning, multiple scholars have concluded that Kafka held Zionist views, or, in other words, he rejected the notion of *Galut* (Gelber; Sokel).

Galut (Yiddish: *Golus*), modern day *Tfutzta* (diaspora), refers to the exile of the Jewish people. The oldest jackal tells the traveler, “Is it not misfortune enough for us to be exiled among such creatures?” (Kafka, Translated by Willa and Edwin Muir, Glatzer 408). In the *Torah*, *Devarim* 28:64 states, “And the Lord will scatter you among the nations, from one end of the earth to the other,” and this is further expressed in *Vayikra* (Leviticus) 26:33, *Yechezqel* (Ezekiel) 6:8, 36:19. Most Jews interpret these verses as prophecy, believing that the Hebrew God cast them from their land and exiled them in the nations as punishment for worshipping other gods (*Shemot* [Exodus] 20:4; *Shoftim* [Judges] 18:30). For the non-Zionist, Orthodox Jews, the notion of *temporary*, forced exile encouraged them to refrain from assimilating, and prevented the Jewish people and German-Czechs from attaining a peaceful coexistence. Periodicals such as *Der Jude* promoted a revolution of thought, and by 1914, Jewish Zionism had shifted the mentality that corrupted these traditions, believing that they fueled anti-Semitic persecution (Kieval). Though the Zionist movement sought to change how their culture viewed certain traditions, they did not attempt to overthrow century old beliefs.

Like the Jewish people, the jackals await the Mashiach (Messiah). The old jackal tells the narrator, “I had

almost given up hope, since we have been waiting endless years for you; my mother waited for you, and her mother, and all our foremothers right back to the first mother of all jackals” (Kafka, Translated by Willa and Edwin Muir, Glatzer 409). In Rubinstein’s analysis, he reasons that the narrator *is* the Mashiach, and given the structure of the text, this is the most logical conclusion. The old jackal tells the narrator, “Sir, we want you to end this quarrel that divides the world. You are exactly the man whom our ancestors foretold as born to do it” (Kafka, Translated by Willa and Edwin Muir, Glatzer 409). Note that in the original German it is, “*du sollst streit beenden*” which more accurately translates to “you shall end the quarrel” meaning that the narrator *is* the one who will put an end to suffering (“Schakale und Araber”). The deity of the narrator is further supported by the way in which the jackals carry his robe, ““These are your trainbearers,’ explained the old jackal quite seriously, ‘a mark of honor’” (Kafka, Translated by Willa and Edwin Muir, Glatzer 409). This may be an allusion to *Yisheyah* 6:1, “I saw the Lord high and exalted on the throne, and the train of his robe filled the Temple.”

In *Jackals and Arabs* and *The Trees*, we have seen how Kafka uses Jewish symbolism and structure to express his religious and nationalistic beliefs. This not only gives us a glimpse of the true beauty and complexity of the texts, it illuminates the mastermind behind their conception. Sadly, many literary scholars have missed the wealth of Jewish culture that is embodied within Kafka’s works. Is it time for scholars who are well-versed in Jewish literary culture to take a fresh look at Kafka’s writing?

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QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

Context

1. This essay analyses Franz Kafka's *The Trees* and *Jackals and Arabs*. What framework or context does the author use for analyzing the texts?
2. How does the author define culture? How is that definition important to the essay?

Style

1. Notice that the author ends the essay with a question. How does such ending stylistically affect the piece?
2. The author often quotes Kafka's text in its original language alongside its English translation. Why do you think the author chose to do that? What might be the significance of such choice?

TOXICITY IN MASCULINE STANDARDS

Zachary Atteberry

Throughout time, humanity has developed under a binary system of gendering that is unable to encompass a significant number of individuals under its limiting structure. This has resulted in several different kinds of stigma directed against the people identifying somewhere outside the binary norm—whether in self-identity and/or lifestyle. Almost every quality associated with masculinity has defined itself as superior when compared to feminine and non-conforming roles, and are highly regarded among members of society. This has created an unjust arrangement of desirable qualities that directly impact the stigmas experienced by non-masculine individuals, a key-concept referred to as the “masculine capital.” Women experience the effects of masculine capital as well, but its influence is conflicted by female role-expectations. Therefore, my focus will primarily be from a male-perspective. Alison Bechdel’s graphic novel, *Fun Home*, is a personal account of the toxicity in masculine standards. Her book illustrates the stigma associated with femininity and how they directly impact the mental health of her father, who was at odds with the masculine capital.

This new social system has evolved from males having

traditionally held superior roles with power and control. James P. Ravenhill and Richard O. de Visser introduce their research by stating that “Masculine capital refers to the social power afforded by the traits and behaviors that are associated with orthodox, stereotypical masculinity” (Ravenhill and de Visser 321). What this means is that the more feminine a man is, the less social power he will have. Others may give less value to an effeminate man’s ideas, perceive him as weaker, or view him as a lesser member of society. By building off of this central concept of masculine capital, we can see that these men are more susceptible to issues of mental health because of the stigma associated with their femininity.

Ravenhill goes on to say that certain masculine qualities have more worth than others, and that individuals will barter/trade their “masculine capital” depending on the social situation they are in (322). It helps to think of this system like a balancing scale: the more masculine traits you add to one side of the scale, the more respect people tend to give you. However, each of those traits have a different weight, and therefore have a varying influence on the scale. Some of these qualities include voice pitch, appearance, mannerisms, financial power, physique, and (most importantly) sexuality. In a different, more specific study, Ravenhill and de Visser show that gay men are particularly disadvantaged within this system because their homosexuality has a greater influence regarding their perceived masculinity (209). As a result, homosexual men are more vulnerable to mental health disorders throughout their lifetime (Pitonak 64), likely because of the greater challenges they experience in accruing masculine capital (Ravenhill and de Visser 209).

As people navigate their lives and come into contact with

others, they will face different kinds of stigma at various levels. Three examples are enacted stigma, anticipated stigma, and stigma concealment. These stigmas each impact areas of mental health in unique ways. Enacted stigma is the most easily-identified because it is socially constructed by the people that we come into contact with (Pachankis et al. 1381). Essentially, it is any experience of unfair treatment by others. These stigmas are felt by men who openly display their feminine characteristics to others, forfeiting a certain amount of social power in doing so. The lack of respect and value placed in these men directly influences their mental health and well-being.

This enacted form of stigma defines and governs the other forms of stigma (anticipated and stigma concealment), which are both shaped psychologically and determined from a person's inner-psyche. Anticipated stigmas are the assumptions of negativity that a person feels when they insert themselves into a social situation (Pachankis et al. 1381). A heterosexual man with a high-pitched voice will experience greater anticipated stigma before speaking to a group. Similarly, a homosexual man will experience greater levels of anticipated stigma before coming out to a religious organization. These men will have faced enacted stigmas against the qualities that reduce their masculine capital (and thus, overall respect), which has caused them to anticipate negativity before displaying those traits.

As men interact with the masculine capital, they learn to barter and trade their gendered qualities to better suit their personal identity. However, not all men are able to achieve the qualities that they desire, or they feel pressure to suppress aspects of their femininity. In other words, their personal identity does not align with their gender presentation.

This feeling of misalignment results in stigma concealment when that individual begins to hide certain qualities about themselves in order to avoid enacted stigma. This form of stigma was found to be more prominent in masculine men, which seems logical. A feminine man would be displaying these defining qualities in an open-fashion, whereas a masculine man would have an opportunity to hide/suppress them (Pachankis et al. 1386).

Each of these stigmas that are associated with the masculine capital has a direct impact on the different aspects of mental health. Individuals experiencing enacted stigma from people they come into contact with are more likely to develop depressive symptoms, and are significantly moderated by masculinity. Inversely, men who experience greater levels of anticipated stigma show higher levels of social anxiety. Interestingly, a person with a greater socioeconomic status tends to show lower levels of anticipated stigma (Pachankis et al. 1386). Using the analogy of the balancing scale, this makes sense. Financial wealth can also contribute a different kind of social power to reduce the negative associations resulting from a man's femininity.

Further observation of Ravenhill and de Visser's work explains why homosexual men are extremely vulnerable to mental health concerns as a result of the masculine capital. Having an attraction to the physique of another man is inherently feminine, and represents a particularly critical threat to the patriarchy. In their research, it is stated that "heterosexuality maintains cultural patriarchy and gay men are culturally subordinated because their homosexuality is a threat to the ideology that it is women, not other men, who are the objects of sex for men" (Ravenhill and de Visser 209). When the effects of the masculine capital are coupled

with heteronormative environments and homophobia, this leaves homosexual minorities very susceptible to feelings of suicide, depression, anxiety, and substance abuse.

The effects of experienced stigmas in homosexual men are shown in the research performed by Michal Pitonak. Through his work, it was found that “non-heterosexuals are about 2.5 times more likely to have a lifetime history mental disorder and 2 times more likely to have a current mental disorder” (Pitonak 64). These higher rates of social anxiety and depression are synergistic contributors to problems related to substance abuse. Gay and bisexual men are 1.6 times more likely to develop an alcohol dependency, and they are 3.4 times more likely to have a drug dependency. Sexual orientation was an independent predictor in suicide among boys, some areas having rates 5-6 times higher than other demographics (Pitonak 65). With a man’s sexuality having such a large influence on his masculine capital, which then in turn has such drastic consequences in terms of mental health, Pitonak’s research shows the harmful effects of the social system’s gendered roles.

An example of this can be seen in Alison Bechdel’s graphic novel, *Fun Home*. Her story is a personal account of the relationship that she had with her father, who was still married to her mother in spite of the differences in their sexual orientation. Her father is a homosexual man and displays unhappy, abusive tendencies. Her combination of story and illustration show the experienced emotions and struggles of someone in conflict with the masculine capital among society. Her illustrations are consistently black and white for the duration of the novel, which sets a tone of depression over her story. This works congruently with her story’s depiction of Bruce, who is never drawn with a candid

smile aside from one photograph when he is with a possible male lover (Bechdel120).

In the first chapter, Bechdel describes her childhood home as a museum and a labyrinth because of the false home-image her father sought to create. His impeccable attention to detail of their house works to counterbalance his delicate, flowery aesthetic that exist within his personal identity. She claims that, "He used his skillful artifice not to make things, but to make things appear to be what they were not" (Bechdel 16). Bechdel then goes on to compare their dynamic to being raised by Martha Stewart, acting as the Spartan to his Athenian. She writes, "His shame inhabited our house as pervasively and invisibly as the aromatic musk of aging mahogany. In fact, the meticulous period interiors were expressly designed to conceal it" (Bechdel 20). This aligns with the evidence that her father, Bruce, was experiencing depressive symptoms from stigma concealment. Each of these contribute to her questioning her father's death as an act of suicide. While the cause of Bruce's death is never certain, his story represents a real-life experience of someone who exists outside of the binary norm, struggling to conform themselves to a masculine capital.

Looking towards the future shows us that this social system of masculine capital is evolving, but slowly. The use of gender-fair language appears to be a useful implementation to work towards improving gender expectations. A study by Friedrich and Heise shows us that its use boosts morale for both sexes in regard to stereotypically male-occupations. However, their results also showed that jobs are interpreted with a higher status when presented in masculine forms. The use of masculine descriptors reinforces gender differences, which reinforces the overall concept of masculine

capital. By advocating for more gender-inclusive language, people become more aware of the equality that needs to exist between roles of masculinity and femininity (Friedrich and Heise 52-53).

Thinking progressively, it should be made clear that masculine nature is not to blame for the issues of masculine capital. Rather, the issues are rooted in the forcible conformity to gender-role-norms. Even men who are able to accrue a plethora of masculine capital are able to fall victim to its harmful nature. Using research from McDermott and others as an example, “men tend to avoid engaging in thoughts, behaviors, or emotions that are socially constructed as feminine, avoidance of femininity is a critical factor within the normative and gender role strain frameworks” (13). Despite the social power that they are able to accumulate, the pressure to conform to a masculine suppression of emotional expression has negative correlations as well.

While this research focuses on a male-perspective, the negativities associated with the masculine capital have a much broader range and affect all members of society. Women barter with the expression of these qualities as well, but also have a gender-standard of femininity that is expected to be upheld. I propose that the women who embody more hegemonic, masculine traits are likely to be afforded more social power. However, their contradiction and intersection with female gender expectations will inherently work against them to lessen their overall gain.

In conclusion, the ranges of masculinity and femininity that have already been established will continue to exist throughout society and expression. It is vitally important, however, that we embrace the qualities that come naturally to us to avoid experiences like those of Bechdel and her father, whose mental

health concerns resulted from the stigma associated with the suppression of feminine traits. By understanding that our perceptions of men are shaped by a variety of qualities, many of which are outside an individual's control (physique, voice, height), we can take action to create a healthier, more diverse population. We should uphold and value the femininity that is associated with them. In doing this, we are refusing to contribute to the enacted stigma and negativities put forth by others. By eliminating the masculine capital that exists, we can create a world that has more equal opportunities by achieving positive mentalities toward qualities of femininity as traditionally conceived.

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QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

Context

1. How does the author define toxic masculinity and “masculine capital”? Are you familiar with such terms, and how do you define them?
2. This piece, like Clough’s essay later in the issue, uses Alison Bechdel’s graphic memoir *Fun Home* as basis for inquiry. Here, however, *Fun Home* is used to explore toxic masculinity as opposed to father-daughter relationships. How does each piece provide a different approach to the same text?

Style

1. Can you locate points within the essay where the author interjects their own voice? How does such interjection work alongside the presentation of research and statistical data? Explain.
2. Create an outline of this essay (be sure to note the essay’s thesis, key points, and organizational structure). What do you notice?

SOCIAL MEDIA IS BURNING

THE FAILURE OF A FESTIVAL

Anne Bolin

On April 27, 2017, Trevor DeHaas tweeted a picture of a soggy meal in a foam food container from the Bahamas. “Here’s the dinner they promised us,” DeHaas captioned the picture, “literally slices of bread, cheese, and salad with no dressing,” adding “#dumpsterfyre” for effect. In the following days, this picture fueled a conversation that shifted our cultural dialogue to the real-time failure of a music festival—a failure so ugly, cringeworthy, and inexplicable that we just couldn’t look away. Fyre Festival, the luxury music festival meant for social media influencers, millennial entrepreneurs, and grown-up trust-fund babies, was dying a painful death. Though somewhat humorous, this failed attempt at entrepreneurial media eminence came at the expense of countless innocent people. Luckily for Netflix, Fyre founders Billy McFarland and Ja Rule brought cameras along to document everything, which made for premium documentary footage. Netflix’s documentary, *FYRE: The Greatest Party that Never Happened*, is an exposé of egotistical greed and a problem unique to the 21st century: social media as the forerunner of a post-truth era.

At its simplest, the documentary is a timeline of public and private events that explain the festival’s short-lived hype.

Fyre Festival was the 2016 brainchild of Billy McFarland, a millennial entrepreneur, and Ja Rule, a rapper turned music promoter, to promote their music booking app, Fyre. The timeline turns sour quickly as interviewees—New York-based marketing professionals, celebrity event planners, journalists, Bahamian construction workers, angry attendees, and, most notably, a Bahamian restaurant owner who was defrauded of \$50,000—explain their involvement. McFarland, though not interviewed, is a main character. The documentary explores his motivations for the scam as the legal repercussions start taking effect in real time. Currently, McFarland is serving a six-year sentence after pleading guilty to wire fraud in relation to Fyre Festival, and the criminal investigation and class-action lawsuits that lead to his conviction are the focal points of the second half of the documentary.

Undeniably, Netflix took a disastrous mess and turned it into a cohesive visual account of our culture of immediacy, entitlement, and false truths. While the big players of Fyre are given plenty of screen time, also included is the shrouded world of celebrity social media influencing. Emphasized in *FYRE* are the undisclosed monetary deals that media figureheads like Kendall Jenner, Hailey Bieber, and Bella Hadid agreed to in exchange for Instagram marketing on behalf of Fyre. These Instagram posts were idealized representations of what organizers were working to create with Fyre: a luxurious tropical getaway that promised musical festivities better than Coachella, on a private island claimed to have once been owned by Pablo Escobar. On the Fyre account, marketers posted entrancing footage of supermodels on yachts in bright blue water, off shore from sandy beaches with luxury accommodations that almost seemed too good to be true. To the Fyre organizers' credit, this was all smart marketing. Even watching the promotional

videos now, I'm intrigued. But to their demise, it perverted the truth and hid reality: leftover disaster relief tents, foam-boxed meals, attendees shorted thousands of dollars, and a last-resort location of Roker Point at Great Exuma, an unfinished development near the Bahamian Sandals Resort.

The problem isn't necessarily that these celebrities posted these things on Instagram, though in the aftermath of Fyre they definitely profited off of the little man's back, in some cases by hundreds of thousands of dollars. As reported by *W Magazine*, Kendall Jenner in particular was paid \$250,000 for a single Instagram post promoting Fyre Festival without clarifying in the post that it was a paid sponsorship (Marine). The problem is more complicated, something that is at the forefront of information consumption today, which is the idea that truth no longer matters. From this idea grow wildly branches of thought that are both cause and effect: that information can be monetized, and the more outrageous the more its prospects for commercial success; and that falsehoods are in the eye of the beholder, up for any interpretation and use regardless of consequence. We could place the blame on modern society's materialistic, money-hungry operation. However, "society" seems like too broad a term to use when considering a situation in which a millennial entrepreneur defrauded thousands of people who are at once the victims and the enablers. To play devil's advocate, wasn't it the attendees' own choice to believe those Instagram posts and then spend thousands of dollars on Fyre tickets and airfare, especially when they knew of no concrete details of the festival's logistics? Should we then just resort to blaming the age-old affliction that has cursed millions: greed?

From the behind-the-scenes footage Netflix gives us, we are able to see exactly how Billy McFarland cheated hundreds of Bahamian workers in reportedly not paying them for countless

hours of labor ordered in last-minute efforts to save the festival he knew from the start would never actually work. This is worker exploitation, akin to forced labor, as these workers assumed they would be paid for their time, were coerced into continuing the work by the looming threat of poverty. That these workers were people of color adds a racialized layer to the already problematic situation. Caribbean economies like that of the Bahamas are heavily reliant on tourism (Ogden), a favorite luxury of the rich and white, like those targeted by Fyre's advertising. Considered a continuation of colonization, Caribbean tourism, according to Rebecca Ogden of the University of Kent, creates capital that is often "concentrated offshore, benefiting foreign operators, but contributing little to the local economy." This is exemplified by Caribbean tourist staples like all-inclusive resorts, which encourage guests to leave their cash at home, disadvantaging local businesses, and poses a striking similarity to McFarland's "credit-loaded wristbands to pay for drinks, food and experiences" during Fyre Festival (Ogden). For the workers contracted by McFarland's team, this was an opportunity for a relative profit. But as *FYRE* explains, the money was never there. McFarland was borrowing millions from investors, lying about Fyre's financial standings as a company, and doing shady deals for money to fill in the cracks to which he arrived by private jets. None of it made sense, and people still bought tickets, booked flights, and brought their vlog cameras along on the dusty shuttle buses that drove them throughout the Fyre campsite. McFarland, in a rare moment of honesty, said it himself in *FYRE*: "We're selling a pipe dream to your average loser."

For this, I was dumbfounded. My immediate reaction was disbelief that some people could be stupid enough to buy into such a facade. But, like I said earlier, the promotional videos

and other marketing tactics by Fyre were smart, intriguing, and beautifully made, so calling attendees stupid feels like a cop-out. I'm aware that my reaction stems primarily from the fact that I didn't grow up with a lot of money. I grew up lower-middle class, and I had a wonderful childhood, but my family did experience our fair—or unfair—share of financial struggle. After the 2008 Recession, my dad was an unemployed alcoholic, and my family couldn't live comfortably on my mom's salary alone. Thus, luxury experiences and things have always been off my radar, and especially so since 2008.

This doesn't mean that I didn't want those experiences and things, though. When I first heard about Coachella, I dreamed of going, wearing wild clothing, mingling with celebrities, feeling free in the desert. But Coachella isn't just one concert, and tickets aren't just a couple hundred dollars; it's a bi-weekend experience in one of the most expensive places in the United States—Palm Springs, California—and ticket packages can go for thousands, not including airfare and accommodations. I also dreamed of owning some of those luxurious names—Chanel, Gucci, Tiffany. I still do. Professional advertisements for these things are relatively rare outside of print, so it's obvious to me that their social media sponsorships, in which influencers are paid to include those items in an Instagram post or YouTube video, are the driving force behind my desire. This goes beyond traditional advertising and into a realm of lifestyle marketing: reaching the consumer directly so as to make them envy the life of the influencer promoting the product or experience, not necessarily the product or experience itself. This can create a far more emotional reaction to the marketing, blurring the line between need and want. I know this because I've felt these things—I experience the inner war between want and apathy that most other people do. Still, I have a difficult time under-

standing why people were so quick to throw their money, hard-earned or inherited, at Fyre.

So, I beg these questions: Why do we so easily trust what we see on social media, perceive it as fact, and then try to live our lives accordingly? Why do people buy into lies like Fyre Festival just because their favorite model or social media influencer promotes it? No one can escape these phenomena. I, like most other people of my generation, the very generation that was at the center of Fyre, are consumers of its medium. But social media isn't evil. It has proved to be an incredible tool for reaching the masses and creating change, ethically promoting business, and connecting with people around the world. However, its downsides aren't exactly secret, and yet our lives revolve around it. Maybe it's hypocritical of me to find fault with this issue, but the crux of my personal values is the assumption that truth matters. This belief has solidified throughout the time I've spent in journalism classes and is reinforced by the idea that without people who value truth, we cannot live in a society that values democracy. Simply put, society cannot function without champions of truth.

I believe that cheating the system as McFarland did is wrong, and that taking advantage of people is wrong, especially when they have less privilege than oneself, and I would hope that most people think the same. Social media seems to have become a pipe dream itself, and if it can act perfectly as the medium for a message as disastrous as Fyre Festival, then we've got a lot of work to do. As Marshall McLuhan said, "The medium is the message" (16). We now value clout over truth, and in order for it to be satisfying, that clout must come directly from the medium: social media. However, like McLuhan's ideas, nothing is ever black and white, and that is especially the case with Fyre Festival. I don't believe that modern communication

is broken, and, to reiterate, I don't believe that social media, lifestyle marketing, or wanting things that aren't necessary are inherently bad. But I do believe that we have work to do. As alluded to in *FYRE*, taking what we've learned from the failed Fyre Festival and using it to change how we operate powerful, omnipresent channels of communication is essential. Speaking purely out of optimism, this could be the start of a transitional period in our culture in which we repair the damage.

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QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

Context

1. The author asks: “Why do we so easily trust what we see on social media, perceive it as fact, and then try to live our lives accordingly? Why do people buy into lies like Fyre Festival just because their favorite model or social media influencer promotes it?” How do you respond to such questions? How does the essay respond to such questions?
2. The essay discusses social media as a medium for marketing and selling pipe dreams to consumers. What do you make of this sentiment? Do you have firsthand experience with such occurrence?

Style

1. The style of this piece might be described as more conversational or colloquial than strictly academic. What do you think this style offers to readers of the piece? How might this style suit the essay’s subject matter?
2. The essay centers around discussion of the Fyre Festival, but is also infused with the author’s own personal experience and a larger discussion about social media and truth. What do you think about the essay’s layout? Do you find it’s organizational scheme effective? How do you think the element of narrative affects the piece overall?

THE LONGING FOR A FATHER

THE EFFECTS OF PATERNAL ABSENCE ON DAUGHTERS

Sarah Clough

From the time a child is born, everyone assumes her first word of spoken vocabulary will be some form of “mama” or “dada.” While friends and family smile at this precious endearment, it symbolizes how central parents are in children’s lives. From infancy until adolescence (and possibly beyond), family serves as the “basic social institution” for children (Carvalho 1). Specific parent-child relationships further impact children in unique ways. One relationship often overlooked is a daughter’s bond with her father, which is shown to be the most beneficial connection for daughters in high conflict family situations (Corwyn and Bradley 13). Sadly, many young women cannot benefit from this relationship because their fathers are absent in their lives. Absent fathers (whether emotionally or literally detached) are those who do not regularly interact with their children and consequently are not a part of their development (Peyper et al. 4). In her graphic memoir titled *Fun Home*, Alison Bechdel portrays her experiences growing up with Bruce, her emotionally absent father. While Bechdel navigates through the difficulties in her upbringing, she also attempts to find the good in her father. The book eventually ends with the conclusion that he was in some way there for her all those

years before he died, as he “caught” her when she fell. In her attempt to honor Bruce, Bechdel paints the relationship in an overall positive light, which is not the truth. Bechdel’s own story in concordance with many young women’s testimonies published in the *Journal of Psychology in Africa* reveal the most detrimental issues seen in daughters with absent fathers: engaging in behaviors and activities solely for attention, experiencing declining self-esteem and mental states, feeling prohibited to express their true selves, and having difficulty sharing emotions. In light of these horrible effects, daughters need the ability to deal honestly with their fathers’ impacts on their lives, while still demonstrating appropriate honor and respect.

One important way a daughter reacts to an emotionally absent father is by seeking ways to earn the attention and affection lacking in the relationship. *Journal of Psychology in Africa* published an article in 2015 summarizing a study exploring the “personal experiences of father emotional absence by young adult women” (Peyper et al. 128). The study revealed a common trend, which was that many young women engage in activities that their fathers enjoy (such as sports) in order to receive approval and attention. One young woman participating in the study commented, “I learned watching rugby and cricket because that would appear to be an opportunity for bonding. Those were the things that we could do together, so what I did was to literally determine what my father regarded as important so that I could share his interests with him. It at least resulted in his talking to me from time to time” (Peyper et al. 131). Another participant recalled how she continued playing cricket not because she enjoyed it, but because her father began showing interest in that area of her life (Peyper et al. 131). The general consensus was that participating in these activities was worthwhile in the moment, simply because it

prompted their fathers to give them some of the attention that was lacking before.

In *Fun Home*, Bechdel pays tribute to the daughter's struggle to find a connection point with her father. Alison is unable to start building a more concrete relationship with Bruce until she is old enough to be on a similar intellectual plane as him and gets interested in his passion: literature. As she says, "Dad didn't have much use for small children, but as I got older, he began to sense my potential as an intellectual companion" (Bechdel 198). This harkens to another participant's comment in an interview where she mentioned that engaging in activities her father enjoyed made her feel "almost as if he would allow me to be his friend" (Peyper et al. 131). This is similar to the situation in *Fun Home* when Alison goes through Bruce's English course in high school and then continues studying English in college. She remembers that they actually grew closer while she was in college; her father discussed her readings with her and offered help (Bechdel 200). When Alison came home for Christmas, she says, "I found Dad's delight about *Ulysses* a bit galling. But it was nice to have his attention... In a burst of tenderness, I encouraged him further" (Bechdel 204). This connection is the first time the reader sees a promising relationship, as Bruce even goes so far as to give Alison his own copy of *Ulysses* from college (Bechdel 204).

However nice these special moments are, Bruce spends most of the book ignoring Alison. Alison does make an attempt at relationship when she mentions that the gay group at school is going to picket a movie. This is a potential mutual topic, since she and her father are both gay. Disappointingly, Alison drops the subject when she notices both derision and fear in her father's eyes (Bechdel 219). What should have been an easy connection point fails as such, because Bruce does not show interest in that

area of his daughter's life. Not once is Bruce seen asking Alison about her life or showing interest in her aside from what she's currently reading. Bechdel begins to recognize this issue when she reflects that "He really was there all those years, a flesh-and-blood presence steaming off the wallpaper, digging up the dogwoods, polishing the finials... smelling of sawdust and sweat and designer cologne. But I ached as if he were already gone" (23). For all practical purposes, Bruce's physical presence was not enough to create a meaningful father-daughter connection. This is a real issue that Bechdel and daughters with similar experiences must be willing to face without burying it under the guise of respecting fathers and remembering them well.

Beyond just seeking affection, a father's behavior towards his daughter greatly impacts her overall self-esteem and mental state. *Journal of Psychology in Africa's* article also stresses how a father's emotional involvement benefits a child's "well-being, academic competence, persistence to complete complex tasks, and self-esteem, and has proved to protect adolescents from emotional distress" (Peyper et al. 127). In other words, a daughter who doesn't feel loved and supported may wonder if something is wrong with her, become incredibly self-conscious, worry about everything she does, or simply lack any motivation. When her father is involved in her life, she remains more secure in her identity (Peyper et al. 127). As one participant in the study said, "I think it must have been related to poor self-esteem—always those negative ideas and beliefs about yourself" (Peyper et al. 131). Another young woman relayed, "As soon as somebody acknowledges something I've done I start thinking there must be a mistake somewhere," while one participant admitted, "I never thought much of myself, I always tried to look great in his eyes or in the eyes of other people, but I never thought I was up too much or 'passing the

test' or was worth something..." (Peyper et al. 131). Clearly, a father's support greatly impacts a daughter's view of self-worth. These women did not experience a positive relationship with their fathers, and that took a toll on their self-esteem and confidence.

To further the case, a survey was taken of 310 girls in Turkey aged 14-18 to see if the same effects of fathers are prevalent in non-western cultures. The study identified that the three basic psychological needs of any person (autonomy, relatedness, and competence) are in fact indirectly related to the quality of father-daughter relationships (Sagkal et al.). When children, specifically daughters, do not receive these basic needs, it can lead to psychological ill-being and possibly even psychopathology (Sagkal et al.). Alison's obsessive-compulsive disorder beginning when she is ten years old arguably exemplifies this effect of emotionally distant parents (especially fathers). She describes how she religiously avoided odd numbers and multiples of thirteen, whether that meant counting water drops leaking out of the faucet or the edges of the flooring in a doorway (Bechdel 135). Alison felt that she had to follow specific rituals and daily routines (such as undressing or going to bed) in a special order and recite incantations to protect herself (Bechdel 136-137). Additionally, her insecurity rose when she began drawing "I think" over every statement in her journal. Bechdel says, "To save time I created a shorthand version of I think, a curvy circumflex. Soon I began drawing it right over names and pronouns. It became a sort of amulet, warding off evil from my subjects" (142). She described these journal entries as "a sort of epistemological crisis. How did I know that the things I was writing were absolutely, objectively true?... My simple, declarative sentences began to strike me as hubristic at best, utter lies at worst" (Bechdel 141). By this point, Alison's

self-esteem and mental state are clearly declining. Since *Fun Home* strongly focuses on the father-daughter relationship, noticing how disconnected Bruce is from Alison explains a possible contribution towards the disorder. Whenever Bruce is seen interacting with Alison, he is making her help him with work around the house, punishing her for doing a task incorrectly, or engaging in a game of airplane or baseball only to notice the dirty rug or weedy flower bed and place more importance on those than the game (Bechdel 4, 91). In this way, Alison's story demonstrates how a father's neglect affects his daughter's self-esteem and mental state.

Furthermore, many daughters living with emotionally distant fathers do not feel free to be themselves due to repressed emotions. They learn to maintain a façade in front of other people, because their fathers do not allow them to show emotion (Peyper et al. 131). One participant said, "I think if people were to observe me from the outside they would have thought that I was a totally balanced and happy child. In true fact I was all but. That which I presented to the outside world was not at all the truth, not at all what I was feeling deep inside myself" (Peyper et al. 131). In this way, a daughter's social and emotional behavior is altered so that people don't truly see what is going on "behind the scenes." Bechdel touches on this in *Fun Home* when she remarks that her father "used his skillful artifice not to make things, but to make things appear to be what they were not. He appeared to be an ideal husband and father, for example" (16-17). Bruce, who seemed to others to be a quality role model, was really a man having sex with teenage boys and controlling many aspects of Alison's life. For instance, he decorated her room in a way that she hated and forced her to dress in certain ways (Bechdel 14-15). In these situations, she was not free to express her thoughts, preferences, or opinions.

Alison also appeared to be a normal young girl who enjoyed playing dress-up in Daddy's clothes, but much more was going on in her life (such as the previously mentioned obsessive-compulsive disorder) connected to the strained relationship with her father. The reader feels that their entire relationship is a façade, a perfect model covering up the truth, when a family friend makes the remark that they seem unusually close (Bechdel 225). Bechdel agrees that they had indeed become closer than they used to be, but the entire relationship was still a shadow of what it could have been. Alison never began opening up, being herself, and living the truth until she moved out from under Bruce's influence in her life.

In a broader sense, emotionally disconnected fathers also make it difficult for daughters to freely share emotion, even when they want to be open with their fathers. This begins when the father "neither shows affection nor expresses his love in return" (Peyper et al. 129). Many fathers are found to be uncomfortable when a daughter expresses her emotions, causing them to discourage it altogether (Peyper et al. 129). One young woman who was interviewed shared that "an emotional conversation with my father was very difficult. I couldn't go to him and I still cannot. If, for example, I shared with him that my boyfriend had upset me he was quick to cut the conversation short by telling me to get rid of the boyfriend. That was his solution, just like that. He would tell me to drop discussions on emotions and emotional trivialities..." (Peyper et al. 129). Another participant realized that "my father failed to make me feel at ease. In his presence I was almost always shy for having emotions and of showing emotions. I think the reason for this was that my father didn't allow room or space for emotions... He didn't accommodate or embrace it" (Peyper et al. 129). Yet another woman relayed that her father taught her "if you cry

you're a weakling, if you display emotions you're a weakling" (Peyper et al. 131). One examination of "parental socialization of children's sadness" found that spouses perceive fathers to "provide more support for their daughters' sadness expressivity," while mothers tend to support sons better (Cassano et al. 3). This examination reinforces the young women's testimonies that a daughter's ability to be emotionally open is greatly dependent on how her father encourages or discourages the behavior.

Beyond simply encouraging emotions in their own daughters, parents have been found to be emotional role models for their kids; they set the example for how to act (Cassano et al. 3). If the father does not display it first, it is extremely difficult for the daughter to navigate expressing and understanding her emotions on her own. Alison's father in *Fun Home* is definitely an example of this kind of father. When reading his written response to Alison's letter about her homosexuality, Alison felt that "instead of at last confiding in me [concerning his own homosexuality], he took the novel approach of assuming that I already knew—although at the time he wrote the letter, I did not" (Bechdel 211). Here, Bruce was unwilling to be open with Alison and express his own emotional turmoil. The result was Alison's continuing frustration and confusion. Her father also discouraged physical affection in the family, which made Alison shy and uneasy when she decided to kiss him goodnight. She remembers that "all I managed was to grab his hand and buss the knuckles lightly as if he were a bishop or an elegant lady, before rushing from the room in embarrassment" (Bechdel 19). She even says, "this embarrassment on my part was a tiny scale model of my father's more fully developed self-loathing. His shame inhabited our house as pervasively and invisibly as the aromatic musk of aging mahogany" (Bechdel 20). Liv-

ing in his shame and emotional distance inhibited Alison from reaching out to him without feeling embarrassed or like she was imposing on him. By living on his own emotional island and shutting her out, Bruce failed as an emotional role model and did not create an environment for her to freely express her feelings.

In light of these testimonies and research findings, some may argue that too much emphasis is being placed on the father-daughter connection, since a father is not the sole influence in his daughter's life. It is true that no family relationship exists in a vacuum; general family dynamics always play a part in how the child is feeling and what she may be struggling with (Corwyn and Bradley 17). An article from *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal* states that "the behavior of one of the elements is inseparable from the other elements and that what happens to one of them influences the whole family system" (Carvalho et al. 1). While each variable in the family dynamics ultimately affects the others, that does not mean specific relationships cannot be very forming and influential on daughters in distinct ways. For those who believe the mother-daughter relationship is being ignored in order to exalt a father's influence, again the important factor is that each relationship can be fundamental for varying reasons. Comparing them and proclaiming one to consistently be more important is tricky, since fathers and mothers often offer different kinds of support for their daughters. While it is important to recognize the family as a whole, the picture of fathers as helpless morons who don't matter when it comes to parenting needs to be counteracted and revealed as a lie (Carvalho et al. 1).

Overall, it is incredibly clear that a daughter's behavior and well-being are dependent on having "a secure base for emotional development" (Peyper et al. 8). As the primary male

influence in her life, a father's place is crucial. Daughters who feel overlooked are often driven to engage in activities they don't enjoy and conform to his personal preference in order to receive attention (Peyper et al. 131). Disconnection with fathers also impacts self-esteem and their mental states, while creating the feeling of having to repress their personalities and who they are. Emotionally distant fathers also fail to create space for daughters to learn how to freely and healthily express their emotions. Women's testimonies, including Bechdel's own, provide the basis for these claims concerning fatherhood and bring up an important issue concerning emotionally distant fathers. In *Fun Home*, Bechdel is reviewing her relationship with Bruce before he died, hoping to discover some insight into what made him the way he was. This is important for her to process but must be done with caution. Bechdel plays with the possibility of Bruce being the result of the small-minded town he lived in and its oppression on him. While this may be important to recognize, it would be wrong to conclude that he's therefore a practically innocent victim of circumstances. Bechdel ends the memoir saying that "in the tricky reverse narration that impels our entwined stories, he was there to catch me when I leapt" (232). In reality, Bruce did nothing except recommend a book that she ended up identifying with; in every other situation, he ran from honesty and conversations concerning their similarities. It is ultimately important to recognize that making deceased fathers sound better than they were to find the good in them only encourages denial. While Bechdel certainly has a few precious moments to remember with Bruce, her story struggles with the tension surrounding their relationship. Healthy families must learn to bear this tension of giving genuine respect to imperfect parents and honest consideration of the impact of their weaknesses.

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QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

Context

1. The author uses Alison Bechdel's graphic memoir *Fun Home* as a basis for inquiry into father-daughter relationships. How does the author use research to support their analysis of such relationships as portrayed in *Fun Home*? Similarly, how does the author's depiction of *Fun Home* reinforce the research presented in the essay?
2. Can you think of other texts or personal experiences that relate similar testimonies about parent-child relationships?

Style

1. The author goes back and forth between analysis of *Fun Home* (a creative work) and synthesis of secondary source material (research articles. Do you find this formatting effective? Is this style something you have practiced in your own writing?
2. How does the author address potential counterarguments near the end of the essay?

SACRIFICING PROFESSIONAL GOALS FOR FAMILY SUCCESS

A WORKING CLASS STORY

Manasa Gadiraju

Samad Hasan oghlu Aliyev sits across from me in a beige recliner rubbing his eyes. His seven-year-old daughter darts past us, weaving in between her father's legs, peddling the books she has made to sell to him. Smiling, he tells her in a thick, doting Turkic accent that if she can calculate how much money all her books will total to, he will buy as many as she makes. She wanders out of the room with her finger on her chin and her eyes trained towards the ceiling, thinking. Mr. Aliyev smiles, and I can see the same spark of excitement, industry, and inquisitiveness in his eyes as in his daughter's. Mr. Aliyev takes a sip of steaming, honey-colored tea and beckons me to start the interview. In the distance, we can hear his daughter counting aloud, settling the worth of her wares.

Mr. Aliyev works as a chemical operator in a biopharmaceutical company in Kansas City, Missouri. His work entails producing chemical pesticides and preservatives, and his success in his field calls on both his knowledge of chemistry and his attention to detail. He has been working at this company for four years, although he has previously worked at an automotive company as a "professional" car washer, as he tells me with a chuckle. Besides his job at the automotive company, Mr. Aliyev

has held several odd jobs, including working in construction for houses and as a nurse's aide.

Before he immigrated to the United States, Mr. Aliyev was a young and promising doctor in Central Asia. He explains that he was motivated to become a doctor when he was 17 years old and witnessed a man sustain a life-threatening injury to his carotid artery. The young Mr. Aliyev sprung to action, rushing to the man's side and using his hands to stop the bleeding. He called out to the growing crowd for someone to bring him a knife or any implement, but the shocked onlookers did nothing. Finally, a little boy came running to his side, holding a spoon. Inspired by this little boy's willingness to help, Mr. Aliyev decided to become a pediatrician. Mr. Aliyev came from a working-class background: his mother worked on the railroad, and his father worked in a glass factory. Despite this less-than-privileged background, Mr. Aliyev studied hard throughout medical school and became a pediatrician, working for three years as a doctor in his country before immigrating to the United States in search of a better life free from the political strife of the crumbling post-USSR nation. Mr. Aliyev fondly describes his experience as a doctor in his country: although being a doctor in his home country does not pay as well as it does in America, he explains, there was a sense of gratitude from the community and social respect that the role afforded him. The grocers would recognize him as a doctor and give him chickens for free; the car servicers would change his tires for free. I recognize a glint of wistfulness in his eyes as he recounts these experiences.

After immigrating to the United States, Mr. Aliyev enrolled in English-learning classes and occupied himself with whatever work he could find—mainly car washing—as he worked to learn the language and assimilate to the culture. He saved up enough money to take the United States Medical Licensing

Examination, or USMLE and began what would end up being a paperwork-laden, expensive, and disappointing ten-year process of attempting—and failing—to break into the US medical system. Successfully attaining a United States residency spot, or “match,” as it is known in the medical circles, is notoriously difficult for so-called Foreign Medical Graduates, or FMGs—people who complete their medical training outside of the United States. As explained in his article decrying the deck that is so heavily stacked against FMGs, Eric Beam, MD, points out that only half of FMGs matched in 2016 (Beam). Further, Beam points out that many residency programs take it as a point of pride that the smallest possible percentage of their residency spots are occupied by FMGs, due to the stigma against their supposedly lesser quality of education. To be eligible to apply for a US residency, FMGs are required to submit an application to the Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates (ECFMG) for certification, about half of whom actually succeed in obtaining certification. Then, these applicants are faced with another hurdle: the United States Medical Licensing Examinations, or USMLE, a multistep licensing examination which qualifies candidates to apply to residencies within the United States. To apply to residency programs, candidates must pass the challenging Steps 1 and 2 of the USMLE, which test proficiency in the sciences as well as clinical medicine respectively, and must also complete the “USMLE Step 2 Clinical Skills test, which requires a high-stakes demonstration of English proficiency and a costly trip to one of the five U.S. cities where it’s offered” (Beam, AAFP). Mr. Aliyev studied diligently and passed the exams—difficult in their own right but almost impossible in a language other than his first—but was unaware of some of the finer points of navigating the complex application system. The time limit between your exam attempts, the num-

ber of times you can take the exams, and the general attitudes of residency boards, which can vary from hospital to hospital, all dictate one's chances of getting in. Mr. Aliyev had no one to advise him on navigating such a maze, and with a family to care for and a less-than-ideal income, Mr. Aliyev hung up his dreams of being a doctor and turned to focus on providing for his family.

Faced with the task of rebuilding his professional identity and feeding his family, Mr. Aliyev transitioned from washing cars by day and studying by night to picking up odd jobs. He decided to apply to his current biopharmaceutical employer when a friend of his encouraged Mr. Aliyev to apply for a job as a Chemical Operator. Initially, Mr. Aliyev describes how the hiring staff was skeptical of his application since he was, by his own admission, educationally overqualified. However, he conveyed his sincere interest in the job and was invited to interview and take the four written exams, which he passed with flying colors. Impressed by his skill and charmed by his ambition, the company offered Mr. Aliyev his current position as a chemical operator.

Mr. Aliyev has been working at his current workplace for four years and speaks fondly of the company. When asked about his least favorite part of the job, he demurs, answering that almost nothing bothers him and that perhaps cleaning the lab is sometimes tedious. However, he said he regards the company as his home, so he takes pride in its keeping. When asked about the best aspect of his job, Mr. Aliyev explains that the diversity of people is what makes it worthwhile. He describes in his characteristic, accented lilt, "I never, ever have [sic] such a company, I never work [sic] at a company [that] had so many different types of people. Different nationality [sic], different languages. See, my English is not my perfect language, but [this company]

gives everyone a chance” (Aliyev).

Certainly, not everyone shares Mr. Aliyev’s appreciation for diversity. He describes a particularly stressful incident he faced as a new employee dealing with discrimination from a coworker. This employee antagonized Mr. Aliyev’s language and culture, and while at first, he ignored this transgression, the hostility built over a year such that Mr. Aliyev simply could not tolerate how toxic his work environment had come to be. He finally reported the harassment to the company’s HR and explains how the company handled this matter with a thorough and serious investigation that led to the termination of the offending employee. After the corporate intervention, Mr. Aliyev has not experienced any further mistreatment and admits that his only regret was not reporting the situation sooner, since his company responded to the conflict so well.

Throughout my interview with Mr. Aliyev, it was clear to me that he is a strikingly hardworking, industrious, and perseverant man. He has risen above many obstacles, including encountering the stigma of what some might see as downgrading from being a doctor in his home country to a car washer in America when he first arrived, struggling and failing to continue practicing as a doctor due to the internal red tape of the American system, and having to struggle with discrimination within the working class workforce. He has managed to change his perspective and maintain his positive attitude, and when asked whether he had regrets, he was content in saying that he did not. He loves working for his current company, and his only regret is that he wasted ten years of his life trying to break into the US medical system. As he explains, “In the end, I had to choose between my family or my career. I chose my family.” Looking around his living room, decorated with pictures of his children and wife, I could see that that statement was true.

Mr. Aliyev is the consummate family man, and his love for his family clearly motivates everything that he does. His attitude exemplifies many of the often-undervalued virtues of the stalwart working class and reflects a work ethic and quiet dignity that deserves to be celebrated.

Just as I ask him my final question, a small head of brown hair obstructs my view. His daughter is back, beaming, holding out her books for her father; she's figured out the price. He smiles and pulls out his wallet, and I can tell that he knows his hard-earned dollars are being put to good use.

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QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

Context

1. The essay begins and ends with the image of Mr. Aliyev's daughter. How does the returning image affect the tone of the piece?
2. Try to summarize the author's purpose in writing this essay in a sentence or two. What do you think might be the author's primary objective(s) in presenting the information as they do?

Style

1. This essay reflects an interview that was conducted by the author. Notice, however, that this piece does not appear in the traditional format for an interview. Instead, the author has taken creative liberties, giving the interview a narrative and story-like effect. Do you find this format more accessible? Why or why not?
2. How does the author incorporate secondary sources into this piece?

THE BEATLES AND THE CRISIS OF SELF-IDENTITY

Jared Gutzmer

“Ringo- a lovely performer. George- a mystical unrealized talent. But John and Paul, Saints John and Paul, were, and made, and aureoled and beatified and eternalized the concept that shall always be known, remembered and deeply loved as The Beatles”

-Leonard Bernstein

The Beatles are one of the most popular bands of all time. This is an undisputed fact no matter the location. They were so popular that in America, they had to stop touring due to the screaming fans which caused the band not to be able to hear themselves. Never before was there a group that was so incredibly popular in history. This popularity and other factors led the members of the Beatles to change as individuals and as a group as they matured musically and mentally. Their identity shifted from a group identity to a self-identity. From the Beatles first album, *Please Please Me*, to their last, *Let It Be*, the shift in their identity can be seen through their music and the appearances that led to individualism and eventually their downfall.

The Music

“It would not seem quite so likely that the accompanying fever known as Beatlemania will also be successfully exported. On this side of the Atlantic it is dazed stuff.”

-Jack Gould, *New York Times* television critic

The Beatles music and lyrics changed drastically from their first to last album due to adapting to a changing society, musical maturity, and their increased popularity. The Beatles first began to become popular in the United States in 1964 when they first performed on the *Ed Sullivan Show*. They played one of their first hit songs, “I Want to Hold Your Hand” among others. This broadcast drew an estimated audience of 73 million viewers, a world record for that time and furthermore, began the British Invasion in music. The lyrics of this song are about a down-to-earth, innocent love for someone that can be seen through the lyrics, “Oh yeah I’ll tell you somethin’ / I think you will understand / When I say that somethin’ / I want to hold your hand” and, “And when I touch you / I feel happy inside.” These lyrics are accompanied by an upbeat, bright feeling from the guitar and the vocal harmonies bringing out the innocence and euphoria of the music. The Beatles identity at this time was a fun-loving innocent group that anyone could enjoy. They were the purest form of the Beatles as a collective and identity as a group.

As the Beatles became more popular their music began to change in 1965 and 1966 with the release of the albums *Rubber Soul* and *Revolver*. They moved to a side of ambiguity and lyricism that made the listener have to listen to the lyrics to find the meaning. This was because of many reasons, the main one being the popularity of the Beatles during this time. The music that they would write would be listened to

because of their popularity. They could now write music they were more interested in and passionate about causing them to begin to move away from the innocence of their past. They never left this style of their music behind, but their new style of music began to become more popular. However, this also caused them to start the shift away from their past group style and move towards the Beatles as individuals with their individual songs. An example of this ambiguity and separation can be found in the song, "Norwegian Wood (This Bird Has Flown)" on the *Rubber Soul* album. The lyrics leave the listener wondering what it is about, "I once had a girl / Or should I say she once had me / She showed me her room / Isn't it good Norwegian wood?" and, "She told me she worked / In the morning and started to laugh / I told her I didn't / And crawled off to sleep in the bath." These lyrics are accompanied by the eerie sound of the sitar, an instrument popular in folk music in India. John Lennon, the writer of this song, revealed that it was about an extramarital affair he was having, and he worded it to hide the truth from his wife. This demonstrates the individualism that started to be revealed through the album. It is not a song concerning the collective anymore, it's a song solely about an event in John Lennon's life. In this period there are more instances of this ambiguity such as the single, "Day Tripper" which Paul McCartney, the writer, said, "This was getting towards the psychedelic period when we were interested in winking to your friends and comrades in arms... 'Day Tripper' was to do with tripping" (Inglis 132). This quote shows the dramatic shift in the Beatles music from wanting to hold someone's hand, to an affair, to a song about tripping on drugs.

From 1967-1970, the Beatles music shifted further into ambiguity and drugs that caused censorship and recording

problems. One of their most historic albums, *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Heart Club Band*, acted as the beginning of this shift. The song, "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds" is an example of this. The song contained lyrics such as, "Picture yourself on a boat on a river / With tangerine trees and marmalade skies. / Somebody calls to you, you answer quite slowly / A girl with kaleidoscope eyes." This song sparked controversy because most people thought it was about an LSD trip, which was heightened once someone discovered that each letter in the title spelled out L-S-D. This caused many radio stations to ban this song, the major one being the British Broadcasting Corporation. This song remained banned even after John Lennon, who wrote it, said that the song was inspired from a drawing that his son made in school depicting his classmate Lucy. Although, Lennon and McCartney also admitted to taking LSD during the time they were writing this song and many others. This again shows the sense of individualism that is revealed through their music, but in this case, it is harder to see without the history of the song. This song was not the only record on this album to be banned, the BBC famously banned many of their songs including "A Day in the Life" for its many drug references (Inglis 134).

Censorship was not the only problem that the band faced, but the drugs itself started causing problems. In 1966, the Beatles abandoned touring and became full-time studio musicians. When they started recording *The Beatles (The White Album)*, studio time became excruciatingly long. "The first album, *Please Please Me*, took 10 hours to record...By the recording of *The Beatles*, studio time appeared to be of less concern. Several tracks— 'Revolution 1' (40 hours) 'Revolution 9' (two days prior to studio recording), 'Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da' (42 hours) ... To some extent, time can be accounted for by the

drugs- LSD and cannabis- the group was using in this period” (Inglis 129). This quote shows that the drugs were starting to become a severe problem for the Beatles, and it was starting to affect their performance. Of course, there was no stopping them because they were the Beatles.

This shift in musical and lyrical style shows how the Beatles identity as a group changed with their increased popularity. They were able to make music that they wanted because they could, due to their popularity. People would listen to their music no matter what. The BBC did censor many of their songs, but in the US that was very uncommon. People loved their music even if it was talking about drugs and affairs. This is mainly due to the evolving culture of the United States, especially the hippie movement that swept all the major cities in the US. Drug culture was never as present as it was 1960’s during the height of the Beatles popularity. By their last album, they were not the “I Want To Hold Your Hand” Beatles anymore; they were this psychedelic group of drug loving individuals, with their individual songs.

Appearance

“One shake of the bushy fringe of their identical, mop-like haircuts is enough to start a riot in any theater...”

-The New York Times Magazine December 1963

The Beatles’ appearance went through a transformation that reflected the advancement of their musical style. When the Beatles first appeared on *The Ed Sullivan Show* in 1964, they were clean cut, with matching hair, and matching suits, leading to an overall uniform, clean look.

This reflected the music they were playing such as, “I Want To Hold Your Hand.” They were singing innocent songs, so their appearance matched this identity they were trying to portray. This look also shows the group identity within the

Beatles. They were a group of four people who looked completely the same, making music together. This



look stayed consistent for their next albums, but slowly became more individualistic but with the same commonness of their hair styles to keep the unity feeling among the band. It was not until the release of *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, that they began to break this uniformity among the members.

The clean look from before has started to change, but not completely. They still have similar hairstyles and mustaches here, but the wardrobe has changed. They are now wearing bright, flashy military uniforms, hence "Sgt. Pepper." The album covers also has many other notable faces, including: Bob Dylan, Edgar Allan



Poe, Karl Marx, and, most noticeably, the old Beatlemania Beatles to the left of the singers. This comparison directly shows the continuous change of the Beatles. By putting Karl Marx on their album cover, while the United States was still

involved in the Cold War with the Soviet Union, also shows the change of style of the Beatles. The Ed Sullivan Beatles would not have been able to make a statement like this. Their identity was evolving. It was evolving into separate identities.

In the following Beatles albums, *Magical Mystery Tour*, *The Beatles*, *Yellow Submarine*, *Abbey Road*, and *Let It Be*, the group's appearance deviated and became completely individualistic. *The Magical Mystery Tour* was the first album to not feature the Beatles themselves, instead it featured them dressed as walruses on the cover. However, this individualistic form of identity can be seen in the music video, "I am the Walrus."

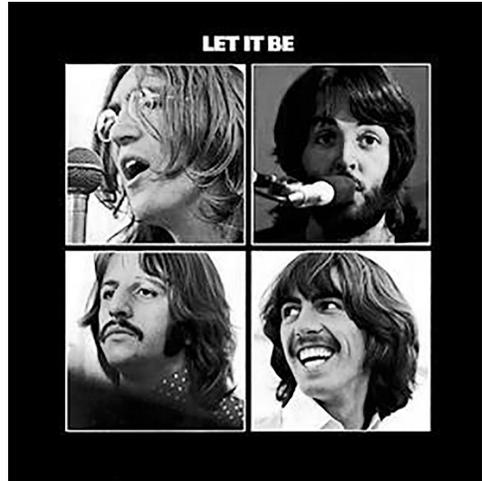


In the photo to the left, they look almost completely different from earlier group photos, with much longer hair and no uniformity. They completely lost the "clean cut" Beatles look from the *Ed Sullivan Show*. They had become individuals not a group, a clear shift from their last albums and

the mindset they had. They were still the Beatles, but they had diverted and become four individuals. The next album, *The Beatles*, does not feature the Beatles entirely, instead it just has the plain white front, hence "The White Album." *Yellow Submarine* only features the Beatles in an animated form. It is not until *Abbey Road* and *Let It Be* that the Beatles return to the album cover. The album cover for *Let It Be* best demonstrates the transition toward complete individuality.

This album cover shows the change of identity for each of the Beatles. Their identity was not "the Beatles" anymore. Their identity was John Lennon, Paul McCartney, George

Harrison, and Ringo Starr. This idea is even shown in the cover, by the separation of each member in the square layout. This was also the first album that the Beatles were not in one picture but instead, four pictures taken at different times. This is fitting, since this is the last released album of the



Beatles. By the separation of the Beatles within the squares, it can be inferred that the Beatles were no more. They were their own separate squares, with their own separate lives.

Self-Identity and Breakup

“That was last week. The Beatles are no more. But this week I am still jumping, weeping, remembering a good epoch, a golden decade, a fine time, a fine time...”

-Leonard Bernstein

The Beatles went through a change from a group identity of the Beatles, to self-identity and individualism, that inevitably led to their downfall. According to George Martin, the Beatles’ record producer for every original album and often regarded as “the 5th Beatle,” this self-identity started with the return from their trip to India and the recording of *The Beatles* album. “They came back from abroad and they all had a huge collection of songs they wanted to record. And they wanted them done all at the same. By this time, they were four individuals with their individual songs, wanting to record them with the assistance of the other people rather than being a group” (Kozinn 161). According to Kozinn, the

breakup began during the time of the White Album mainly due to varying interests of the members. John Lennon wanted to give up touring and eventually even got tired of recording. Ringo Starr still enjoyed playing with the group, but also was interested in pursuing a career in acting since his success in the Beatles movies. Paul McCartney was interested in the path the Beatles were taking with their music and had difficulty convincing Harrison and Lennon to keep on this path. Meanwhile, George Harrison was still interested in his pursuit of Indian culture and music and wanted to integrate this into his music (Kozinn 162-163).

This separation however started before *The Beatles*; it began after the Magical Mystery Tour with the album of the same name. After the tour was over, they flew to India to study meditation and the Indian culture from Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, an Indian guru they met at his lecture. This trip caused much dispute among the band members and caused Ringo to leave only eleven days after arriving and the rest a few weeks later after a dispute with Maharishi. The bands return is when relations became more tense between members. This divide was strengthened when John Lennon began a relationship with Yoko Ono, a singer and musician from Japan. John and Yoko soon became inseparable and Yoko would even come to recording sessions which angered the other members because it interrupted the privacy that they were used to (Kozinn 172-175). This caused strife among the band which led to an increased tension in recording sessions. This even led to Ringo quitting the band because he found it unnecessary to be at the sessions and was further dispirited by their poisonous atmosphere. The other members eventually coaxed him back into joining a few weeks later (Kozinn 177). The Beatles were in a civil war with each other.

This event and the strife among the members started this division and made the next albums *Abbey Roads* and *Let It Be* a long and hard process. During this time, John Lennon was pursuing a career with Yoko Ono and making albums with their band. Paul McCartney, George Harrison, and Ringo Starr were also working on their own individual solo albums. In fact, by the time *Let it Be* was released each member had released their own solo album. They were not the Beatles anymore. They could not work well or efficiently together anymore. They were four individuals with their individuals' ideas trying to make music together. They finally agreed that it was not worth the strife and fighting that was occurring in the sessions. It was John Lennon who finally ended the band after the many legal fights, legal suits, and disputes among the band members. Lennon said, "I started the band, I disbanded it. It's as simple as that" (Gilmore "Why the Beatles Broke Up"). Lennon had enough of the Beatles and was the one who decided to end it. This was a mutual feeling among the Beatles because they knew that it was over. They knew the Beatles were no more.

It was individualism that caused the Beatles to break up. It was not solely Yoko Ono, who most people blame. The Beatles were fractured before she came into the picture. By the time of *The Beatles*, they were not the Beatles anymore, they were four individuals making music together. Their identity and focus shifted and went down four different paths. The separation was inevitable but necessary. They knew there was no changing from each of their current paths. They tried as long as they could to be the Beatles, but in the end, they were Paul, John, George, and Ringo. In a span of eight years, the Beatles rose to the top and conquered the music industry of the world, cementing themselves in music history forever, but the shift from group to self-identity is what caused their downfall.

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QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

Context

1. Throughout the piece, the author tracks the evolution of The Beatles from a band (often noted as “the original boy band”) to four individual artists. What might such evolution suggest about societal pressures and norms? Can you think of any other examples of such evolutionary pattern in popular culture?
2. The author ultimately argues that the “individualism” expressed in the latter part of The Beatles’ career is what caused their split. How can this argument be tracked throughout the essay? What thoughts do you have about the development of and evidence used for this essay’s thesis?

Style

1. The author uses epigraphs at the beginning of each section. How do the epigraphs set the tone for what follows?
2. Visual evidence is provided in support of the author’s thesis. Do you find such evidence convincing? Why or why not?

THE LIBERTY MEMORIAL

A MALLEABLE EXPRESSION OF HORROR IN IDYLIC TERMS

Richard Blake Schneider

Does Kansas City's Liberty Memorial celebrate war or peace? Is it focused on World War I or on the idealistic life to come? These questions are unanswered by the statue itself, and much is left to the discretion of the viewer. This leaves the Liberty Memorial with a spectrum of meanings. For the 100th anniversary of the end of World War I, the Liberty Memorial was covered in a projection of poppies. Bright red flowers floated across the stark white monument. The juxtaposition of the Liberty Memorial and imagery of poppies combines their meanings; additionally, it adds the vernacular and official meanings of the poppy to those found at the Liberty Memorial.

When the Liberty Memorial was constructed, many in the public supported the building of a large monument, but what it would represent would be of much discussion. The Liberty Memorial Association was created soon after the Armistice was announced. In fact, the first mass meeting was held just eighteen days later (Aber 1). The architectural competition charged the competitors with remembrance of the war and protection of courage, loyalty, sacrifice, and patriotism (13). Their aim was to mark the "dawn of an era of Peace" (13). However, the Liberty Memorial's specific meaning would be shaped throughout

and after its construction process. The Liberty Memorial has a duality of meaning in its remembrance of the first World War and the charge to create a better future. This duality of meaning is a result of public input, the creation of the Frieze, and officially-endorsed statements.

Meanings are created and sustained through public memory, which means the intended or official meaning of a memorial does not always match its vernacular. For example, John Bodnar in “Public Memory in an American City” describes the difference between official and vernacular cultural expressions by looking at the National Vietnam War Memorial. To the government, the Vietnam War was a patriotic duty to defend America; to those affected, it was a sorrowful waste of life (Bodnar 74). The official commemoration of the Vietnam War was often in terms of patriotism rather than mourning (Bodnar 74-75). The National Vietnam War Memorial was criticized as a “black gash of shame” while others supported the display of sympathy (Bodnar 74). Official culture uses “dogmatic formalism”, or prescribed truths, to express an idealistic reality, whereas vernacular culture is a spectrum of diverse values and views (Bodnar 75). Official culture seeks idealism, and vernacular culture asserts the reality of life as seen with the views of the Vietnam War. According to Bodnar, vernacular expression’s “... very existence threatens the dogmatic and timeless nature of official expressions”, yet the combination of official and vernacular cultural expressions defines public memory (Bodnar 75). This combination significantly impacts society’s perspective of culture.

Public memory derives from our continuous interpretation of reality—an attempt to relate the present with the past (Bodnar 75). Bodnar defines public memory further: Public memory is a system of beliefs and views that is produced from a political discussion that

involves the fundamental issues relating to the entire existence of a society: its organization, structure of power, and the very meaning of its past and present. (Bodnar 75)

This memory loans its perspective to current discussions and its significance exists in the commentary and implications on present issues (Bodnar 75). To look at the official and vernacular meanings of something is to look at the way the public remembers it. This memory is ever present and malleable.

The beginning of Liberty Memorial's Memory in Kansas City occurred on November 25, 1918 when Robert Alexander Long, a well-known Kansas City Businessman, was informed of a meeting on the creation of a memorial in the First World War, over which he would be the temporary chairman (Aber 1). On November 29 he would become the permanent chairman of what was to become the "Liberty Memorial Association." The name had many proposals, and, according to Sarajane Aber, "Whether the emphasis was to be on war or on peace was a question which developed early and was to continue" (2). To the public at the time, a World War I monument was viewed as noble, idealistic, and patriotic (Aber 3). Public input from this community would be an important process throughout development.

One citizen, Louis Cupp, published a booklet upon the Association's request. It begins with three biblical passages: from the Sermon on the Mount, Isaiah, and Proverbs (Cupp 3). Throughout the booklet, Cupp argues about the qualities that the memorial should and should not have. His outline for the fundamental qualities of the memorial were: that it should be beautiful, monumental, symbolic, and useful; that it should be built for the living; and its value to the public should increase over time (Cupp 6-8). Cupp defended his various stipulations

as well. It should be beautiful, he said, so that there is pride in putting it at Kansas City's "Front Door" (Cupp 6). It should be monumental to be unforgettable (Cupp 7). It should be useful because, for Cupp, to create an object with beauty with no purpose would be a sin. The most interesting part of the booklet, however, is the symbolism of the "prophetic conflict." Cupp described these struggles among the conflicting ideals of materialism and idealism; militarism and civilization; and barbarism and brotherhood. He argues that a memorial of WWI must be symbolic of "The new spirit of democracy which has been born out of this struggle for world freedom" (Cupp 7).

But why does a booklet on one person's view of World War I matter? Louis Cupp's booklet represents a form of vernacular culture. While his views were published for the public, many letters were written to the Liberty Memorial Association (Aber 4). Vernacular cultural expresses a perception of reality; for Cupp, this spiritual battle in society began, and ultimately ended, with the physical world war. Perhaps such a world view was not limited since many citizens were supportive of a memorial to "the dawn of an era of peace."

The excitement and interest in the Liberty Memorial was also found in much of the public. After months of research, the Liberty Memorial Association concluded that at least \$2 million would be needed to build the envisioned memorial (Donovan 20). A public fundraiser was organized to last from October 27, 1919 through November 5. The American Legion kicked it off with a parade. By noon the first day, the association achieved 15 percent of their \$2.5 million goal (Donovan 20). The final tally on November 6 put the subscription amount at \$2,517,000 (Donovan 23). This effort shows the intense support of the public in the creation of the Liberty Memorial—even if a design had not yet been chosen.

As plans were solidified, the polymorphic Liberty Memorial narrowed its ambiguity. There were proposals for an arch, monument, civic center, and even a memorial college (Cupp 8-12). Others proposed the qualities the memorial should possess but gave artistic freedom on the implementation. After a vote among seven choices, the association almost unanimously voted in favor of a monument with a non-utilitarian building (Donovan 20). The Liberty Memorial Association went on to choose an architect by conducting a competition governed by the competition code of the American Institute of Architects (Aber 12). The 30-page competition booklet begins with a statement of the memorial's official aim, "To forever perpetuate the courage, loyalty, and sacrifice of the patriots who offered and who gave their services, their lives and their all, in defense of Liberty and the Nation's honor during the World War" (Aber 13). The values of courage, loyalty, sacrifice, and patriotism are invoked to honor those who served and died in the first World War. However, the Association intentionally left the design aspects up to the architects:

We sought in this competition to depart from the stereotyped form of competitions. In writing the program I sought to remove every restriction possible and in their place has been an appeal to the spirit of the people. I want to speak for the author of this winning design. He will have the city. (Donovan 32)

This shows that rather than trying to impose their vision of the Liberty Memorial on an architect, the Association searched for an artistic view of commemoration to support. The aims were to (1) have an inspirational monument to the "dawn of an era of Peace", (2) be the "keynote" of a cultural campus, and (3) be the first step in the development of the whole site (Aber 13). How

these goals were accomplished, however, was intentionally left open for interpretation.

The winner of the competition, H. Van Buren Magonigle, was selected as the architect for Liberty Memorial (Aber 18). His design was “The Flame of Inspiration, guarded by the spirits of Courage, Honor, Patriotism, and Sacrifice...” (21). The site for the memorial was dedicated on November 1, 1921 (21). The cornerstone was laid November 9, 1924, and the dedication of Liberty Memorial was November 11, 1926 (38, 51). At 11 a.m. on the eleventh day of the eleventh month in 1926, Calvin Coolidge, then the president of the United States, addressed the crowd for the dedication of the Liberty memorial (51). The key elements of the Liberty Memorial would not be completed until the dedication of the Great Frieze on the North Wall on November 10, 1935 (70).

The Frieze’s by Edmond Amateis completion finished the main features of Magonigle’s design (Aber 70). In 1935, the Liberty Memorial Association published a pamphlet that contained scenes of the Frieze with explanations from the artist on the symbolism and meaning (Amateis). The Frieze is bounded on each side with Stars and Stripes guarded by a sword—meant to be a representation of patriotism and strength. The east side depicts war and destruction. It starts with a howitzer, a bare tree, and a wounded soldier. The four horsemen of the apocalypse reinforces the motif of destruction. The east side ends first with a scene of a grieving family and then with soldiers placing wreaths on the gravestones that will be left behind after the armistice. The west side of the frieze contains idealism and industry. One scene depicts a family. Amateis described this scene as extremely idealistic: “This is the group representing morality and sanctity of the home. The knelling choir boy pouring forth his song, the wife and mother with the

little babe, the whole protected by the figure of justice” (Amateis). The idealism continues as spirits of poetry and music ride on bulls, a symbol of confidence, and a father and mother celebrate their plentiful crops and child—symbolic of the hope for a better future. The construction of the west side opposes the destruction of the east. The central figure is necessary to tie the Frieze together. According to Amateis, she represents peace and understanding while the broken sword signifies the war’s end. Her face looks to the future, yet her expression bears the memory of suffering (Amateis). Magonigle’s “Flame of Inspiration” is a beacon of peace for prosperity, yet Edmond Amateis gave the Great Frieze a different meaning (Aber 21, Donovan 88). The statements that Magonigle and Amateis begin to create the public memory of the Liberty Memorial and of the first World War.

The Liberty Memorial Association is separate from the city government and is often characterized as a “grassroots” effort (Donovan 18). That might support the attribution of the Liberty Memorial to vernacular culture; however, it is not. The erection of the Liberty Memorial created the Liberty Memorial Association’s official statement on the first World War. The endeavor utilized public feedback throughout the process, therefore it does not represent any singular perspective (Aber 5). A monument to peace in an ideal form. Conversely, the frieze on the north wall exhibits vernacular culture. Edmond Amateis contrasts the gruesome war and grief with the hope for an idealistic future (Amateis). The Frieze adds to the discussion started by the Liberty Memorial. The public memory of World War I in Kansas City is similar to the representation of the central figure of The Great Frieze. Caught between the destruction and idealism, she remembers the suffering and covets a utopian future (Amateis). The public memory of World War I contains a duality of meaning—a duality that still exists.

When I look at the Liberty Memorial, I see myself in the central figure of the Frieze. She remembers the past and looks to the future (Amateis). This temporal space applies to more than just World War I. To be in process of becoming is the charge given to the public by the Liberty Memorial, but it also represents personal and societal development (Amateis). The ability to view a monument from past generations as an ambiguous mission helps establish its timeless nature. The spirits of courage, honor, patriotism, and sacrifice do not hold the same meaning to me as they would have to the creators. But the charge for the viewer to pick up the “torch of inspiration” and create an idyllic future speaks to everyone. To see history represented in the present by a relatable future keeps the Liberty Memorial’s statement relevant in society. The duality of meaning that the Liberty Memorial contains continues to hold public memory and influence.

Leading up to the 100th year anniversary of the end of World War I, the Liberty Memorial was illuminated by a projection of poppies. The poppy—a bright, crimson flower—obtained a specific symbolism during the First World War (Poppies for Remembrance and Commemoration). In 1917 Lieutenant Colonel John McCrae, a surgeon, wrote the poem “In Flanders Fields” (Poppies). The blooming poppies covering the scarred Earth is imagery invoked to testify against the war (Poppies). “In Flanders fields the poppies blow; Between the crosses, row on row” (Poppies). The poppy soon became the emblem of remembrance for many veteran groups. Moina Michael, a YMCA overseas secretary, started wearing a red poppy when McCrae died. She made it her mission to have the poppy designated as the American National Memorial Symbol and to inspire a return to peace (Poppies). This duality of meaning is significant in relation to the official and vernacular cultures

that John Bodnar outlined. The National WWI Museum and Monument's website also poses a few questions to students on the symbolism of the poppy ("Poppies"). One asks why a thing of beauty was chosen to represent the brutality of war ("Poppies"). It is important to consider the motive; the poppy's official symbolism is solemn remembrance. Using a beautiful flower redefines the reality of grief in an ideal statement. However, vernacular expressions are also symbolized by the poppy: the red of blood, rebirth of the landscape, and commitment to peace ("Poppies"). Thus, the poppy is able to contain a spectrum of statements about war, mourning, and hope.

You never see something with fresh eyes—there are always preconceptions and assumptions. To me, the Liberty Memorial represents the idyllic mission to create a better future. It also serves to remind the public of the horrors of war. In its contemporary form, with a completed Frieze and the National World War I Museum, the Liberty Memorial holds a spectrum of meanings, and so questions about its meaning remain. The unanswered questions about the Liberty Memorial support its duality of meaning; the Liberty Memorial is a symbol of peace and a reminder of suffering. The "Flame of Inspiration" is a beacon of hope for a better society, and the north wall bears the charge to create that society:

These have dared bear the torches of sacrifice
and service; their bodies return to dust, but their
work liveth forevermore. Let us strive on to do all
which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting
peace amongst ourselves and with all nations.

(Amateis)

To mark the "dawn of an era of Peace" or symbolize "the new spirit of democracy", one of the core values of the Liberty Memorial is an idealistic life of peace and patriotism (Aber 13,

Cupp 7). On the other hand, the remembrance of those who died is also an important statement from Liberty Memorial. The incorporation of multiple vernacular meanings allows the Liberty Memorial Association to create an official statement through the Liberty Memorial. A timeless, idealistic official statement that many in the public support. The duality of meaning is a result of the public's involvement in Liberty Memorial's creation, the creation of the Frieze, and the reinforcement of the memorial's official statement.

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QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

Context

1. The essay begins: “Does Kansas City’s Liberty Memorial celebrate war or peace?” How does the essay answer that question?
2. The author later poses the question of why one person’s perspective on WWI is important. How does the author address this question? Why are individual perspective and narrative important?

Style

1. The author employs block quotations to support the researched elements of the essay. Do you find the use of such quotes effective?
2. How does the author define key terms within the essay?

THE 1950S AND MOTHERHOOD UNDER SCRUTINY

Alex Schray

Grease, poodle skirts, and the Beathnicks. In the United States, the 1950s are often remembered with a particular sense of nostalgia. However, under the surface, the fifties were rife with oppressive gendered expectations and destructive misinformation about disabilities. Rose Gordon from Daniel Keyes' *Flowers for Algernon* represents the culmination of these themes, as the prioritization of homogeny (misinformation about disabilities) and the intense mother-blaming (stemming from gendered expectations) of the 1950s contributed to the way Rose treated Charlie throughout the novel. Rose Gordon's perception of intelligence and treatment of Charlie reflect the inherent social pressures of motherhood in the 1950s.

A culture of conformity ran deep in America throughout the 1950s. After World War II, Americans strove to return to the normalcy of life before the war. A high value was placed on custom and social homogeneity. Throughout the fifties, a common thought was that "happiness was achieved by the mature individual who settled into work and family roles and learned to be socially cooperative, despite his compartmentalized and conflict-ridden self" (Thomson 505). Therefore, the traditional nuclear family was idealized, which meant that women relinquished

their wartime responsibilities and soldiers reintegrated into the workforce. Everything was back to pre-war “normal.”

In many respects, then, Rose Gordon typifies the American need for normalcy. While on his way to the International Psychological Convention in Chicago, Charlie recalls an argument between his parents that illustrates just how important being perceived as normal was to Rose. En route to Dr. Guarino’s practice, Matt begins to question his techniques and the exorbitant cost of treatment, but Rose immediately interjects, crying “He’s going to be normal, whatever we have to do, whatever it costs” (Keyes 135). Of course, in the context of this quotation, *normal* is synonymous with *intelligent*. This quote contributes to our understanding of Rose’s perception of intelligence: to her intelligence is the cornerstone of a normal life; one concept cannot exist without the other, and both are unquestionably necessary. Even at the expense of her son’s well-being and the family finances, Rose is willing to sacrifice *everything* to live a “normal” life with a “normal” son. Of course, despite Rose’s fiercest efforts to “normalize” Charlie, she soon realizes that nothing she can do will change her son.

As a woman in the 1950s, Rose’s role in society was confined to homemaking and childrearing, a societal norm which clearly shaped her attitude toward Charlie. Her whole identity revolved around motherhood. Rose used her children’s success as a measuring stick for her own parenting ability. While recounting an argument between his parents, Charlie says, “The words are angry sparks between them—an anger and a guilt he can’t identify” (Keyes 74). Rose felt personally responsible for Charlie’s intellectual disability and, as such, bore a tremendous guilt. Charlie continues, “Only after Norma proved to her that she was capable of having normal chil-

dren, and that I was a freak, did she stop trying to make me over” (Keyes 144). Because Rose was able to have a “normal child,” the weight of her guilt was lifted. Rose’s mounting resentment towards Charlie after that point stemmed from her belief that he stood in the way of her living a normal life. In an act of aggression, Rose picked up a knife and declared, “He’s better off dead. He’ll never be able to live a normal life. He’ll be better off—” (Keyes 184). To Rose, a life that’s not normal is a life that not worth living. In order to validate her own success as a mother and restore a sense of normality, the only logical option was to expel Charlie from her life.

Rose’s internal desire for normalcy is matched by her intense yearning to maintain a visage of composure to those around her. While visiting his mother after years apart, Charlie recounts that, “Norma had to dress well; the house had to have fine furniture; Charlie had to be kept inside so that other people wouldn’t know anything was wrong” (Keyes 260). The social emphasis on homogeny perpetuated a culture of scrutiny. Rose not only evaluated her own self-worth on the basis of her household, but was evaluated by others on the same pretexts. In order to avoid judgement, Rose tried to conform. She “beat [Charlie] with a strap until [he] was nearly unconscious” and “spanked [Norma] for not doing [her] homework right, or for not bringing home the best marks” (Keyes 272). She uses abusive behavior to unleash her social frustrations and punish her children into submission with her standards of *acceptable, normal* behavior.

Rose’s self-imposed guilt was reinforced by the intense culture of mother-blaming prevalent in 1950s America. In their book *Modern Women: The Lost Sex*, Marynia Farnham and Ferdinand Lundberg asserted that “neurotic mothers

were responsible for ‘a slaughter of the innocents’ and were ‘the principal transmitting media of the disordered emotions that ... are reflected in the statistics of social disorder’ (Feldstein 146). Throughout the fifties, this notion was widely accepted. Popular thought was that a mother’s inadequacy was the prime factor that contributed to whether or not her child developed an intellectual or physical disability. Often times, mother were also held responsible for the loss of their child, even when it was no fault of her own. Many individuals believed that “Infant death was preventable—if a mother kept her home clean and sanitary and followed expert’s advice” (Umansky and Ladd-Taylor 10). However, mother-blaming did not stop there. Philip Wylie accused mothers of “controlling the American economy, and causing the war” (Feldstein 146). Science today has, of course, disproven all of these theories, but in a society where women were already systematically devalued, it hardly seems like that much of a leap to falsely attribute blame to mothers. Though women were expected to return to the household after WWII, “the dominance of childrearing experts, the growth of state power, and the flux in gender roles” resulted in wavering trust in the institution of motherhood in the American public and engendered further feelings of suspicion and blame throughout the following two decades (Umansky and Ladd-Taylor 10).

Like other mothers raising children in the 1950s, Rose Gordon faced the brunt of this public mistrust. Though her behavior towards Charlie was certainly not justifiable, understanding the social pressures Rose faced allows us as reader to come to grips with her motivations. While it is easy to frame Rose as selfish, loveless mother, a deeper analysis of her character demonstrates that these traits do not define her. In a time where tremendous misinformation shrouded

the research surrounding intellectual and physical disabilities, Rose acted in what she believed was her son's best interest. Though her actions were misguided, Rose relentlessly sought treatment for Charlie because she earnestly believed that treatment would give Charlie the chance to live a "normal" life free of judgement and pain. After reuniting with Charlie, Rose says, "I told them all that you'd go to college and become a professional man and make your mark in the world. They laughed, but I told them" (Keyes 268). This quote illustrates that Rose's obsession with normalcy is not totally rooted in self-interest. While part of Rose's motivation to "normalize" Charlie was selfish, Charlie's own gratification, pride, and legacy appear to concern her as well. This care is further evidenced by the fact that whenever others confronted Rose about Charlie's disability, she defended her son. Rose wholeheartedly believed that by first refusing to acknowledge Charlie's disability and later perusing countless avenues of treatment, she was protecting not only her own image, but that of her family and Charlie too.

The culture of conformity and mother-blaming that spanned the 1950s contributed to Rose Gordon's perception of intelligence and her treatment of Charlie in Daniel Keyes' *Flowers for Algernon*. In a society that scrutinized motherhood and emphasized normalcy, Rose felt a sense of responsibility for Charlie's intellectual disability and lashed out at her son in a futile attempt to gain control over a situation she could not change. Keyes' portrayal of Rose encourages his readers to be cognizant of the ways we as individuals are influenced by and contribute to existing social issues and urges us to love and empathize with all those that our society marginalizes—a lesson that applies to our current decade just as much as it did to the 1950s.

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QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

Context

1. This essay, in part, discusses the gender expectations and misinformation about disabilities that pervaded the era of the 1950s. Can you list examples of such expectations and misinformation? Can you think of examples that still persist today?
2. The word “normal” appears several times throughout the essay. How does the essay define “normal” (directly or indirectly)? How does contemporary society define “normal”? How do you define “normal”?

Style

1. How does the author use historical framework alongside literary analysis to build evidence and stake a claim?
2. How does the author draw parallels between the era about which they are writing and today? In other words, how does the author create a sense of urgency and relevance within the essay?

WE'RE HERE AND WE'RE QUEER

THE EMERGENCE OF LGBT CHARACTERS IN YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE

Annie Spencer

“Homophobia is usually the last oppression to be mentioned, the last to be taken seriously, the last to go. But it is extremely serious, sometimes to the point of being fatal.” (Smith 112)

If there is one headline from 2008 that will bring back memories for any member of the LGBTQ+ community, it is the tragedy of Lawrence King. A young queer boy in high school professed to having a crush on golden-boy Brandon McInerney. McInerney, blinded by his own homophobia, “stormed into his southern California high school’s computer lab, armed with a small caliber gun” (Curwood 39). He shot King twice in the head. Further reports indicate that McInerney, when turning down King, named him a “faggot,” a term coined in reference to the pyre witches and heretics were burned on in the Middle Ages (Swartz 14).

Dismayingly enough, King was not the only person to be killed for their sexuality or their gender identity/expression. The heterosexist culture that seems to pervade our world carries serious and damaging effects on the queer population, especially for youths. The “current silence sends an alienating message of denial and despair to gay and lesbian youths” (Vare 190). Young students’ heterosexual counterparts have been passing along a

message that was detrimental to self-esteem and mental health. In last year's national survey produced by GLSEN (Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network), they found something quite shocking on the day of "acceptance and diversity." As of 2017, over 87% of queer students "experienced harassment or assault based on personal characteristics, including sexual orientation, gender expression, gender, religion, actual or perceived race and ethnicity, and actual or perceived disability" (GLSEN). This number includes over 57% of LGBT students who "were sexually harassed (e.g., unwanted touching or sexual remarks) in the past year" (GLSEN). This leads to conflicts regarding safety, leading to almost 60% of LGBTQ students feeling unsafe, with nearly one-fifth of all LGBTQ students changing schools due to safety concerns.

When educators do decide to teach queer literature to their students, "teachers, texts, and/or institutions invariably presumed student readers to be straight and often aggressively homophobic... Accompanying this goal, was the tacit suggestion that it was acceptable to maintain a homophobic position in this classroom" (Clark and Blackburn 26). By automatically assuming that the audience is in a position opposed to queerness, we deny queer students a positive piece of literature for them to engage in and a positive environment for them to process their own identities. Not only this, but we deny their straight allies the opportunity to glean knowledge and empathy towards queer students.

One place that students have found sanctuary has been their English/Language Arts classrooms, where they are supposed to evaluate different perspectives and thus feel freer to express an identity that does not fit the heterosexual hegemony. Literature has a way of providing readers with a way of looking at our own reality with different eyes. Yet, queer

literature, in my experience, is hardly ever included in the syllabi, and when it is, it is presented as a one-off or during a one-day, short lesson. “When such literature is excluded from the curricula, all students learn that queer persons are not worth mentioning and the status quo of socially constructed gender and sexual identity hierarchies are allowed to perpetuate” (Logan 39). Despite the growing multitude of books for teachers to select and incorporate into their curriculum today, this was not always the case.

The earliest incarnations of queer young adult literature, beginning with John Donovan’s *I’ll Get There; It Better be Worth the Trip*, left readers less than satisfied. Even the books that shortly followed it contained similar messages and themes: “These works left readers with the overall impression that homosexuality led to a dire outcome and that being gay had no lasting importance, that it was just a phase one might pass through during adolescence” (Norton 65). This kind of novel was categorized by scholars Cart and Jenkins as “homosexual visibility (HV),” which meant that it was providing a queer character within a straight world: an anomaly in the status quo. At its time, this was seen as an enormous breakthrough, a groundbreaking notion that there could be literature about queer people.

In the following decades, there were more LGBTQ themes and characters on the rise in young adult literature. However, this wasn’t always beneficial: “From 1980 to 1995, most of the LGBT characters in YA fiction were secondary, often dead or killed off during the narrative, or run out of town and separated from the community and/or family...The message is hard to miss: LGBT characters are most useful if they’re dead or gone” (Banks 35). Homosexual Visibility literature seemed to be the only option available for queer students reading young

adult literature. “Most LGBT-themed YA literature does the work of making homosexuality visible, less of it does the work of showing how gay and straight people are alike, and little of it portrays queer characters’ connections to their queer communities” (Clark and Blackburn 30).

Thankfully, the problematic themes that seem to permeate these stories were re-examined and slowly began to change. In the past twenty years, there has been a surge in influential literature written for young adults, exhibiting positive messages for queer/questioning youth. “According to Michael Cart and Christine A. Jenkins, the number of YAL titles with such content has been gradually increasing, so that in this decade the publication rate is nearly double the rate from the 1990s” (Letcher 123). Not only is there further variety, but there is something to choose from other than HV novels. The most recent, the most accepted type of literature within the queer community, is known as QC, or “queer consciousness/community” literature. These are books that “portray multiple LGBTQ characters within supportive communities and families, including families of their own making. They show the diversity of LGBTQ characters and dispel the myth that being gay means being alone” (Clark and Blackburn 29). Books such as this need to be shown in classrooms to provide an appropriate mirror and window for students to examine their relationship to themselves and to their fellow queer students.

Too often in middle and high school, queer literature is never taught. It is not only ignored by heterosexual teachers, but by queer educators as well. “By not including l/g/b/t/i issues in classroom discussion and materials, and not attempting to lessen homophobia, lesbian and gay teachers who remain in the closet ‘may find themselves in the position of protecting the very institutions that exclude them, and their

students, from full participation” (Swartz 12). Queer literature is beneficial for all people involved in the process: the author, the teacher, and the reader. Providing queer literature in classrooms can allow incredible growth in acceptance. By creating the work, the author, typically queer themselves, expresses themselves and voices their own life experience. For queer teachers, queer literature can open doors for discussion about how the work compares to their own lives as well as demonstrate to students positive queer role models. For the queer reader, seeing themselves in literature is crucial for validation and investigation into who they are.

However, studies that focused on queer curriculum in English classes found that it is being approached in a rather problematic way. “The questions teachers usually bring to me when they want to include an LGBTQ text in their class is not ‘What’s the *best, most powerful* LGBT young adult novel you’ve read recently?’ but ‘Is there a book you think I could *get away with* without ruffling too many feathers?’” (Banks 34). While teachers should remain mindful of the outside influences impacting their choices for literature selected, this literature is present in order *to* ruffle feathers. The purpose of queer young adult literature is to be a combatant of blatant homophobia and the heterosexism in our schools. The goal is to provide a window into the world of LGBTQ culture, and a mirror for young queer students to find a place of self-identification. How could it *not* ruffle some feathers? It should. As long as it ruffles feathers, we need queer literature in classrooms.

As long as queer people exist, we need queer literature in classrooms. Although, if this is the case and we are seeing more representation in classrooms, then why have we seen an uptick in aggression towards queer students? (GLSEN) Per-

haps it may have something do with how we are positioning our teaching of queer literature.

It is crucial for students to get ahold of queer literature that is presented in a supportive environment. Even more, they need a picture of themselves reflected back to them. And yet, “in no cases were texts ever presented as possible mirrors for LGBTQ readers to examine and reflect on their possible queer selves in a text” (Clark and Blackburn 28). Instead, the lens of heterosexism denies students the opportunity to gain words to claim as their own identifiers. One way that educators can improve here is to engage in a practice known as critical literacy: “Through this critical literacy lens the reader learns the language for describing themselves, for narrating themselves into existence, and for articulating their needs and values” (Logan 39). By persuading students to be critical in their thinking while still engaging with pleasurable literature, educators can help students bridge the gap between consuming meaningless entertainment and formative works that can and will shape how future generations develop their self-identity.

With the above said, it is difficult to navigate the narrow line that separates literature with a deeper purpose, ones that can be incorporated easily into curricula, and literature that should be read during pastime. For scholars, there are certain qualifications that books should meet in order to be considered for the classroom. “Through our discussions, two criteria emerged as essential: curriculum relevance and literary merit...To establish the curriculum relevance and literary merits of a text, educators should engage in essential discourses with critical friends to provide the rationale so that the books can be used in class or assigned as ancillary reading” (Logan 32). It is important that educators surround themselves with

friends and coworkers who are equally invested in furthering education by engaging in the inclusion of queer literature. By bouncing ideas back and forth, it is more likely that quality selections are chosen for critical literacy. Additionally, with the collaboration of other teachers also including queer literature in their classroom, the influence can spread that much faster, with that much more impact on the entirety of the school. Of course, not only will it help the reach of these texts, having teachers collaborate would understandably help when these books are challenged. I use when because most of the books found on the “banned lists” in districts contain queer characters and themes. Being able to have a united front against the homophobic dissenting voice will make it more likely that the book is defended efficiently (“Top 10”).

So, what are top scholars in the field recommending that educators include in their reading lists? After all, “our LGBTQ students need and deserve to read good books as much as anyone else” (Letcher 125-126). The following list was compiled from several lists provided during research:

1. Hartinger, Brent. *Geography Club*. Harper Collins, 2003.
2. Lazara Dole, Mayra. *Down to the Bone*. Harper Collins, 2008.
3. Levithan, David. *Boy Meets Boy*. Knopf Books for Young Readers, 2003.
4. Moore, Perry. *Hero*. Hyperion, 2007.
5. Myracle, Lauren. *Kissing Kate*. Dutton’s Children’s Books, 2003.
6. Peters, Julie Anne. *Keeping You a Secret*. Little, Brown, 2003.
7. Peters, Julie Anne. *Luna*. Little, Brown, 2004.
8. Ryan, Sara. *Empress of the World*. Penguin Books, 2001.

9. Sanchez, Alex. *Rainbow Boys*. Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing, 2001.
10. Wittlinger, Ellen. *Hard Love*. Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing, 1999.

When examining the most recommended selections, a clear pattern emerges. Only one out of the ten selections was about a queer person of color (*Down to the Bone*), and only one was about a trans* person (*Luna*). But, these aren't the only books about diverse characters outside of what is deemed to be the "typical" or, more accurately, stereotypically queer characters. "Books should contain diverse portrayals of gays and lesbians and thereby accurately reflect that they are as diverse a population as heterosexuals" (Norton 66). There are queer people of color, there are queer people in impoverished locations, there are queer people in the blue-collar class, and there are queer people who are young and old. Queer people are people, and therefore are unique to themselves, not just because of their sexuality or gender expression/identity, and recognizing this diversity by representing it in queer literature will be an important next step for the field.

There are ways that we can improve the quality of queer young adult literature that is being taught, and also the literature that is being produced. One of the more unexplored topics is gender nonconformity. It has been mentioned by a few authors in select works, but never with full investigation. For instance, "Jess, Feinberg's character in her *Stone Butch Blues*, realizes that whether or not she is a man or a woman 'could never be answered as long as those were the only choices' (Feinberg 222)" (Swartz 14). No longer are these the only choices, but young queer students who are questioning their gender should be exposed to literature that will provide that mirror for them. They deserve to see someone who does

not conform to the gender binary and not only accepts themselves, but also is accepted by their community.

I have compiled a list of books that were recommended by fellow queer young adults, who gave a much more diverse selection of literature that is just as qualified to be taught in schools. In the list below, you will find books about trans* people, queer people of color, queer women, and bisexual/pansexual people. These books are to be used in addition to and comparable with the list provided above, rather than a replacement. It is to be considered in order to provide several different perspectives, rather than the stereotypical “queer” image. Each person experiences their sexuality and gender differently, and the intersectionality of different aspects of identity all contribute to how their story will be told:

1. Danforth, Emily M. *The Miseducation of Cameron Post*. Balzer Bray, 2018.
2. Fink, Joseph. *Alice Isn't Dead*. Harper Perennial , 2018.
3. McCann, Alexandra. *Angels Can't Swim*. Kindle Direct Publishing, 2018.
4. Rice, Anne. *Interview with the Vampire*. Knopf, 1976.
5. Saaenz, Benjamin Alire. *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe*. Thorndike Press Large Print, 2012.

To conclude, I would like to include a selection from Clark and Blackburn. Though this was written over a decade ago in 2009, the lesson that it teaches remains pertinent today:

It is imperative, however, to acknowledge [homophobic biases] and strive to change them. Because we are always learning, we must be prepared to make mistakes, reflect on them, learn from them, and improve on them. (Clark and Blackburn 31)

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Terry L. Norton, and Jonathan W. Vare. "Literature for Today's Gay and Lesbian Teens: Subverting the Culture of Silence." *The English Journal*, vol. 94, no. 2, 2004, pp. 65–69. *JSTOR*, JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/4128776.

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QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

Context

1. Who do you believe is the target audience of the author? Do you think the author is making a call to action? Explain.
2. The author includes two lists of diverse texts to be considered when designing course syllabi. What do you notice about such lists? Are there any books you might add to either list?

Style

1. Notice the introductory paragraphs of the essay. How does the anecdotal nature of the introduction frame the essay as a whole?
2. The author poses several rhetorical questions throughout the essay. How do such questions work to drive the essay forward and/or engage you as a reader?

ADVANCED CATEGORY WINNER

DIVIDED WE FALL

THE FATAL CONSEQUENCES OF THE TROOST DIVIDE

Jerrica Park

In 2017, Kansas City was hit with a troubling report: life expectancies vary by more than 12 years between zip codes in Kansas City (“Living in Certain Parts” 2018). To fully understand the genesis of this disparity, it is necessary to understand the fundamental differences between the micro-communities within the urban core. A study of Kansas City is a study of segregation of the races, as it remains one of the most hypersegregated cities in America (Gotham 13). This segregation has vast and far-reaching consequences. Systemic racism has created divisions of economic opportunity, infrastructure, and medical care in Kansas City, all of which have contributed to the highly dissimilar life expectancies observed within the city’s various communities.

History

Kansas City has a long history of racial bias, and this history is reflected in our neighborhoods. A drive from west to east, from suburbia past the Troost dividing line, might convince a visitor that this uncannily imbalanced distribution of resources was intentional. The state of social and economic deterioration apparent in the urban core of Kansas City is the product of multiple socioeconomic and political machines,

abetted by a generational racialization of our communities. Racial tensions and class divisions almost seem to define our neighborhood boundaries and with them, our zip codes. To understand this state of imbalance, it is necessary to examine many processes, such as blockbusting and redlining by real estate developers, political interference, and predatory financial practices. A common theme among all of these processes is the commoditization of emotion—namely, fear—and a subsequent disinvestment and movement of significant capital away from the urban core.

Nothing motivates a process so much as money and fear; the systematic racialization and disinvestment of our city began with a monetization of emotion. In Kevin Bryce's *We Are Superman*, former Assistant City Manager Anita Maltbia states that the practice of blockbusting was preceded by the desegregation of schools, explaining that "there was a lot of fear, and there were people who took advantage of that" (Bryce). This serves as an excellent explanation of the commoditization of racialized emotion. As Tanner Colby explains, developers like Bob Wood created an artificial threat by purposefully installing families of color who conformed to already-present negative biases into targeted neighborhoods, and men like J.C. Nichols made sure the fleeing white residents—and their money—had appealing neighborhoods where they could retreat (102). A related monetization of fear can be seen in the biased lending and insuring practices that shaped the racial contours of Kansas City. Colby explains the "U-shaped pattern" (110) evident in loaning practices; the encouragement of white flight from the urban core became a profitable endeavor for lenders and insurers. Colby found that "white families with good credit who wanted to move into Kansas City had their mortgage applications denied" (110) or

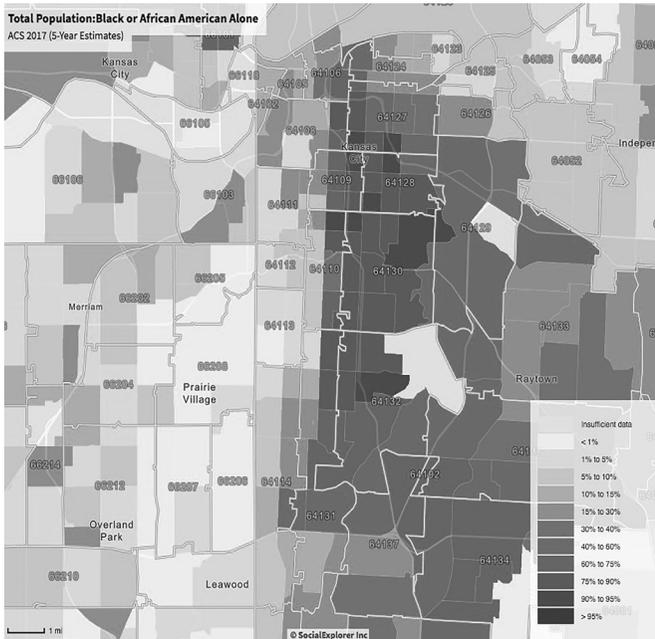
found their insurance rates “inexplicably jacked up” (110); an evolution of the same fear that drove whites to the suburbs informed lenders that the urban core was a bad investment. A bird’s eye view of this process reveals white flight—a mass movement of wealth away from the urban core, spurred by artificially created fear. As wealth fled, so followed jobs and opportunities for economic development (Gotham 13).

This disinvestment in the urban core of Kansas City led to a self-perpetuating cycle. As wealth moved away from the metropolitan area, racially restrictive real estate covenants ensured communities remained demographically unbalanced. Such covenants made it so “even those Blacks with fiscal resources had a difficult time gaining access to housing in the private market” (Gotham 23). Many such covenants are still in place today, especially in developments surrounding the desirable Plaza area (Thomas). A further concentration of underprivileged black residents in the urban core zip codes resulted from these racially restrictive covenants, bringing Kansas City many steps further from desperately needed reconciliation. Gotham points out this also caused those citizens to be restricted to “older, deteriorating, and dilapidated housing” (21). Thus, what should have been assets to these residents quickly became liabilities.

Furthering this cycle of disinvestment was the installation of corporations engaged in predatory lending practices. Kansas City is home to corporate giant QC Holdings, which boasts considerable local political power. According to the Federal Reserve, the national average interest rate on a two-year personal loan is 10.36%, however, QC Holdings loan at rates that are capped at 1950% (Bryce). Their dubious practice of targeting black and Hispanic neighborhoods entrap consumers in cycles of debt (Bryce) and furthers the mobilization of wealth

away from the black-centric urban core. The ultimate product of these processes has been an extreme segregation of economic resources and race into discrete geographic areas, so dramatic it is mappable by zip code.

This map details the concentration of black residents in Kansas City; the significant divide is readily apparent.



(“Total Population: Black or African American Alone”)

The racial distribution pattern creates ripple-effect impacts throughout the urban core of Kansas City, resonating in every measure in which the races are unequally affected. Sadly, this includes just about every gauge of socioeconomic health and physical well-being and heavily influences life expectancy patterns in Kansas City.

From the map above, it can be seen that the zip codes 64109, 64127, 64128, 64130, and 64132 are inhabited by primarily black residents. These zip codes have all been

associated with life expectancies of 70-72 years, a stark contrast to other areas with life expectancies exceeding 83 years (*KCMO CHIP 9*). The state of Missouri published findings that there is a 12.8 year gap in life expectancies between zip codes in Kansas City (*KCMO CHIP 9*). It can be inferred that the link to geography and decreased life expectancies is heavily influenced by racial disparities.

This is not a problem specific to Kansas City. The Centers for Disease Control have accumulated national data suggesting that white citizens throughout the country have life expectancies roughly four years longer than black citizens. While this national trend is troubling, the causes of this severe disparity in Kansas City and the effects of the problem demand immediate investigation.

Effects of Life Expectancy Divide

Perhaps the negative implications of a shorter life expectancy seem easy to intuit. However, it is important to fully appreciate the wider impact on an economic scale. Racial biases lead to health inequities within the metro area and contribute to the significant life expectancy differences between zip code areas. Health inequities include issues such as increased morbidity (instances of disease), inadequate high-quality health care access, and living conditions that prevent wellness. The Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies found that during 2003 to 2006, the combined direct and indirect cost of health inequities and premature deaths among minorities in the country was \$1.24 trillion—exceeding the gross domestic product of the entire country of India (LaVeist et al. *The Economic Burden*).

Entire communities feel the economic effects of decreased life expectancies. Earlier deaths result in fewer taxpayers, decreasing revenue for the county as a whole. Chronic health

problems, which eventually lead to premature death, create increased health care costs for the state (*Chronic Disease Fact Sheet*). The economic impact of lost productivity and potential from a premature death is likely incalculable, but researchers use a standard estimate of \$50,000 per year, based on a model that analyzes cost effectiveness of medical treatments (LaVeist et al. *Estimating the Economic Burden* 3). Therefore, each life lost 12.8 years early (the cited disparity between life expectancies) can be estimated to cost the community \$640,000.

Inestimable, however, is the intrinsic value of each life cut short and the impact of that loss to families and loved ones. Loss of family members leaves not only emotional holes but also foundational ones; the premature death of a parent or grandparent leaves families with one fewer caretaker, educator, or supervisor of children being raised in the family. An overall decrease in familial stability and increase in problematic grief responses often arise (Sandler et al. 132). Such responses can manifest as emotional trauma and stress, and these manifestations can lead to problems such as cardiac disease or mental health disorders later in life (Pervanidou et al.1). These diseases may perpetuate the cycle of diminished life expectancy in affected populations. As these early deaths are occurring more frequently in Kansas City's at-risk, primarily minority communities, our residents of color are being disproportionately affected by a crumbling community infrastructure.

Researchers have launched investigations into the biochemical and physiological effects of residential and racial segregation and have established evidence of profound molecular changes associated with socioeconomic marginalization. A study published in *The Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* demonstrates how factors such

as spatial constraints (an effect of crowded housing or old homes), environmental stressors (present in disadvantaged neighborhoods, as will be discussed shortly), and increased exposure to disease and death can produce biological changes. Such changes can include alterations of gene segments called telomeres, which are associated with the aging process, and alterations to methylation status, which serves as a molecular tagging system and is associated with certain cancers (Massey 802). Impacts on physiological systems that regulate hormone levels and control have also been demonstrated; these factors may cause endocrine imbalance, which increase the influence of environmental stressors (Massey 802). Ultimately, the effects of such physiological changes include shortened life expectancy and greater risk for disease. Interestingly, this study demonstrated a purely physiological link between neighborhood disadvantage and increased mortality and morbidity rates, unconnected to factors such as education level, income, or wealth (Massey 801). The disadvantages our black and minority communities face are affecting Kansas Citians at a very real, molecular level. They create a process that can be considered akin to a systemic rot that will continue to spread, and the city cannot afford to ignore it.

Causes of Problem

Investigating the causes of this massive difference in life expectancy between communities should be of vital moral concern to the city. The stochastic nature of mortality makes this undertaking extremely difficult, but it is of the utmost importance in the struggle to correct this stark demographic disparity. Some causative agents of premature mortality can be loosely categorized into more manageable subsets to be studied, including inadequate health care, increased economic burden,

and problematic environmental conditions. Enough data exists in these areas to give us a start toward resolution.

Inadequate Access to Health Care

Inadequate access to health care is one of the more obvious factors contributing to shortened life expectancies. The 2016 Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP), enacted by a partnership between the city of Kansas City and the Public Health Accreditation Board, cites a “positive correlation between use of high quality primary care services and reductions in hospital admissions” (*KCMO CHIP* 26). Preventative care is one fundamental weapon against early loss of life, as identifying disease early is often key to treatment. It has been demonstrated that residents in at-risk zip codes routinely have less access to preventative care (*KCMO CHIP* 25). Such care is especially lacking for minority patients in the prevention and treatment of respiratory illness, diabetes, cardiac disease, hypertension, mental health care, and prenatal care (Reece et al. 17).

Attention from primary care physicians can help prevent illness, reduce economic burden, and improve overall wellness. However, studies examining traffic in Kansas City’s emergency rooms clearly show that admissions for preventable diseases (hypertension, chronic obstructive pulmonary disorder, pneumonia, influenza, and asthma, specifically) are significantly higher in marginalized, majority-black, at-risk communities than other, more affluent parts of Kansas City (Reece et al. 22). This is a significant finding because the use of emergency rooms for illnesses that could be managed through a primary care physician stresses the system by utilizing precious emergency resources and costs patients many times more in hospital bills than an outpatient visit to a clinic (Reece et al. 5). This economic burden can amplify the cycle of poverty

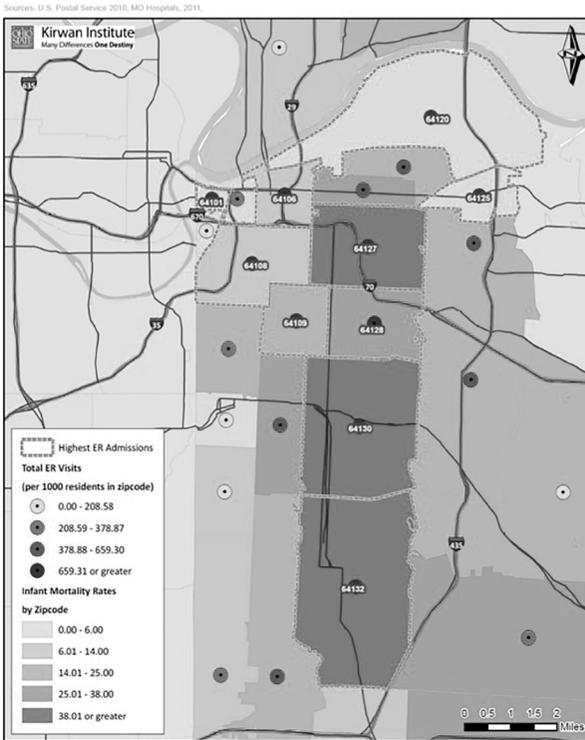
that often prevents patients from seeking primary care in the first place.

Often, patients in marginalized communities forgo primary care visits due to uninsured status or lack of available doctors in the area. In fact, while there is a total of 257 primary care physician locations within Kansas City, only 32 of these are in at-risk zipcode areas (Reece et al. 15). Traveling far from home can be difficult for those living in vulnerable, urban-core neighborhoods. As will be detailed below, at-risk communities are disproportionately affected by poverty, and travel for impoverished patients can be problematic, as access to a vehicle may be limited, bus routes may not coincide with primary care physician locations, and work, familial obligations, or disability may impede travel. The resulting misuse of emergency room services due to socioeconomic status may perpetuate the economic burden and health disadvantage of minority citizens living in at-risk zip codes.

Kansas City must also address the issue of inadequate prenatal care if we are to improve the health of our citizens and shrink the life expectancy gap. Poor prenatal care has been shown to reduce likelihood of successful pregnancy and increase risk of infant mortality (Mazul et al. 79). The speed and consistency with which a woman receives prenatal care has long been linked to her education level and race (Cooney 986). Across the nation, mothers with college degrees have lower infant mortality rates than those with high school or lower education levels (Reece et al. 45). However, this trend breaks when examining correlation with race; better educated black mothers still have higher rates of infant mortality than their less educated white neighbors in Kansas City (Reece et al. 45), which implies a deeper, systemic link between these factors. The following image maps the incidence of infant mortality

in Kansas City, and it is again observed that our at-risk, primarily black neighborhoods are disproportionately affected by these harrowing losses.

Map 7.0 - ER Admissions and Infant Mortality Rate (Kansas City, MO)
Highest number of ER admissions by zip code, overlaid with infant mortality rates



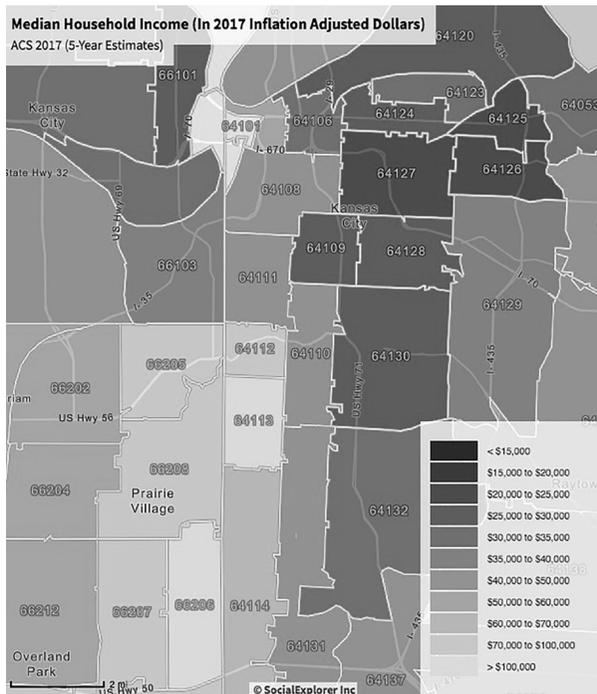
(Reece 43)

The map above demonstrates a significantly higher number of emergency room visits overall in the same areas—the majority-black, marginalized, at-risk neighborhoods impacted by reduced life expectancies—that experience highest infant mortality rates. Such discrepancies suggest problematic health care access as a trend in these at-risk areas, which result in decreased prenatal care and increased infant mortality.

Higher Economic Burden

Rates of poverty, indebtedness, and lack of insurance all exhibit significant correlations to race in the Kansas City

metro area (*Quality of Life 17*), and links between economic burden and health care have been well-documented. In fact, the World Health Organization states: “it isn’t genetics, health behaviors, or even access to health care services that have the greatest impact on illness: poverty and physical environment are thought to account for 50 percent of an individual’s health outcomes” (qtd. in “How Your Zip Code”). Indeed, poverty is seen in disproportionate rates in the at-risk zip codes identified earlier. A map below, created with US census statistics, shows income data across Kansas City. An obvious correlation between race and income can be observed as patterns are compared.

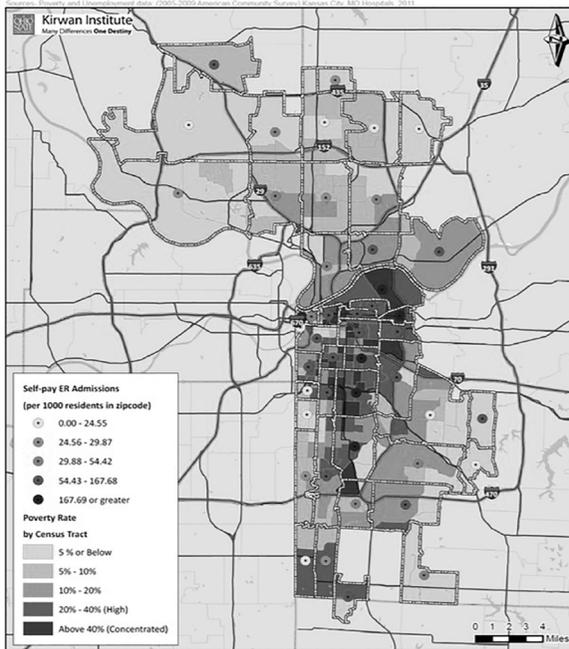


(“Median Household Income”)

Compounding this poverty is the issue of indebtedness and insurance status. Health care costs, especially for those who are uninsured or underinsured, are notoriously astronomical, and

for those without insurance, these costs can create unrelenting crises of debt. Insurance status has been definitively linked to life expectancy. A study published in the *Annals of Internal Medicine* has linked increased rates of mortality with uninsured status (Woolhandler and Himmelstein 424). This link between uninsured status and increased rates of mortality

Map 3.3 - ER Admissions and Self-Pay with Poverty Rate
 Rate of ER admissions paying with their own money by zipcode,
 overlaid with neighborhood poverty rates



(Reece et al. 27)

was found to be associated with reduced access to primary care services (Woolhandler and Himmelstein 424). The most recent five-year U.S. Census Bureau data shows that Jackson County, Missouri has a higher uninsured population than the national average (*Jackson County MO – Health Profiles*). The following map shows the incidence of patients who self-pay emergency medical costs due to lack of insurance, overlaid with poverty

rates in Kansas City. Again, the delineation of at-risk, majority black communities is clearly seen in the map below.

Problematic Environmental Conditions

Economics and access to health care are not the only contributors to the widening gap of life expectancies in Kansas City. Environmental characteristics of these at-risk zip codes also contribute to premature deaths. Issues such as reduced access to fresh foods and clean water and reduced educational opportunities also play a role.

It has been established that residents of at-risk zip codes in Kansas City have reduced access to healthful foods, which are a crucial element to overall health. Researchers mapped concentration of grocery stores and farmer's markets—purveyors of fresh produce and other nutritious foods—versus convenience stores and dollar stores. Such vendors tend to stock sugar-, fat-, and sodium-filled, highly processed products as their grocery mainstays. Unsurprisingly, areas with higher concentrations of grocers offering fresh foods and lower concentrations of convenience and dollar stores were associated with longer life expectancies, higher income, and a higher white-to-minority racial ratio (Reece et al. 33). The current explanation of this phenomenon is that lower income neighborhoods rely more heavily on less healthful but less expensive grocery providers, and excessive intake of the foods stocked by such merchants heightens the likelihood of developing chronic conditions, such as cardiac disease or diabetes (*About Nutrition*).

Healthful foods are not the only commodity in short supply in many of these neighborhoods suffering from shortened life expectancies. Limited access to high-quality, uncontaminated drinking water may also play a role. Researchers have found that levels of pollutants such as lead in municipal tap water

can reach unacceptable levels in many at-risk zip codes (KCMO “A Segregated Kansas City” 4). As a neurotoxin, lead can impact cognitive function and behavior, and excessive exposure can be fatal (Lanphear et al. 894). Childhood lead poisoning cases are concentrated in Kansas City’s most marginalized, disinvested neighborhoods (KCMO “A Segregated Kansas City” 4). It is our city’s responsibility to mitigate such unnecessary harm to young lives in any way possible.

Communities in disinvested areas, such as these at-risk zip codes, also suffer from gaps in educational opportunities. A state-sponsored study found that quality and consistency of education in children is a predictor of lifelong health (*KCMO CHIP* 15). Rather than directly causing better health, quality education correlates with lower levels of poverty and subsequent departure from cycles and environments that perpetuate poor health (Hummer and Hernandez 2). The *Review of the Kansas City (MO) Public Schools* from the Council of the Great City Schools analyzed the Missouri education system and showed a consistent trend of Kansas City trailing the rest of the state in educational performance in both communications and mathematics (19-20), as well as graduation and attrition rates (54). Furthermore, the *Review of the Kansas City (MO) Public Schools* report shows that the inner-city Kansas City schools are majorly composed of black students (14), with far more students per staff member than other city schools (26). Considering these bleak metrics of educational quality, it becomes clear that that our at-risk, black neighborhoods are disproportionately affected by lower levels of educational opportunities, which may in turn contribute to conditions associated with shorter life expectancies.

Advocating Solutions

To truly begin the process of reversing the health inequities that contribute to unequal life expectancies in marginalized

areas of Kansas City will require a great investment of focused effort, intention, and capital. While the economic burden of potential solutions may be unpalatable to some and admittedly a hotbed for intense political debate, the expense of enacting solutions is minimal compared to the outrageous cost of lives and potential lost in our city. By finally acknowledging racial biases that have led to inadequate health care, heightened economic burdens, and problematic environmental conditions disproportionately affecting our citizens of color, Kansas City can begin to heal this divide, stymie early loss of life, and approach the beginnings of reconciliation.

Improving Access to Health Care

Enticing more advanced health care practitioners, such as nurse practitioners or physician assistants, to the urban core of Kansas City is one way to help bridge the gap of access to care in the metro area. Studies in other metropolitan areas, including those in California and Washington, have shown that nonphysician clinicians tend to serve more uninsured and minority patients in underserved areas than physicians (Grumbach et al.). The scope of nonphysician advanced practitioners is determined by the state, county, and the facility in which they work. Researchers have found that states with less restrictive regulations see larger increases in underserved patients being seen by advanced practitioners (Kuo et al.). By rewriting local regulations that govern the use of advanced practitioners to more closely match the rest of the country, Kansas City may be able to increase access to health care providers among marginalized populations.

Many underserved and at-risk communities are able to attract new physician assistants and nurse practitioners through public service loan forgiveness programs. In such programs, such as those offered by the Health Resources and

Services Administration and the National Health Service Corps, graduates of nurse practitioner and physician assistant programs can commit to work in areas considered to be “health professional shortage areas” and receive partial loan repayment for their graduate studies (*NHSC Loan Repayment Program*). The urban core of Kansas City qualifies as such. However, federal pressure to cut these programs has been in the news of late (Friedman). Voters and city and state lawmakers would be well-advised to push back on such cuts, as they will only amplify health inequities that our city already faces.

Kansas City would do well to invest in expanding health education in the classroom starting at the primary school level. Education about nutrition, exercise, stress, and how these relate to disease and mental health must be taught from an early age to cement habits of prevention. Furthermore, complementary education in how to prepare food at home, fostering mental health awareness, and sex education have been shown to dramatically improve health outcomes later in life (Hall).

Reducing Economic Burden

Perhaps the most important aspect of healing the rift that splits the Troost divide is infusing our most at-risk neighbors with the capital and opportunity to rise above the inequities that have been forced upon them. It is imperative to lighten these economic burdens as they are significantly contributory to the shorter life expectancies that plague Kansas City’s urban core.

In *We Are Superman*, ReEngage creator Rodney Knott sums up part of this inequity by explaining, “wealth is something that is built over generations...the unfortunate thing in the black community is that almost every generation

has to start from scratch” (Bryce). To truly bridge the divide that has been created in our city, we must provide our at-risk residents with a path to create real, lasting wealth. This is something that has been done for more privileged members of our society many generations ago and has been taken from our citizens of color involuntarily and, at times, forcefully. Our city can fund programs that aim to direct grant money to entrepreneurs of color in the Kansas City urban core and particularly to entrepreneurs who have visions of improving life for their neighbors. By doing so, we can begin taking steps toward putting power and money in the hands of those who have systematically had it ripped from them. Philanthropic giving is insufficient to create lasting, sustainable change in communities. A capitalistic drive to put wealth in the hands of white residents in Kansas City led to the hypersegregation that claims minority lives early in the urban core; a capitalistic drive to shrink that divide must be partnered with our efforts to remedy that injustice. By increasing access to entrepreneurial resources, specifically in marginalized communities, well-funded programs can bolster efforts of at-risk community members to mitigate economic burdens that exacerbate health inequities and may help close the gap of the life expectancy divide. To allow that, however, Kansas City must increase funding to such programs. It is also imperative to recognize the inherent harm in allowing groups of affluent, white citizens to maintain decision-making control over the entrepreneurial futures of people of color with limited resources. The power in these instances should, without question, be put in the hands of members of the affected communities.

To further lighten the economic burden that weighs upon Kansas City’s marginalized citizens, a federal plan for

universal health insurance *must* be investigated. By ensuring that every man, woman, and child has access to health insurance regardless of income or employment status, we can take steps toward healing the economic divides that drive life expectancy discrepancies. It is important that not only our most vulnerable citizens receive health insurance, but also that they are educated in how to use this insurance. This, admittedly, is an enormous undertaking and will most likely be a federal, not a state or local, battle. In the meantime, funding local programs to expand health care access to low- or no-cost clinics, such as the Sojourner Clinic, which is operated by medical students, can help alleviate the burdens of our uninsured populations in our at-risk neighborhoods. Clinics run by students have been shown to be cost-effective solutions, in part “due to their high-yield use of funding and decreased expenditures due to volunteerism”, and providers gain the benefit of hands-on experience in a clinical setting (Rumalla et al. 16). Increasing awareness of and funding to such clinics would be a good step toward improving health inequities that plague our city.

Improving Environmental Conditions

Improving the environmental conditions that contribute to health inequities in Kansas City is a task wholly accomplishable by our local government. Addressing the lack of adequate healthful foods in at-risk communities and improving the quality and scope of education in the urban core are all accessible goals which, upon their achievement, would help mitigate the life expectancy divide that plagues our city and improve overall quality of life in at-risk communities.

Research has shown that communities with access to farmers’ markets and fresh grocers have higher levels of

overall health, and with that comes longer life expectancies (Reece et al. 33). Initiatives in the city have already begun to help bring fresh food to our at-risk communities. In areas that do not have grocers nearby, grocery trucks, such as Rollin' Grocer, help make access to healthy foods easier (Davis). One proposal to improve the performance and impact of these mobile vendors is to reduce or eliminate the amount of unhealthy foods that are stocked, such as candies and sodas, and provide the vendors with a small subsidy to recover losses that may be resultant. Additionally, providing vehicles, training, and stock necessary to run such an enterprise to young entrepreneurs from marginalized neighborhoods may be an immediately impactful way to increase consumption of healthy foods and as well as to provide job training for those who seek it.

Improvements to the education system in Kansas City are essential in healing the life expectancy divide as well. It is clear from research cited above that urban core institutions suffer from a high faculty-to-student ratio. By enticing high quality teachers to marginalized school systems with loan repayment programs or grants, we may begin to reverse this trend. Additionally, the city should allow room in the classroom curriculum for subjects such as financial readiness and the history and effects of systematic racism in Kansas City. This could help empower a new generation of residents to make economic and political choices to take the city in a different direction than it has been taken before. Some communities in other states are beginning to see the benefits of such socioeconomic literacy programs. Community organizations in some parts of California are seeing increased college graduation rates and decreased debt loads in low-income students with financial coaching (Fries). By understanding

the link between education, income, and life expectancy, we can understand how such initiatives have bigger, life-altering impacts than may be initially apparent.

Conclusion

It is clear from examining the history of disinvestment in Kansas City that we have created devastating health care, economic, and environmental crises for our most vulnerable residents. There are many wrongs we must correct in order to begin the process of healing the urban core and equalizing the immense gaps that lead to divergent life expectancies among our residents. At the heart of these issues lie a monetization of racialized emotions and subsequent movement of enormous amounts of capital away from the primarily black city center. This systematic disinvestment has been reinforced for generations by massive economic and sociopolitical machines. To truly reverse and remedy these injustices, equally massive and economically sustainable amounts of capital, power, and organization should be put in the hands of those who have been unjustly marginalized and harmed by these cycles.

It is important to remember, however, that Kansas City is but a microcosm of our country at large: divides like Kansas City's Troost divide exist throughout our nation, separating and marginalizing our citizens of color, our LGBTQ+ kin, our minority-religion neighbors, and the immigrants who arrive in our country hoping for better. This systematic disinvestment has been tragically hyperbolized in our city, but it impacts innumerable vulnerable citizens of our country every day, even if in less dramatically apparent ways than early death. As we seek solutions, we must be mindful of the extent of the damage caused. Above all, an empowering message of hope and equality must resonate through our efforts at bridging the chasm that runs along Troost Avenue and throughout our city.

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QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

Context

1. Throughout this article, there are many references to financial losses associated with racial divides and resultant disparities in Kansas City, Missouri. What is the relevance of these figures, and how might they be functioning to persuade certain audiences? How does the author make these numbers and statistics presented here feel relevant and connected to the argument?
2. Which of the proposed solutions in this paper seem most immediately actionable, and why? What might be ways for college students to get involved in addressing the issues outlined in this paper?

Style

1. How do the maps and illustrations throughout the piece add to the argument? How are they contextualized within the piece?

FOR THE LOVE OF BOOKS

A CRITICAL LOOK AT THE LITERACY GENDER GAP

Joseph F. Allen

As the turn of the century drew near, a growing disparity between the literacy of young boys and girls began to emerge. This disparity caused a surge of social and educational concern. (Sommers; Tyre; Whitmire) Numerous studies were carried out to ascertain the scope of the issue, as well as determine the factors that play a role in its development. Decades later, boys continue to fall significantly behind in English Language Arts (ELA). According to the Common Core State Standards, ELA is defined as the ability to critically read, write, speak, listen, and use language skills in a variety of disciplines. As we will examine, boys are trailing girls in every assessment at state, national, and international levels. Thus, we are left with the concerning question: after so many years, why are boys still falling behind? The existence and persistence of a literacy gender gap is not in dispute, yet the factors that contribute to its development, as well as potential solutions, are heavily debated. It is my hope that through the course of this paper, we will arrive at an understanding of the literacy gender gap as well as familiarize ourselves with the complex discussion that surrounds it. To that end, we will explore the literacy gap in the United States beginning in

elementary and middle school, continuing through high school, followed by post-secondary education, specifically at college and university levels. We will then turn our attention to the international stage, examining how the literacy gender gap affects countries like China, the Netherlands, and Australia. Lastly, we will discuss some of the arguments that surround the issue, focusing on those that have received a considerable amount of attention through the past several years.

Recently, both popular and educational sources have published articles that discuss the widening literacy gap that exists between boys and girls. In 2004, the U.S. Department of Education reported that boys score 16 points lower in reading and 24 points lower in writing when compared to girls (Froschl 11). In 2011, a study conducted by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) tested over 120,000 randomly selected students at ages 9, 13, and 17 in reading, writing, math, and science. The study concluded that by the eighth grade, boys outperformed girls by 1 point in math and 5 points in science, and girls outperformed boys by 9 points in reading and 20 points in writing. According to the parameters of the study, 10 points is equivalent to approximately a year of schooling (Sommers 16). To put these results in perspective, the average 13-year-old boy is 1 to 3 years behind his female classmates in ELA. The NAEP writing tests further concluded that three-fourths of this gap can be measured by the fourth grade (Froschl 11). This suggests that the contributing factors that allow the gap to develop are present in the early and most critical years in boys' development and education (Sylva). Another study conducted by the NAEP assessed the writing performance of 24,100 eighth graders from 910 schools. The study showed that the average eighth grade boy is 19 points behind the average girl, and based on achievement-level results,

over twice as many boys performed at a “below basic” level compared to girls. This finding indicates that boys are having serious difficulties with ELA by the time they reach the eighth grade. In *Girls, Boys, and Reading*, Loveless presented results across eight standardized tests (Figure 1). If we examine the gaps between the standard deviations on both of the NAEP tests, the gaps are narrower among elementary students and wider among middle and high school students, a pattern that also appears on international assessments). These statistics suggest that the literacy gender gap is increasing as boys progress through their education, and as we look further ahead, we find that these issues may have significant long-term consequences.

Historically, a higher percentage of men have held bachelors’ degrees when compared to women. However, according to the U.S. Cen-

sus Bureau’s 1967 to 2015 current population survey, the gap has narrowed over time.

(Ryan) The survey found that in 1967, 1970, 1980,

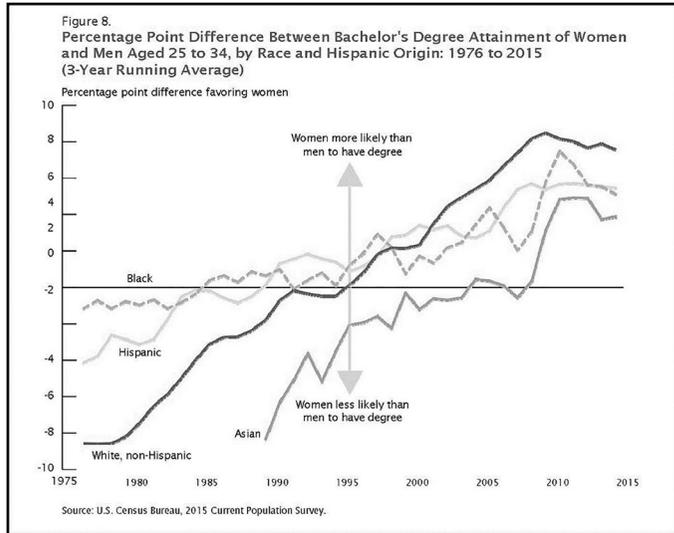
and 1990, there was no statistical difference between men and women with respect to college completion. Yet, from 1991 to 2015, young men’s college completion rate steadily dropped well below that of women (Figure 2). To see how these trends are presented across racial and ethnic groups, the U.S. Cen-

Test	Age/Grade	Male	Female	Gap	Standard Deviation	Gap in Standard Deviations
NAEP-LTT (2012)	Age 9	218	223	5*	38	0.13
	Age 13	259	267	8*	37	0.22
	Age 17	283	291	8*	42	0.19
NAEP-Main (2013)	4th Grade	219	225	6*	37	0.16
	8th Grade	263	273	10*	34	0.29
	12th Grade	284	293	9*	38	0.24
International Assessments	PIRLS (2011) 4th Grade	551	562	11*	73	0.15
	PISA (2012) Age 15	482	513	31*	92	0.34

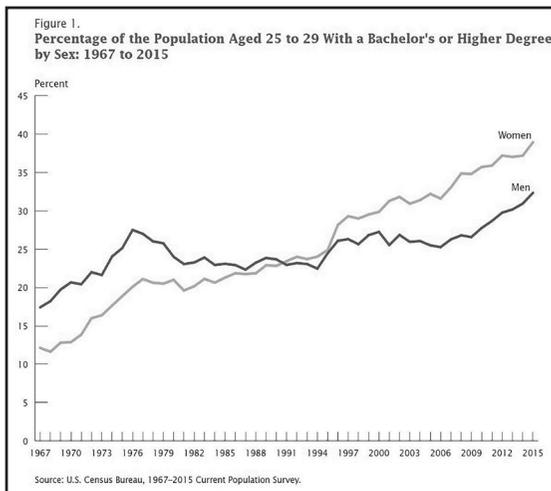
* Significantly different from zero, p<.05.

National Assessment of Educational Progress Long Term Trend (NAEP-LTT), began testing in 1971. U.S. Gender Gap in Literacy
 NAEP Main Assessment, began testing in 1992. (Results from Eight Tests)
 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), began in 2001
 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), began in 2000.

the Bureau introduced several variables and broadened the age range to account for the inherent reduction in sample size. The results showed that the college completion gap is represented in every race and ethnicity (Figure 3).



A study conducted by economist Andrew Sum and his colleagues examined gender disparities in Boston Public Schools, class of 2007. They found that among White students, 153

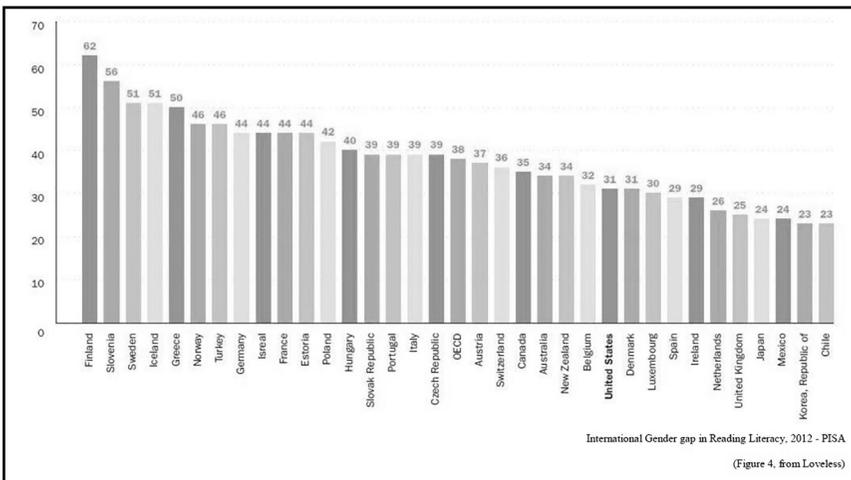


females to 100 males were attending a four-year college, for Hispanics students 175 females to 100 males, and for Black students the gap had swelled to 191 females for every 100 males (16). In *The Educational Experience of Young Men of*

Color: A Review of Research Pathways and Progress, Lee studied the educational and career pathways available to men ages

15 to 24 as of 2008. The study concluded that men of all racial and ethnic backgrounds fall behind their female counterparts in college access, educational attainment, and employment. The outcomes for Black males are particularly concerning, especially when it comes to literacy development (Bristol). It is difficult to determine whether the literacy gender gap exhibits a correlative or causal relationship with the deficiencies that men are facing in educational and professional outcomes, yet one can conclude that these issues need to be addressed, and young boys' literacy education will undoubtedly play a crucial role in their resolution.

The underachievement of boys is not limited to the United States. Many first-world countries are facing similar challenges. In 2012, the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) assessed reading literacy in countries that belong to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (Figure 4). The study found that the gender gap existed in all OECD countries, with girls outscoring boys by 23 to 62 points on the PISA scale. On average, girls outscored boys by 38 points, and with respect to the other countries, the United States fell below the OECD average with a 31-point gap. The largest



gender gap in 2012 was found in Finland, a country that has received an abundance of praise for its superior test scores and effective education system.

Turning our attention to China, another country that tends to score highly on the international stage, Lai in *Are Boys Left Behind? The Evolution of the Gender Achievement Gap in Beijing's Middle Schools*, assessed the achievement of 7235 middle school students in Beijing. The study found greater dominance in female achievement when compared to the United States, especially through primary and middle school. In addition, boys displayed a significantly higher dropout rate by the end of middle school. Lai concluded that the growth in the gender gap from primary school to middle school indicated the importance of early intervention.

In the Netherlands, following an increase in national concern regarding the literacy gender gap, the Dutch Ministry of Education commissioned a study by Driessen and van Langen to investigate gender achievement in Dutch primary and secondary schools. Driessen and van Langen focused on three main areas, namely cognitive competencies, non-cognitive competencies, and school career features. The study analyzed data from several large-scale national and international databases to determine both the existence and scale of the literacy gender gap. The results found that over the past ten to fifteen years, girls have outperformed boys in reading and language. Yet, compared to the United States, the Dutch gap is relatively small, and in the upper social classes, the gap all but disappears. Driessen and van Langen conclude that the inequality in Dutch education is primarily a result of gender stereotypes and the different ways in which developing boys and girls interact with their environment.

A paper published in Australia, "Boys and Literacy: Lessons from Australia," examines the complexity of the issues associated

with boys and literacy (Alloway). It initially reviews Australian research documenting gender differences in literacy performance, highlighting the interplay between gender, class, and ethnicity. Alloway then develops a framework for considering the interconnectedness between literacy, schooling, and the different ways that young boys experience masculinity. Alloway argues that Australian educators are not recognizing literary texts that would be of more interest to young boys—namely those that present action and adventure themes with strong “masculine” characters—due to an apprehensiveness toward encouraging hegemonic masculinity in the early years of development. Finding no evidence to support these presumptions, Alloway states that efforts should be made to promote literature that would be of interest to both boys and girls:

A basic tenet of working on the boys and literacy agenda should be that both girls’ and boys’ interests in improved literacy performance are promoted; boys’ gains in literacy should not be promoted at the expense of girls’ gains; efforts to enfranchise the boys should not disenfranchise the girls. Rather than developing programmes that are ‘good for girls’, or ‘good for boys’, we need instead to focus on a critique of school literacy practices and the assumptions upon which they rely, and to widen our understanding of literacy and literate practice. (Alloway 56)

Alloway concludes that it is vital for Australian families and communities that young men become critically literate. When it comes to literacy education policies, it should not be viewed as a zero-sum game. As a society, we should endeavor to improve the literacy of everyone, regardless of race, gender, or creed.

At a critical time in young boys’ literacy development, they

are falling far behind. The significance of this problem cannot be understated or underestimated. Through the early years of education, children transition from learning literacy, to using the literacy skills that they have acquired *in order to* learn. These skills are not only necessary to succeed in further education, they prove to be vital in subsequent careers as well as throughout life. The question of why the literacy gap exists, and why boys have fallen so far behind is heavily debated. In *Beyond the "Boy Problem": Raising Questions, Growing Concerns, and Literacy Reconsidered*, Watson and Kehler express concerns about how the literacy gender gap has been defined and engaged by education policy stakeholders, the media, and public dialogue. They argue that the issue is failing to improve because key individuals are opposed to acknowledging learning differences between boys and girls. A Canadian report opposed Watson and Kehler's position by stating that "there is more variance within groups of boys and within groups of girls than there are differences between boys and girls" (Cappon 48). Some researchers hold that there are no biological differences between men and women, rather all differences arise from environmental conditioning (Fine; Eliot). That being said, the majority hold that "there is something fundamentally different about the way men and women think, feel and act, and that these differences are tied to their different biological and psychological make-up" (Rowen 29). Whether the differences arise from biological or environmental factors, the fact remains that there are differences, learning or otherwise. On average, boys and girls are inclined to choose different genres and types of books, they are conscious of different aspects of the text, and they receive the information in different ways (Millard 160). In "Not Just Boring Stories: Reconsidering the Gender Gap for Boys," Taylor argues that

current education policies are working against boys, and that boys' out-of-school literacy interest are not being represented in the classroom. Taylor believes that by introducing teaching strategies that build upon boys' interests, while recognizing their individual learning styles, as well as their developmental and emotional needs, they may be more likely to become lifelong readers.

The literacy gender gap is affecting boys in the United States and around the world, and "if we do not want to live in a society where a large segment of the population is missing the joy and understandings that are available through literature and critical reading, writing, and thought, then we cannot afford to take these issues lightly" (Taylor 291). As expressed by Taylor and many others, teachers recognize that young boys in their classrooms are struggling with literacy, and the clear majority would welcome solutions to help them succeed, but their hands are tied by the mandated literacy programs currently in place in the United States educational system. To mitigate the ongoing literacy gender gap, it is time for our society to develop and introduce solutions into the classroom or through extra-curricular programs. Books are the means by which we share ideas, knowledge, and skill, and every child should be given the opportunity to experience the joy that comes with literacy.

Now we come to the point in which we must ask ourselves: where do we go from here? Over the past several decades, experts across a wide variety of fields have discussed the literacy gender gap, its causes, and potential solutions. Yet, with each year, boys' literacy remains well below the standard that their female classmates achieve. Where we would expect to find normal and equal distribution, data has revealed a large literacy gender gap at state, national, and international

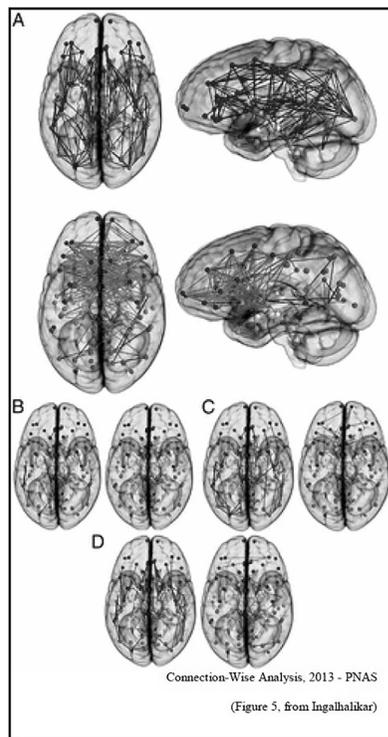
levels. Research shows that by the eighth grade, the average male student is developmentally 1 to 3 years behind their female classmates in reading and writing (Froschl, Sommers, Loveless). This lack of competency in literature and critical reading, writing, and thought may have long-term effects on an individual, their community, and society. This can be illustrated by the fact that boys, on average, are less likely to apply or be accepted to an institute of higher education; and, for males that continue their education after secondary school, they participate in fewer extracurricular activities, earn lower grades, and are less likely to graduate. (Sommers) The opportunity for an individual to attain academic and professional success is crucial for the vitality and development of society, and literacy acts as the means by which advancement can be pursued. When a large portion of society is unable to acquire or realize their full potential due to a lack of literacy, we ought to ask: what are we doing that is hindering their ability to achieve success and what actions can we take to help them succeed? To answer these questions, we will examine several factors that may play a role in the development of the literacy gender gap, then turn to solutions that may help to improve boys' literacy, followed by a discussion of how we can affect change in our schools, homes, and communities. Regarding the first point, there are a variety of elements that may influence the development of the gender gap. For our purposes, we will focus on analyzing four primary factors: biological, environmental, sociological, and psychological.

Researchers from a variety of biological fields (e.g., neurology, psychology, physiology, genetics, etc.) have studied the role that gender has in the acquisition of language and literacy development. Currently, we do not fully understand the molecular basis for language differences between men

and women in terms of neurodevelopment, neuropsychology, and neurochemistry, yet recent studies offer insights into how language is learned, represented, and processed (Pakulak). In a study published by *Nature Communications*, Trabzuni and her colleagues found strong evidence suggesting that genes are expressed differently between men and women in regions throughout the brain. This means that at the transcription level, analogous to a blueprint for how cells will develop, there are key differences that affect structure and function of the brain. These findings are supported by a recent article published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (PNAS). The study determined that the male brain is optimized for intrahemispheric (*blue*) communication, whereas the female brain is more specialized for interhemispheric (*orange*) communication (Ingalhalikar). A connection-wise analysis revealed that (A) brain networks show an increased connectivity pattern in both males (*upper*) and females (*lower*); with child (B), adolescent (C), and young adult (D) groups shown below. (Figure 5) Understanding that there are differences in the way that the right and left hemispheres communicate is essential for establishing a foundation for why males and females learn, process, and utilize language and literacy differently. According to these findings, it is significantly easier for boys, especially during development, to process sensory information, whereas girls' brains are structured to process abstract language. It is due to these differences that some researchers have stated that females are "better at performing language tasks," yet there are fallacies with that conclusion. (Burman; Northwestern University). It is more logical to infer that there are simply *differences* in the way that boys and girls process language during development, rather than to assert that one form of function is superior to the other. If we

use this knowledge to inform early education policies, it will give teachers the ability to assign texts that will be of more interest to boys during their literacy development. Additionally, since evidence does not currently suggest that differences in language processing persist into adulthood, once a solid literacy foundation is in place, boys will be better equipped to expand their literacy to all forms (Burman). In addition to biology, sociological and environmental factors play a crucial role in the literacy gender gap. Anke Ehrhardt, a psychiatry professor at Columbia University Medical Center, stated that:

“Acknowledging brain effects by gender does not mean these are immutable, permanent determinants of behavior, but rather they may play a part within a multitude of factors and certainly can be shaped by social and environmental influences” (qtd. in Khazan).



Learning takes place in a physical environment with quantifiable and perceptible characteristics. These external influences affect learners emotionally, having both cognitive and behavioral consequences (Graetz). Society often portrays reading as a feminine quality. In the average American home, children are more likely to see their mothers reading for pleasure, whereas fathers tend to identify themselves as non-readers (Brozo). According to Alloway, some boys demonstrate their understanding of what

it is to be male by *not* reading. According to the U.S Bureau of Labor (2016) and the Association of American Educators (AAE), approximately 97.5% of preschool and kindergarten teachers, 78.5% of elementary and middle school teachers, and 83.8% of librarians are female (Larisa). Thus, at a crucial time for literacy development, boys tend to receive reading encouragement exclusively from women. With a lack of male role-models, potent stereotypes, and social norms that would dictate reading is for some reason not masculine, young boys often feel that literature is not for them. To reinforce this impression, most books offered by publishers feature storylines that appeal to female audiences because statistically, girls are more likely to buy books. White, a journalist from *Deseret News* wrote that “there is a gap in the book market,” following an interview with Chris Shoemaker, a librarian at the New York City Public Library. At a recent presentation of soon-to-be-released titles, Shoemaker noticed that most plots targeted female audiences: “stories of ‘frenemies,’ vampire romance, and first love. The average boy just doesn’t want to read a story about ‘bullying between female best friends’” (White). Sociological and environmental factors play a significant role in child development, and the associations they make therein have long-term effects on the way in which they perceive the world as well as their positions in it.

Related to the concept of cognition, psychological factors are closely connected to thinking, learning, and perception. A study conducted by the University of Kent of approximately 600 children, ages 4 to 10, examined the role of “stereotype threat” in boys’ academic underachievement. The researchers, Hartley and Sutton, define stereotype threat as a reduction in task performance due to an awareness that the social group in which an individual belongs is not expected to do well at said

task. According to Hartley and Sutton, “Acute exposure to stereotype threat can affect performance by causing rumination and anxiety, whereas chronic exposure can lead individuals to disengage with a performance domain to protect their self-esteem,” (19). Hartley and Sutton’s research found that boys’ poor performance in literacy subjects is correlated to a stereotype threat that most boys in the study shared. When surveyed, boys felt they were being told that girls were better at academics. They believed that their teachers and parents did not expect them to do as well as the girls and, from age 7, boys tended to rate themselves collectively as *worse* than girls. Comparatively, by age 4, girls thought that they were better than boys at school, believing they understood their work better, did better, were more motivated, and were better behaved. According to the results of the study, there is a direct correlation between stereotype threat and task performance. In literacy development, stereotype threat may affect boys’ motivation to read, as well as perform other literacy-centered tasks. It is not clear whether psychological, environmental, sociological, or biological factors mediate the literacy gender gap, yet with each case we gain insight into how we might solve the issue.

The literacy gender gap is impacted by a variety of factors. To improve boys’ literacy experience in our schools, homes, and communities, we need to take a critical look at society and our education policies. In the United States public school system, Smith and Wilhelm summarize Millard, who “suggests that boys are disadvantaged in academic literacy as a result of current curricular emphases, teacher text and topic choices, and lack of availability of texts that match their interest and needs” (Smith and Wilhelm 14). The importance of interest is at the core of motivation and learning. Accord-

ing to Probst, “If we want [boys] to read carefully and analyze conscientiously, then the works they study have to matter to them.” When an individual has a vested interest in a specific subject matter or task, he or she becomes engaged and begin processing it on a deeper level. Research by Hunter, Gilbert, and Patterson demonstrated how current constructions of literacy pedagogy draw strongly upon discourses of personalism, moral regulation, and emotional disclosure. Interview studies conducted by Gilbert, Martino, and Rowe suggest that these topics are simply undesirable for the average elementary or middle school boy. For example, one student stated:

My English teacher wants me to write about my feelings, my History teacher wants me to give my opinions, and my Science teacher wants me (to) write on my views about the environment! I don't know what my feelings, opinions and views are, and I can't write about them. Anyway, they're none of their bloody business! I hate school!! I only wish I could write about things I'm interested in like sport and military aircraft.
(Rowe 3)

Giving students a choice of reading material can play an important role in the enjoyment and engagement of reading – in and of itself, that choice fosters voluntary reading (Taylor). In 2002, a study by Smith and Wilhelm found that “boys almost universally felt that school denied them choice and control and therefore any sense of personal agency or competence” (109). The boys in the study saw reading as an opportunity to learn more about their existing interests and, despite their feelings about literacy pedagogy, they believed that school was important. If we wish to encourage boys to read and write, it is important for us to offer books and topics with content that they find interesting and motivating (Oakhill

and Petrides). Of course, children will need to read and understand material that they do not find particularly interesting as well. If literacy skills are gradually built from a young age using choice and interest to facilitate learning, boys will have the necessary foundation to extract meaning regardless of their personal interest in the content of the assigned text or material. In the words of Plato, "Do not train boys by force or harshness, but lead them by what amuses them so that they may better discover the bent of their minds."

Beyond the classroom, boys need role-models who encourage and motivate them to read and write. Dads, grandfathers, brothers, etc. can have a significant impact on boys merely by reading with them. Through such examples, boys will experience first-hand that being a man and being a reader are not incompatible. Miller said, "Without a positive male role model in your life, it is extremely difficult to become a man who benefits his family and benefits society." Of course, not all homes will be able to provide these opportunities for their sons, and some may not know how to help them develop literacy skills. To meet those needs, communities should organize extra-curricular programs that target young boys' literacy, closing the gap and giving each child the opportunity for success. As a society, we do not want to permit another decade to pass where boys are unable to experience the joy that comes from books. It is time for us to act, closing the gap in literacy so that the lives of our young men may be enriched by the power, beauty, and opportunity that comes from literacy.

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QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

Context

1. What are the reasons for the gendered nature of the literacy gap? What else might this gap affect, aside from academic performance?
2. What types of efforts might be effective in changing the attitudes of male students toward literacy? What social pressures contribute to the problem? How might such social pressures be used more positively?

Style

1. What different types of evidence does Allen use in the essay? Which are most effective? Why?
2. How does Allen structure the various levels of the argument? What would a reverse outline of this paper look like?

CAN THEY GET HERE FROM THERE?

TRANSPORTATION BARRIERS AND HEALTHCARE ACCESS

Karen K. Faught

The need for easy and affordable methods to get from point A to point B in our American society is undeniable. Nearly everything we need to manage daily living, let alone successful lives, centers around the ability to maneuver physically in the world. Although this necessity may be offset by the ever-growing cyber universe, capacity to obtain the basic goods and services to keep us functioning in society remains dependent on our ability to get where we need to go.

At the top of the list of those basic needs is transportation to healthcare services. Annual check-ups, preventive screenings, specialist appointments, urgent care, primary care, physical therapy, oncology care, chronic disease management, and even palliative and hospice care often require access to transportation. Access to healthy food options and pharmaceuticals to support healthcare goals is integral to their attainment for individuals. Private vehicles comprise most ways in which these connections are made (Sagrestano, Clay, Finerman, Gooch, & Rapino, 2014). For those without a car or access to one, healthcare services are much more difficult to obtain (Sagrestano et al., 2014). Dependence upon public transportation, ride-sharing services, Medicaid funded transport, taxi

services, or volunteer rides contributes to the likelihood of missed appointments and an insufficiency of healthcare service for many vulnerable populations (Starbird, DiMaina, Sun, & Han, 2018). Without reliable access to these components of health, individuals may develop illness and become sicker, further complicating their access to transportation and healthcare service.

The costs (financial, physical, emotional and spiritual) of barriers to transportation are greater when other social determinants impinge and disease is not managed well (Grant, Goldsmith, Gracy, & Johnson, 2016; Sagrestano et al., 2014). Government entities, city planners, and healthcare providers must be active participants in developing strategies and interventions to reduce such access issues for vulnerable demographics. The real impacts of solving the transportation burden for susceptible populations would be improved health and reduced healthcare expenditures which would far offset any cost of the transportation itself (Kheirkhah, Feng, Travis, Tavakoli-Tabasi & Sharafkhanah, 2016). In this paper, I examine the effects of transportation barriers on vulnerable populations and the health disparities created by insufficient transportation. Additionally, I review solutions that are currently in use and those that need fuller implementation or more study.

Part 1: Defining the Problem: Transportation Barriers and Healthcare Access

Background

Over the past several decades, research has helped to define the issues of transportation access for at-risk demographics. Low-income individuals, minority and ethnic groups, urban and rural dwellers, children and the elderly, people with disabilities, and chronically and mentally ill individuals comprise the populations most affected by transportation and healthcare

access (Syed, Gerber, & Sharp, 2013). The barriers faced by these populations include the cost, the distance necessary to travel, the schedule of the available transport options, complications of needing more than one mode of transport to get to a healthcare facility, advance scheduling, transport delays and no-shows, inclement weather, accommodation of disability, and stigmas experienced by those using public transportation. (Sagrestano et al., 2014). A range of studies have addressed the effects of these barriers: missed appointments, lack of follow-up appointments, cessation of healthcare visits entirely, and exacerbations of illness (Grant et al., 2016; Kheirkhah et al., 2016; Sagrestano et al., 2014; Starbird et al., 2018). Transportation barriers lead to worsening disease and/or the development of chronic disease, poorer outcomes in the management of those diseases, and overall increased healthcare costs to providers, patients, and the nation (Syed et al., 2013).

Scope of the Problem

Lack of transportation is an expanding issue. The breadth of the problem of transportation barriers and its potential to grow are illuminated by the following numbers and estimates:

- The United States Census Bureau (USCB) (2018) projects an overall national census of over 354 million in the year 2030.
- The Bureau of Transportation Statistics (BTS) indicates an estimated 10 to 11 million households are without a vehicle and 5.1% of the population used public transit (BTS, 2017).
- In the year 2016, the number of people living in poverty was 40.6 million (USCB, 2018).
- By the year 2030, 73.1% of the overall population in the United States will be 65 years and older (USCB, 2018).
- 13.3% of the United States population lives with a dis-

ability (USCB, 2018)

- The American Cancer Society (ACS) estimates the probability of developing cancer during one's lifetime at 1 in 2 for males and 1 in 3 for females (ACS, 2016).
- The Partnership to Fight Chronic Disease (PFCD) projects the number of people living with 3 or more chronic diseases is expected to rise to over 83 million by 2030 (PFCD, n.d).
- The financial impact of chronic diseases could hit 2 trillion dollars per year from present to 2030 (PFCD, n.d).
- 44.7 million people have some form of mental illness (National Institute of Mental Health, 2017).

As population growth occurs in the next decade, the number of people with one or more of these concerns will naturally increase, even if percentages do not. The equation adds up to more transportation access issues, a sicker overall population, and rising costs to individuals, communities, and the health-care industry as problems intersect and overlap.

Associated Factors

Identifying Concerns. Research has aimed an investigative lens on the relationship between transportation barriers and health disparities. In a study to define a better tool to measure the sweep of transportation barrier concerns, researchers surveyed African American/Black and Hispanic/Latino adults with Type II diabetes (Locatelli, Sharp, Syed, Bhansari, and Gerber, 2017). The results identified both general and public transportation hindrances, disentangling factors which tend to be lumped together when assessing for transportation barriers. The survey's testing of a scale to capture types of transportation and associated barriers showed 40% of those surveyed who use public transportation experienced transportation problems. Difficulty obtaining transportation was measured with 15.2%

experiencing a little trouble, 14.8% stating some trouble, and 9.8% reporting a lot of trouble accessing transportation. (Locatelli et al., 2017). Other studies have yielded similar findings, such as one conducted with Latino and Black cancer patients who indicated transportation issues as one of the top three most reported barriers affecting missed appointments (Costas-Muniz et al., 2014).

Non-Emergent Transport. Non-emergent transport refers to transportation to routine or scheduled medical appointments by providers able to accommodate wheelchairs, stretchers, or other special needs. The required benefit of non-emergent medical transportation (NEMT) under Medicaid services provides additional options for some healthcare consumers. The provision intends that the most appropriate and cost-efficient form of transportation for each patient (taxi, van, or public transit) be used (Aleccia, 2018). In a geographically focused study, data compiled for adult rural patient transportation needs showed that rural patients, because of greater distance to travel to healthcare appointments, utilized NEMT options more often than urban patients without private vehicle access (Smith, Prohaska, MacLeod et al., 2017). Those who used NEMT most often were dialysis patients, those seeking primary care, and persons of lower income (Smith et al., 2017). In a study of HIV/AIDS patients, issues with reserved transportation such as NEMT included only partial coverage by Medicaid, self-pay with later reimbursement, qualifying medical information requirements, rescheduling problems if appointments were changed, and limited availability (Sagrestano et al., 2014). Grant, Goldsmith, Gracy, and Johnson (2016) further delineated access barriers with NEMT services that stopped at county and state lines, required advance appointment scheduling up to 72 hours ahead of need, and waivers

requested by individual states to release them from the obligation to provide service under Medicaid. This compilation of factors makes NEMT service less than ideal for meeting patients' needs.

Public Transportation. Public transportation (i.e., bus lines and mass transit lines) poses its own barriers, especially with respect to the timing of service in relation to the time of healthcare appointments (Sagrestano et al., 2014). Transport delays, lack of accessibility from the patient's home, and lines of service which do not move the patient close enough to the appointment location—thereby necessitating another mode of transportation to arrive on time—create additional hurdles (Park, & Kear, 2017). Public transit lines rarely extend beyond metropolitan limits leaving them mostly unavailable to rural residents (Locatelli et al., 2017). Furthermore, the cost of public transportation creates barriers for low income individuals, those who would be most likely to use the service in urban areas (Starbird, DiMaina, Sun, & Han, 2018). Similar to non-emergent transport, the apparently promising option of public transportation often falls short of meeting the needs for many who rely on it.

Implications

Healthcare Access. Patients without equal access to healthcare due to transportation barriers experience a health disparity. The obvious result of transportation barriers is missed appointments, delayed or absent treatment, and lack of access to other supports, including pharmaceuticals for disease management, as well as healthier foods which support healthier lifestyles and reduce disease complications (Syed, Gerber, & Sharp, 2013). Approximately 3.6

million citizens are believed to miss medical appointments because of transportation issues (Park, & Kear, 2017). Missed

appointments result in less optimally managed disease, disease exacerbations leading to increased hospital admissions, chronic health conditions through lack of prevention and adherence to treatment, and increased overall healthcare costs (Grant et al., 2016; Kheirkhah et al., 2016). Examples illustrating the impact of transportation challenges on treatment include dialysis patients who need transportation 1 to 3 times per week; cancer patients who require daily radiation or scheduled chemotherapy; pulmonary disease patients who require medication to manage the work of breathing; elderly patients who need prescriptions refilled; low-income patients who cannot afford the cost of public transportation; and those suffering from mental illness who cannot access support from community mental health organizations. Moreover, a seemingly endless combination of other health needs demographics may experience poor outcomes because of inadequate healthcare access resulting from transportation barriers (Park, & Kear, 2017; Costas-Muniz et al., 2016; Syed et al., 2013; Smith et al., 2017).

Costs. In addition to poor health, missed appointments have a significant financial impact on healthcare providers, which leads to increased overall health expenditure (Grant et al., 2016; Kheirkhah et al., 2016). In a correlation of missed appointments to cost, researchers have estimated the average missed appointment cost at \$196 (Kheirkhah et al., 2016). A review of missed appointments at 10 Veterans Association Medical Center clinics projects the cost of one less missed appointment per day, per service in each clinic, to be over \$14 million annually (Kheirkhah et al., 2016). Kheirkhah and colleagues were unable to estimate the actual number of services this would involve; however, the cost difference is remarkable. Furthermore, the emergent care and hospitalization for conditions that can be managed through consistent primary care

are avoidable costs (Grant et al., 2016). In a study of children with asthma, 10% of parents utilized emergency services due to inability to access transportation (Petty, Vargas, McCracken et al., 2008, as cited in Grant et al., 2016).

To understand the potential negative impacts lack of healthcare access can have on new and chronic disease is not difficult. The consequences are numerous: missed dialysis appointments can be life-threatening, delayed radiation or chemotherapy may reduce effectiveness of treatment as cell cycle timing is crucial, pulmonary infections may lead to increased hospitalizations, diabetic patients may experience potentially life-threatening hypo/hyperglycemia, and mentally ill patients may decompensate without needed support. As chronic disease incidence is projected to increase, it is reasonable to expect an increase in healthcare costs to both providers and patients (PFCD, n.d.). For lower income populations and those without insurance, the cyclical problems of access to healthcare and worsening health will continue unless there is a resolution of transportation barriers.

Healthy Food Access. Another concern is how disease prevention is affected through transportation barriers to healthy food. *The Grocery Gap: Who Has Access to Healthy Food and Why it Matters* (TGG) explains the history and challenges that low income, minority and ethnic populations face in obtaining foods that increase their health potential and help to improve and stabilize medical conditions. In an aggregation of 132 studies, spanning nearly 30 years, TGG references political, zoning, real estate, and policy practices as factors that marginalize certain populations with proximity to healthy food (Treuhaft & Karpyn, 2010). The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) (2018) has recognized the preventive relationship between healthy food and disease. Lower risk for obesity, diabe-

tes, and cardiac disease are among the many benefits of access to fresh fruits and vegetables, and higher quality meats (CDC, 2018). Even though this seems like common knowledge, ease of access to these foods represents a barrier to good health for many.

Multiple studies illustrate the disparity in distance of supermarkets and grocery stores (and the over-representation of convenience and liquor stores) in low income and ethnic neighborhoods versus those with a more affluent zip code (Treuhaft, & Karpyn, 2010). The number of households without a vehicle has increased since 2010 in low income areas where distance to grocery stores and supermarkets is greater than one-half mile (Rhone, Ver Ploeg, Dicken, Williams, & Breneman, 2017). Additionally, rural residents using food stamps often travel up to and over 30 miles to the nearest store (Treuhaft & Karpyn, 2010). Transportation barriers maintain the disparities by reducing access to neighborhoods where supermarkets exist. The decades of studies cited by Treuhaft and Karpyn (2010) point to the length of time from research to policy change. The implications of inadequate transportation on vulnerable populations are significant. Lack of transportation increases health-care costs and creates disparities regarding healthcare access, treatment of disease, and access to healthy foods to support wellness.

Part II: Advocating Solutions: Making Transportation Accessible

Research bears out the significant need for added support for patients who are vulnerable to transportation barriers and resultant health disparities. The complexity of the problem requires a multifaceted approach to make transportation more accessible for all who are susceptible to these barriers. The many challenging routes that individuals must navigate

to maintain and improve their health necessitate a variety of tracks to achieve success. Who bears the responsibility of solving the problem? If the goal is better health for all people of all communities, then solutions must involve all components of communities: legislators, city planners, healthcare providers, civic organizations and community residents. Consequently, it is clear there is no *one-size-fits-all* remedy.

Stakeholder Partnerships

The development of a network of solutions for the wide and varied transportation barrier conundrum depends on the collaboration of transportation providers (public and private), federal, state, and local governments, healthcare providers, city and rural planners, and the public. To create an actionable network of solutions will require the pooling of resources; the sharing of different perspectives, results, and new approaches; and unity in promoting common goals provides the best strategy for improving transportation access for all vulnerable individuals and their communities (Broderick, 2018; Syed et al, 2013). Through community coalitions, the movement of people from one place to another can improve, thus reducing the health disparities resulting from insufficient transportation options. Legislative changes that support the common goal of better health for all communities, could be driven by these partnerships (Broderick, 2018).

Current Approaches

Residents. Certainly, patients have a responsibility for understanding and valuing the importance of participation in their own health outcomes. Keeping their healthcare appointments, accepting the services offered to make that possible, and following the plans of care that coordinate their efforts with those of their healthcare providers are vital ingredients of their involvement. Patients must also follow their prescribed

diets, take their medications, and participate in more physically active lifestyles to the best of their ability. These seem like obvious requirements; however, maintaining the motivation for wellness may be challenging for vulnerable populations. Supportive services are often necessary to assist with necessary coping skills. Starbird et al. (2018) found evidence that greater success in maintaining motivation to use transportation support occurs when patients receive additional services through care coordination such as counseling, education, and navigation. Improved rates with patient follow-through suggest this support represents an important piece of the puzzle in overcoming transportation barriers (Starbird et al., 2018).

Civic Organizations. Community support through local community centers and organizations plays an important role in reducing barriers of transportation access. Shephard's Centers of America (SCA), Don Bosco Senior Center (DBSC), and local branches of national disease focused organizations such as Cancer Action, Inc. (CAI) are examples of community resources with established volunteer ride programs. In addition, these centers provide meal delivery to the elderly and income-challenged based on needs assessment (Devins, 2018; DBSC, 2103; CAI, 2018). Community support depends on a supportive community. Service provision is dependent on volunteer availability, with shortages in personnel and resources impacting ability to meet demand (DBSC, 2013).

Healthcare Providers. The financial impact of missed appointments, worsening chronic disease rates, and avoidable emergency room visits make it necessary for healthcare providers to be a growing part of the solution for transportation barriers. The estimated price tag for healthcare providers nationwide per year for missed appointments and delayed care is \$150 billion (Health Research & Education Trust [HRET],

2017). From a business perspective, investment in solutions that increase healthcare access only makes sense. Use of screening tools can capture patient vulnerability regarding transportation. Education about available resources, partnerships with private and public transportation providers, vouchers, and direct provision of transportation through volunteer driver programs and shuttle services are examples of healthcare interventions that reduce the transportation burden for patients and curb overall costs (HRET, 2017). Additionally, the role of care coordination, which addresses the educational and other supportive needs of patients, enhances the success of other transportation interventions (Starbird et al., 2018).

Transportation Providers. Both public and private transportation providers are a core ingredient for accessible transportation for at-risk individuals. For some, public transportation (bus service and light rail) vouchers provide satisfactory remedies to access issues. Services through private agencies such as Lyft Mobility Solutions, Uber Health, Drive a Senior (DaS), and other NEMT providers are go-to choices when public transportation and shuttle service is not a viable option due to cost or availability (DaS, 2108; Della Cava, 2018). Some NEMT services are covered by Medicaid but not all, and Lyft and Uber offer discounted rates based on income criteria (Broderick, 2018). Pushes for Medicaid expansion cutbacks and exemption waivers for individual states from Medicaid transportation requirements place additional financial burdens on patients (Nguyen, 2018). Besides prohibitive costs for lower-income populations, issues with reliability remain the at the forefront of concern with NEMT, as patients have reported no-show experiences with previously arranged rides (Park & Kear, 2017). Rural NEMT providers often have limited operating territory, resulting in the need for more than one mode of transportation to arrive at the destination

(Park & Kear, 2017; Sagrestano et al., 2014). Enhanced partnerships between NEMT and healthcare providers are critical given the challenges of NEMT and public transportation access.

City and Rural Planners. Zoning laws must support the provision of healthy living for communities. *The Grocery Gap: Who Has Access to Healthy Food and Why it Matters* (TGG) articulates the necessity for community planning as a significant part of the solution to healthy food access (Treuhaft & Karpyn, 2010). Creating easier access to food markets, grocery stores, and scheduled farmers markets for underserved areas is paramount to reducing the disparity. Laws that limit the number of convenience and liquor stores within food insecure communities make more space available for alternatives. Legislation that supports the development of unused or abandoned urban and rural spaces for community gardens increases availability to healthy fruits and vegetables and enhances community member participation in their neighborhoods (Treuhaft & Karpyn, 2010). The creation of small and large public spaces for community interaction and exercise enhances healthy living (e.g., community centers, parks, and walking paths). Political choices that increase street safety, such as traffic lights, streetlights, sidewalks, bus route development and service scheduling, are additional pieces that can help complete the puzzle (Haskins, 2108; Treuhaft & Karpyn, 2010).

Emerging Technologies. As NEMT providers increase in number, opportunity to improve service through the development of technology-enabled coordination has been proposed. Several prospective projects are underway to test centralization of transportation services through enhanced broadband infrastructure (Broderick, 2018). Mobility as a Service (MaaS), Mobility on Demand (MOD), Feonix Mobility Rising (FMR) and GoGo-Grandparent are examples of technology-based, concierge-like services that aim to meet service needs of patients more fully

by providing access to individualized transportation options based on patient-centered needs (Broderick, 2018). The goal is to improve customer service through centralization, giving healthcare providers and patients an avenue for feedback and response (Broderick, 2018). The closing of transportation gaps, increasing consistency, and improving opportunities to communicate about service concerns will go some way toward cresting the transportation barrier mountain (Broderick, 2018; Nguyen, 2018).

Government Advocacy. Finally, stakeholder coalitions and partnerships must use their experience and influence to drive change regarding legislation to improve transportation access for vulnerable populations (Broderick, 2018; Treuhaft & Karpyn, 2010). At the top of the list is advocacy for continued Medicaid transportation requirements for individual states to maintain the viability of NEMT for low-income individuals (Nguyen, 2018). Adjustments are needed in zoning laws and restrictions to create more accessibility to food options. Such changes would enhance health in communities that possess underrepresentation of supermarkets, grocery stores, and community food markets (Treuhaft & Karpyn, 2010). Exerting the political will to assist the growth of these markets and invest in the enhancement of broadband networks is important in supporting improved transportation service coordination. Each is a vital point of advocacy for eliminating the health disparities brought about by transportation barriers (Broderick, 2018). Without legislation that supports the material changes that can create transportation equity, lasting change will not occur.

Conclusion

A health inequity exists for populations affected by transportation access barriers. Without reliable and affordable transportation, access to needed healthcare services and foods

that support healthier lifestyles and outcomes is difficult to achieve. Due to the lack of access, individuals experience greater incidence of new and chronic disease. The challenges of transportation access become greater when illness increases, creating a cycle that is difficult to break. In this paper, I have defined the problem of transportation barriers, its impact on patient health and healthcare costs and the potential of the problem to worsen. Additionally, I have examined current and trending solutions to transportation access problems. Evidence suggests that the coming decades will see an increasing aging population, increasing rates of chronic disease, and steady percentages of individuals without access to a private vehicle. Resources for those most at-risk for transportation barriers have been improved but need continued vigilance and enhancement to close the gaps and thus reduce the health disparities which result. Imperative components of success for reducing transportation barriers for vulnerable populations are partnerships and coalitions among stakeholders, including community residents; healthcare providers; transportation providers (public and private); city and rural planners; and federal, state, and local governments. The emerging prospect of centralized coordination services that use technology-based systems to track transportation needs, link them to transportation providers, and facilitate timely communication of concerns holds promise for closing existing gaps in transportation access. Legislation will be necessary to support such coordination with sufficient growth in broadband service to accommodate the needs of the public. Potential exists for individuals to resolve their transportation access issues, but resolution will depend on foresight and collaboration among all stakeholders.

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QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

Context

1. What are the main components of what Faught terms the “network of solutions”?
2. Why is it important to look at healthcare access issues as a network? Why must solutions also operate as a network? How might this network show up in your community?

Style

1. How did Faught employ the “problem-solution” model of organization in the paper? How and why was such a pattern effective?
2. What aspects of style does Faught employ to support the credibility of the paper’s argument? What might have changed had Faught made different stylistic choices?
3. How does Faught integrate such a large number of sources effectively?

DEFINING A GREATER GOOD

Emily Wesley

Sometimes, charities do more harm than good. This harsh reality overwhelmed Victor as he stood in Ho, Uganda, staring at hundreds of boxes of unused medical supplies that he had eagerly helped to ship to this struggling community. Despite his best intentions, starving children still ran barefoot through the streets and mothers still wept as they wondered how they would feed their families tomorrow. People had suffered and died simply because of the absence of human connection between the privileged and the struggling. Victor's charity assumed they understood or at least knew better than the individuals in these developing communities, spending money and time sending resources that weren't helpful or didn't address the major issues plaguing the communities. Change was and is still needed to revolutionize the systems of international aid. At that moment, Victor chose to become a part of this change by establishing an organization centered on human connection and partnership. He hoped to form relationships to empower struggling leaders with the resources that we often take for granted to inspire grassroots efforts that would revolutionize communities. Ultimately, Victor's painful realization inspired the creation of GlobeMed.

Prior to the establishment of the organization known as GlobeMed, a global health organization on the Northwestern campus had been collecting money in order to develop a public health center for a community in the city of Ho, Ghana. The co-founder of GlobeMed, Victor Roy made the decision to visit this community to evaluate the progress their donations had enabled them to make. Upon arrival, Victor was taken to the vacant building intended to be the public health center where he discovered boxes stacked high full of unopened medical supplies that were all sent by the Northwestern organization. Victor was stunned by what he had witnessed and quickly sought to understand the reasoning behind this abandonment and neglect of supposed “progress and aid.” When he spoke with a prominent village leader in the community about the failed public health center, the village leader shared his frustration with the lack of progress with the project. However, he explained that this project was simply not something that the community needed at the current point in time; there were other places of healthcare in the region that people trusted thoroughly for their care, and larger issues plagued their community that required nearly all of their attention. They simply did not have the time or a justifiable reason to develop such a large project even though they were provided with an abundance of resources to do so. Next, the village leader made a remark that came to inspire a movement that would drastically change our perception of global health and social justice work. He simply stated, “Victor, we are African, and we listen to our donors” (“The Story of GlobeMed” 333).

This powerful statement sparked a revolutionary movement, inciting the formation of partnerships instead of harmful dichotomies that had placed the oppressors above the oppressed. Instead of blindly sending random resources and

supplies, this movement argued that relationships should be established with leaders in the community who already have a burning passion to serve their neighbors. The difference is that these native leaders know exactly how to accomplish this end, considering all the social and cultural implications and ramifications of their actions. They simply lack the tools and resources to create this needed change. This is where we can most effectively come in to help. GlobeMed desires to shift our privileges and resources from our hands to theirs so that these grassroots organizations can successfully improve the lives of those that they are closest with.

These ideas are drastically different from those in a variety of charities in the United States and other developed countries. Numerous charities designed to aid efforts abroad tend to approach the issues of poverty and social justice incorrectly. It is imperative to understand that coming from a position of privilege does not give an organization the agency to determine the needs of a struggling community. How could a CEO and their business partners devise a plan to help a starving family when they themselves have never felt the pangs of hunger? Nevertheless, charities simply throw supplies at eager children and desperate adults in a developing community without first speaking with these people to determine their greatest needs. The absence of conversation and the denouncing of these people's intelligence is not only dehumanizing but also detrimental to the foundations of charity work and the desire to achieve the greatest good. In other cases, poverty is turned into a spectacle with the rising popularity of activities such as "volunteer tourism" in which individuals and families spend thousands of dollars to visit unacceptable orphanages or overcrowded hospitals in developing countries. They often fail to realize that the money spent financing these trips could

have easily fed these orphans for over a year or covered every medical bill within the overcrowded hospital if it was spent more effectively.

Ignorance plays a major role in the development of these fatal issues of charity and good will. Sadly, our inherent privilege as a American citizens typically does not prepare us to physically or emotionally understand the struggles and tribulations that people within a developing country must endure. In "Duffle Bag Medicine," Maya Roberts noticed poignant cases of American ignorance as she was researching nutrition for an extended period of time in Guatemala. Within the article, Roberts describes her ideas about the many groups of untrained and medically uneducated Americans who came to the country to hand out donated medicine from their stuffed duffle bags within hectic, makeshift clinics (1491). She poignantly concludes, "There is profound need in this community, but right now the vast amount of donated time, energy, and money does more to stoke the egos of the Americans sojourning here than it does to improve the lives of these Guatemaltecas" (Roberts 1491).

This condition of ignorance is not an isolated case. Many other organizations participate in foreign aid whom are also missing the critical component of communication and partnership that serve to make relationships between the privilege and the struggling beneficial to all of the parties involved. An example of aid that is missing this idea of partnership is volunteer tourism or "voluntourism." This is the act of an individual or group going on a vacation to a developing country in order to provide their service by doing things such as handing out free shoes or toothbrushes to local children. This work is typically facilitated by an outside organization, usually residing in a developed country. According to the research

of Sharon McLennan on “volontourism,” many of these organizations have successfully infiltrated foreign communities and attempted to offer aid without fully understanding all of the cultural implications of providing this assistance (164). Early literature written about the subject remained positive, supported by the thought that good intentions were enough to designate the act as being beneficial to these struggling communities, free of any sort of consequence (McLennan 164). Additionally, a great majority of individuals taking part in these endeavors were trained and knowledgeable physicians or missionaries, prepared to handle these complicated situations. However, with the increasing popularity among inexperienced and unqualified members of the general public, critics of the act began to arise within the literature, finally discussing the social and cultural issues with “volontourism” (McLennan 164). These potential factors that may do more harm than good include “unsafe practices, lack of training and language skills, [and a] lack of sustainability” (McLennan 164). It is also possible for an American volunteer’s presence to adversely impact the effectiveness and trustworthiness of a local health provider within the developing community because of the great distraction the foreigners create during their stay.

Conversely, some feel that the aim of “volontourism” is not to cure illness or aid the impoverished, but instead to instill a feeling of globalism and cohesion across cultural boundaries (McLennan 164). This idea of sociological growth is even explicitly stated in “Giving Back, Doing Good, Feeling Global: The Affective Flows of Family Volontourism” in which Jennie Germann Molz discusses the supposed benefits of the similar trend of “family volontourism.” Molz states, “Family volontourism is therefore not necessarily about making a difference in poor communities, but rather about equipping middle-class

children from the Global North with the emotional skills they will need to live in the uncertain and unequal world of neoliberal globalization,” (1). However, if the actions are inherently harmful to the cultural structure of these communities and their respective idea of Americans, the connection to globalization and the emotional skills that are established for these Americans are far from beneficial. Such ideas only serve to perpetuate the harmful power dynamics that have been engrained within the consciousness of these struggling individuals for many generations. Some scholars even resort to labeling these practices as “neo-colonialism” citing that the impact of these actions make no progress in establishing equality between the individuals in developing countries and those possessing the luxury of privilege (McLennan 165).

Within a blunt and unforgiving speech to the Conference on InterAmerican Student Projects (CIASP) in Cuernavaca, Mexico, entitled “To Hell with Good Intentions,” Ivan Illich further confronts the issue of Americans and their ideas of foreign service. Illich emphasizes that despite the desire to do good in Latin America, this goal of aiding the oppressed is simply unattainable because of the inherent mindset of American idealists, whose exposure to a privileged lifestyle does not simply give them the power to “develop” a Latin American community by spending a few months among the people. He boldly comments on the irony of their pursuit of humanitarianism: “Even the Peace Corps spends around \$10,000 on each corps member to help him adapt to his new environment and to guard him against culture shock. How odd that nobody ever thought about spending money to educate poor Mexicans in order to prevent them from the culture shock of meeting you?” (Illich). Although the adverse impact of these efforts is being recognized by the few willing to confront the actions of a charity effort, a greater

movement must be established in order to educate Americans of the respect that is due of the cultural intricacies present within the societies that they are infiltrating. When evaluating these issues with concepts developed by James Gee, it becomes apparent that Americans are in fact constructing oppressive cultural “gates” to the “non-natives” of dominant discourses by unconsciously promoting American idealism in these foreign countries (9). Individuals outside of the dominant discourses of a society simply do not have the social goods to uphold these expectations, and Gee explains that it is highly unlikely that we would ever afford these communities these social goods simply because they are not “natives” of a privileged discourse community (10).

Despite these horrible occurrences, it is nearly impossible to criticize the charity organizations who are seemingly striving to help and care for the needs of others. The articles mentioned previously and any sort of national media coverage of the issue might actually make things worse. In an article by Jennifer A. Jones, Randall A. Cantrell, and Angela B. Lindsey entitled “America’s Worst Charities: The Effect of Bad Press on Philanthropic Giving Behavior,” the authors state, “Negative media stories—even negative media stories about a few so-called bad apples—can sour the public on nonprofits in general” (5). This may propose numerous issues for the pursuit of charity, but it still is impossible to ignore the issues at hand. With these risks in consideration, it is imperative to promote the idea of solutions rather than the ideas of criticism.

With this critical understanding of the tremendous faults that many foreign aid charities perpetuate, it is imperative to progress in a more appropriate and respectful manner for the sake of the individuals who are being harmed within these systems. After discovering the major issues in the structure

and attitude of the Northwestern global health organization, Victor felt a strong passion for producing tangible change executed in a manner that empowered developing communities and the people that composed them. This incited change in the efforts of the organization so that they could educate others and revolutionize their mechanisms of support and aid for these developing communities, which were filled with intelligent individuals who could achieve far more than any single American visitor ever could. However, this potential could never be realized without the monetary support that is easily afforded by the American population. This conundrum necessitated the idea of partnership to most appropriately fill these gaps. These ideas of collaboration and empathy within our partnerships served as foundational aspects for the development of the organization GlobeMed, which desired to repair the mistakes made by the global health organization at Northwestern. As soon as Victor returned from his disheartening trip, he began planning to uncover the solutions to lasting change by holding the first GlobeMed Global Health Summit with 45 other students from seven different universities within the United States (“Our Story”). Together, through collaboration and a sincere passion for understanding the needs of a developing community, these ambitious undergraduate students developed an organization founded upon a partnership model, designed to work directly with the leaders of grassroots organization leaders within these developing countries in order to achieve the “greatest good.” These ideas grew through methods of storytelling and discussion throughout Northwestern’s campus and beyond to other universities. In “The Development of Social Justice Allies during College: A Phenomenological Investigation” by Ellen Broido, it is concluded that the most effective means of inspiring other college

students to become “allies” of social justice and progress is through direct communication of the issues at hand (10). Such method was evidently successful for GlobeMed, as their influence now reaches 60 university campuses and 2,000 passionate individuals.

GlobeMed continually strives to uphold its core values in order to make a difference for others, but we acknowledge that our work is not free of error. However, we hope to approach any issues in a manner that does not discount the intelligence and the autonomy of these community leaders striving to achieve what is best for their own communities. These leaders should have the freedom to accomplish goals in a way that is appropriate for their own culture without the oppressive idea of the “American Way” infiltrating their efforts. Rather than forcibly correcting the “issues” of a developing community and imposing change, we should instead approach these knowledgeable leaders to provide the encouragement and resources that lead to social progress. GlobeMed endeavors to empower these grassroots organizations through monetary donations, supply donations, or the gift of education to accomplish certain tasks, all under the direct guidance of the people who call a given community their home. We acknowledge that we cannot possibly comprehend the inner-workings of a culture that is not our own, but we are tremendously thankful that the individuals of the many developing countries we work closest with invite us into their homes and lives so that we may work together to fight the symptoms of poverty and systems of oppression. Most importantly, we have discovered that only *together* may we work toward an end that is considered a “greater good.”

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QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

Context

1. What is the definition of “the greater good” that the essay is fighting against? What would a better definition of “the greater good” look like?
2. Where else might the problems underlying “voluntourism” show up in local, national, or global communities? How can community members and activist better guard against these mentalities?

Style

1. How did the essay use stories and anecdotes to support its claims? Why were those components effective?

Contributor Notes

Joseph F. Allen is a second-year student at UMKC pursuing a Bachelor of Science in biology with a Biomedical Sciences (BMS) emphasis, a minor in chemistry, and the distinction of an Honors Scholar. Joseph is the Editor-in-Chief of *Lucerna* (UMKC's Undergraduate Research Journal), leads the honors discussion sections for General Chemistry I and II, and is on the Pre-Medical Society leadership board. Outside of academics, Joseph is engaged in research of multiprotein complexes regulating neural stability at the Ryan Mohan Laboratory. After graduating from UMKC, Joseph plans to attend medical school and attain an MD with the goal of becoming a neurosurgeon. Joseph enjoys spending his free time hiking, fishing, painting, cooking, playing piano, or sitting down to a good book and a cup of coffee. (Taught by John Larson, Dr. Larson Powell, and Dr. Stephen Christ.)

Zachary Atteberry is a 26 year-old college sophomore at the University of Missouri Kansas-City. Originating from O'Fallon, Missouri, Zachary is the father of two children, and comes from a very loving family. He is pursuing a Bachelor's Degree of Science in Nursing, and works with adults with special needs on a part-time basis. His life-goals were redirected after he was diagnosed with thyroid cancer at the early age of 22. He hopes to apply his experiences in a way that can be beneficial to the growth and development of others. (Taught by Cody Shrum.)

Anne Bolin (Ilus W. Davis Writing Competition Winner: Intermediate) is a junior at the University of Missouri - Kansas City majoring in Communication Studies

and minoring in Art & Visual Communication. After graduation, Anne plans to work in editorial photography and art direction. (Taught by Sheila Honig.)

Sarah Clough has been living in Kansas City for ten years and come to truly call it home. She is passionate about pursuing the things she loves, whether that is reading, writing, music, or art. Being a continual (life-long) learner is important to Sarah, and she hopes to both be an inspiration and be inspired by many. (Taught by Cody Shrum.)

Karen K. Faught is a RN to BSN student. She has been a registered nurse for 23 years, working in the fields of Hospice, Palliative Care and Oncology. She holds a prior BA from UMKC in Graphic Design. (Taught by Dr. Amanda Emerson.)

Manasa Gadiraju is an undergraduate student at the University of Missouri-Kansas City currently pursuing her BA degree in Liberal Arts with a minor in Chemistry in combination with her MD degree through the School of Medicine. Manasa enjoys biology and writing, especially creative and academic writing. She hopes that you enjoy reading her work! (Taught by Sheila Honig.)

Jared Gutzmer is from St. Joseph, Missouri, and is currently a freshman at the University of Missouri-Kansas City Conservatory pursuing a degree in saxophone performance and a German language minor. Jared is a graduate of St. Joseph Central High School. He has performed in ensembles under the direction of Roy Maxwell, Joseph Parisi, Stephen Davis, Jerry Junkin, Joel Fischer, Chad Lippincott, and Lynnea Wootten. In 2018, Jared attended the Interlochen Arts Camp where he studied with

Timothy McAllister, Eddie Goodman, and Zachary Shemon. Jared was premiered with the Kansas City Symphony, under the direction of Micahel Stern, in 2018 when he was awarded second place in the Kansas City Symphony Young Arts Competition. In addition to studying privately with Zachary Shemon before becoming a student at UMKC, he has also studied with Bob Long. Jared dedicates all of his musical endeavors to his friend and mentor, Steve Hall. (Taught by Diane Hradsky.)

Jerrica Park (Ilus W. Davis Writing Competition Winner: Advanced) came to Kansas City in 2016 to pursue a career in medicine after experience as a small business owner and emergency medical technician. She is passionate about world travel and bringing accessible health care to marginalized populations. She hopes to pursue a career as a physician assistant after finishing her biology degree at UMKC. (Taught by Rhiannon Dickerson.)

Richard Blake Schneider is a Computer Science and Mathematics double major in his second year at UMKC. He is an Eagle Scout, a member of Sigma Tau Delta, and the current Managing Editor of *Lucerna*. Richard enjoys reading, writing, and music as well as discussions about reading, writing, and music. (Taught by Dr. Henrietta Wood.)

Alex Schray is a first year student in the Six Year Medical Program. While she's passionate about the sciences, she also enjoys writing and listening to podcasts in her free time. (Taught by Tori Hook.)

Savannah Simpson (Ilus W. Davis Writing Competition Winner: Introductory) is currently a senior at Center High School. She plans to attend a four-year college in the

fall. She enjoys English and poetry, but has not yet decided on a major. Savannah is very involved in her community and at her school where she participates in Key Club, Book Club, Art Club, and National Honor Society. She has also been part of the Center High School Swimming and Diving Team for four years and was voted the team captain in her final season. Coming from a big family, Savannah has had to be a role model for her younger siblings while trying her best to ensure a bright future for herself. Savannah hopes to go to college to further her education and to search for the career she wants to pursue. (Taught by Mary Werly, Center High School.)

Annie Spencer is a Senior at UMKC studying Medieval Literature and History. She is involved in the UMKC Honors College, Medieval Studies Society, Lucerna Undergraduate Research Journal, Honors College Student Association, HerCampus at UMKC, Alpha Lambda Delta, and Sigma Tau Delta English Honor Society. She has research interests in Arthurian legend, medievalism, queer theory, and feminist theory. (Taught by Amir Baratijourabi.)

Emily Wesley is a rising Junior majoring in Biology with an emphasis in Biomedical Sciences. She aspires to become a physician that strongly advocates for global health and social justice. She currently develops these skills by volunteering at a local hospital and through extensive involvement with the UMKC chapter of GlobeMed, serving as one of the presidents this past academic year. She hopes to inspire many others to turn toward compassion by aiding those in need and to create change both within their own communities and abroad. (Taught by Kaitlyn Stünkard-Venneman.)

