UMKC

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The Sosland is an annual publication of the University of Missouri-Kansas City, funded by Rheta Sosland-Hurwitt, that features essays by student winners and runners-up of the Ilus W. Davis Writing Competition. The journal exhibits exemplary writing from both composition courses and University-wide Writing Intensive courses to be published and distributed to a larger audience, including UMKC students who use the journal as a textbook in select writing courses and the Kansas City community at large.

The Sosland would also like to thank the following professors, as the work herein was written in their classrooms:

Dr. Leah Edens
Prof. Molly Higgins
Prof. Sheila Honig
Dr. Steven Melling
Prof. Ashley Vogel

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advanced level

editor's note

When dynamite Assistant Editor Jacob Jardel and I sat down to discuss the 2022 edition of UMKC's *Sosland Journal of Student Writing*, we reflected on the fact that so much of the work here deals with identity.

Whether or not the pandemic helped us challenge "traditional" societal expectations in terms of careers and relationships—as well as physical and mental well-being—we're honored to put forth an issue that explores self-expression on one's own terms.

One example of this is Jamaiyah Amerison's "How Debate and Black History Sculpted My Literacy Journey," where the author addresses the relationship between learning about civil rights for the first time and uncovering a passion for justice.

In "Learning English," Keisha Kodidhi describes the changing, conflicting nature of identity—though the author's first language is Telugu, from southern India, Kodidhi learned to speak English in the U.S.

Caroline Cooper's "Exploring the LGBTQ+ Experience in the Classroom" takes us to task, re-imagining a future in which education caters to all those willing to learn, and where those doing the teaching can feel validated as well.

And Ariej Rafiq's piece on TikTok glow-ups confirms my suspicions: social media can be classified as both reliable

and unreliable narrator. Who knows what the future holds?

What we know for sure is that we're so grateful for this season's exceptional collection of *Sosland* contributors. Without each of them, the world would be a far less interesting place.

I hope you take a risk in your own writing this year.

Emily Standlee

beginning level

JAMAIYAH AMERISON
How Debate and Black History
Sculpted My Literacy Journey

As a child, I never really had a relationship with reading or writing. I always thought that it was weird and only for the brainiacs around me, which is ironic because I am sometimes considered a brainiac. I could never understand why I was perceived this way—I hated to read and talk because I struggled to comprehend what I read. It was like the words would go in one ear and pour out the other onto the ground.

It was not until I joined the debate team that I began to learn the true power behind literacy, and its power to help me realize what job I wanted to do for the rest of my life. The journey that literacy and I would take together as I got older was like a rocking ship that would ultimately reach a safe shore.

The earliest memory I have of reading a novel is from fifth grade during our Civil Rights Movement unit. We read *The Watsons Go To Birmingham* by Christopher Paul Curtis. It was the first book I read whose author had the same skin color as me. More importantly, it was the first book I read that featured characters who looked like me.

The schools I went to did not make Black history as big a deal as it should be. I was not taught about the 16th Street Baptist Church Bombing, nor about the true history of Mal-

colm X. I was not taught about the first Black woman to refuse to give up her bus seat—not until middle school, at least.

Our Civil Rights Movement unit was the first one to open my eyes to the harshness of America. For instance, in the movie version of *The Watsons Go To Birmingham*, when the bomb goes off and kills four little girls, I remember my heart pounding out of my chest and the theater shaking from the speakers being so loud. The movies we watched portrayed how violent that time in history was for Black people. That year was the first year I started reading heavily. I would read anything that told the story of how young African Americans lived and how harshly they were treated in society.

After I graduated from elementary school, I began collecting more books. The issue was that no matter how much I loved to read, I struggled in my English classes. Reading comprehension was the most difficult skill to learn for me. I never soaked up what I read, so my grade would be horrible whenever we had quizzes or tests.

When I reached sixth grade, the middle school debate team was a new addition to University Academy, my school. Once my coach explained what debate would be like, I found myself committed to it. There is much research that goes into preparing for policy debates. Early on we learned there would be a lot of reading and that we would hear many words we did not know. It took some time for me to realize what was happening, but debate became my own personal sponsor. For hours on end, I did research on a specific topic. The more evidence I read repeatedly or speeches I gave, the better I wrote.

My grades were always good, but I was starting to develop a knack for quickly comprehending what I read. I could even write about and recite what happened in a book. This is when my journey with literacy began to steady out—literacy became a safe haven for me.

I stuck with debate all throughout middle and high school, mainly because I was good at it.

I have always been one to argue and use evidence to prove my points, so joining debate was one of the best decisions I have ever made. At one point, I was one of the best debaters in the Kansas City Metro area. In my second year as a debater, the topic revolved around whether the government should have the ability to lawfully survey U.S. citizens under the Patriot Act. My favorite thing to do is add emotion to my speeches, so I connected real-world experiences to why surveying citizens is unacceptable. This habit increased my ability to think critically, especially when I would have to think on my feet to answer questions from my opponent. This is why being a debater was always something I envisioned for my life.

Over time, debate has become an outlet for me—a positive way to escape reality. The importance of this to my literacy journey is that it anchored me to literacy, and a life with literacy became my aspiration.

The topic in eighth grade was education. My partner and I ran a critique that called out neoliberal schools. Our argument was that schools only care about test scores because they help schools obtain more money.

We used my school as an example because students could only take end of course exams if they passed the benchmark first. If students did not pass the benchmark, they could not take the required exams or tests in fall. In this way, some students' scores did not make it to the school's financial report. The higher the report score, the more money the school received, and the higher score a student received, the more money the school gave them.

To further prove my argument, we brought our UA gear showing that it was a blue-ribbon school in 2016 and illustrating the school's scores. The best part of that year was that we did so well during the debate season we qualified to go to nationals in Alabama.

When I graduated from middle school to go on to high school, I was the last debater from the middle school team left. I was the only freshman debater, so it was difficult to be accepted into the older team, especially since I no longer had a partner.

My whole freshman year made me question if debate was worth it. It was as if waves were trying to sink my ship with me and my relationship with literacy on board. Even though debate helped me in my English classes, it was stressful to keep up with. Reading and writing can be stressful, especially if you read 10 long articles a day and then create a speech about them.

During freshman year we did not have a consistent coach, which forced me to rely entirely on myself for the whole season. Plus, I debated maverick—by myself—which resulted in double the stress of a typical debater. These factors resulted

in a strong disconnect between me and literacy, almost concluding my literacy journey altogether.

Still, the more research I did and journal articles I read, the more I learned about the importance of words and how powerful they can be.

During my sophomore year, the team was fortunate enough to get a topic that is a huge political issue in society. Since debate is depicted based on politics in the status quo, any change in civil rights led to a change in how I debated.

I had been maverick for about all four years of high school, so I ran an affirmative that was to abolish the police for the safety of the Black community. I read a lot of literature on how the police harm people of color—I read over a hundred articles just to perfect a three-minute speech. As I investigated the literature, I learned about unknown heroes like Assata Shakur and KJ Brooks. These were two beautiful women who fought the injustices of the justice system but are never spoken about. This is when literacy and I started seeing eye to eye again. My ship started to rise above sea level.

I had always wanted to be a lawyer, but after a year of debating the issues of the system, it was clear being a lawyer would be a dream come true—something I had to do.

I learned that one of the fundamental issues of mass incarceration is the lack of adequate defense for detainees. This means that defense attorneys for people of color do not follow the presumption of innocence rule. Some people of color just take a deal because their defense attorney tells them it is the

best they will get "under the circumstances." An example of this is the story of the Central Park Five, in which the victims were children.

Stories like these not only made me want to be a lawyer, but also showed me what not to do as one. This relates to literacy because being a lawyer requires rigorous reading of court documents, evidence, and government laws and literature. I have no issue with the stresses of being a lawyer because debate opened my eyes to how the court system works. Literacy has become a central tenet of my life.

I have been a debater for seven years now and this activity has changed what I read. After starting debate I went from reading thick novels to reading journal articles and books based on the topic for the year. The sport made me more involved in politics at an early age.

After school at night, I would sit in my bed with pages of evidence scattered everywhere gathering more evidence and preparing for the next tournament. I remember coming up with possible questions that someone would ask me just so I would already have the answer. This is the life that I am signing up for as a move forward toward college.

Debate being my literary sponsor was the best thing that ever could have happened to me. Even though I do not plan to return to the sport in college, I am forever grateful for it. Many stresses came with debate, but it affected my literacy journey most of all.

My sponsor taught me that although reading and writing are difficult, they can have a positive mental impact for the

one doing the reading and writing. Once upon a time, literacy was my escape from reality. Eventually, though, it opened my eyes to the realities of America. Literacy helped me find my passion and purpose in life.

In all of this, I have learned that reading and writing are tools, their power unmatched in my mind because they reveal the truth.

questions to consider

1. The author mentions "heroes" like Assata Shakur and KJ Brooks. What is the significance of calling them "unknown"? Does the fact that they are Black women have anything to do with this?

2. The words "literary scholarship" come up a lot in the text—what other examples are there of literary scholarship, or an individual's path to literacy, growth, and education?

3. Are there complications with critiquing a system one finds oneself a part of? What is complex about the author using their own school as an example on page 12?

KEISHA KODIDHI
ఆంగ్లము నేర్చుకొనుట
(Learning English)

My parents tell me that when I used to call them from my grandparents' house in India, I would proudly recite the English alphabet and numbers one through 10 as quickly as I could. Since my first language was Telugu, a language from southern India, my three-year-old self was very proud of what she believed to be an amazing feat of intelligence. Unfortunately, I would soon be hit with a realization that would turn my small world on its head.

Before long, my mom came to take me back to the United States—a country I didn't remember being born in. I was thrust into being surrounded by a language, of which I only knew the alphabet and a few numbers, at my new preschool and every time I left the house. At a young age, this experience made me, a once sociable child, feel isolated and lonely.

Since I had moved to the United States without knowing the language, my parents and sister, plus television shows and books, became fundamental in sponsoring my literacy of the English language. Unfortunately as my English skills increased, my Telugu skills decreased.

From the ages of six months to four years old, my entire world consisted of my Avva and Thatha—my grandmother and grandfather—in Hyderabad, India. My days were spent play-

ing with the neighbor's children, hanging out with my friends, running errands with my Avva, and asking her to take me to the candy shop near our house. The top of our modest home had a breathtaking view of the town's skyline, rooftops far as the eye could see. My favorite scent to this day is how fresh it smelled outside right after rain.

It was a small but happy life, surrounded by love and free from the worries of the world. I was a tiny, unimaginably outgoing child who would talk the ear off of anyone who would listen to her.

Of course, eventually my parents came to take me back to the United States. Though I had felt so accomplished in knowing the English numbers and letters, once coming back I quickly realized it amounted to nothing. My four-year-old self was thrust into a large, new, scary world with only her parents and sister to rely on.

Less than a year later, the time for preschool came around. I have very few memories from La Petite Preschool—barely knowing English itself, I couldn't begin to fathom what the French name might mean.

Interwoven throughout small memories of playing with rollie pollies and digging in sandboxes is a dominating feeling of loneliness. Though I am told I had friends, not being able to successfully communicate with them hindered relationships and made me feel alone even when I was among others. Upon witnessing my unhappiness, my parents decided to help me. Since coming to the United States, I had spoken Telugu at home and English at school. Soon my parents began to speak

to me exclusively in English, in hopes it would allow me to pick up the language quicker. They were right.

From then on, I was constantly surrounded by English. Not just at home and school, but also in the entertainment I slowly began to watch as I finally understood what was being said. I soon became obsessed with television shows and characters like Dora, Diego, and Handy Manny, who taught me both English and at times Spanish.

Years later my sister would complain to me that I rewatched the same episodes over and over again, much to her annoyance and frustration as she was the one tasked to monitor me. I couldn't get enough of all forms of media in this new language that I was finally comprehending and wanted to keep consuming more and more.

In school, that once-charismatic child began to resurface after being hidden away for so long. Now that I had harnessed the power of English, I began to use it all the time. I made new friends and didn't want to stop talking, even during class periods. It became an issue, as my second-grade teacher gave me one out of three for listening and self-control in our weekly reports, even though I scored high in my class work and all other criteria.

Every week I went home guilty, knowing I was in for another lengthy lecture I would immediately disregard. My teachers and parents constantly chastised me for speaking when I wasn't supposed to, but my seven-year-old self paid them little mind and continued to joyfully use my English ability to my heart's content.

Eventually I began to talk less in classes due to the constant reprimanding, but my passion for reading English quickly increased to replace my passion for speaking it. Though my parents were each fluent in two to three languages, neither of them were particularly avid readers. Sure, they would read nonfiction articles and textbooks related to their work, but they never had any interest in fiction or poetry or anything of the sort. Considering that, it's a complete mystery to us all as to how they ended up with two daughters who have an insatiable thirst for fictional novels.

My love of reading originated with my big sister. As children, we didn't get along too well. The one thing we could agree on and share was reading. With her guidance, my reading level rapidly surpassed my grade level and many of my peers. She provided me with advice on what to read, yet was still mindful enough to make sure it was appropriate enough for an elementary schooler.

The one series that overlooked those regulations, however, was the *Harry Potter* series. Since she was young, she has been captivated by those books and me reading them allowed us to bond even more. Truthfully, an elementary school student was probably too young to fully comprehend those novels and everything that occurred in them, but regardless, I still read from *The Philosopher's Stone* to *The Half-Blood Prince* without pause in an effort to have a bridge to cross our seven-year age gap.

Through my sister's recommendations I often flew through multiple chapter books a week in elementary school. I was visiting the library so often the librarians knew me by name

as they frequently recommended books to quell my thirst. I knew my elementary school library better than the back of my hand. Every time I entered I knew exactly where I wanted to go to find what I wanted. I knew where the manga was, where the *Percy Jackson* books were, where the *American Girl* series was, where the *Ranger Apprentice* series was, where *The Giver Quartet* were, where all of the Missouri Association of School Librarians' Readers Awards books were.

To this day, I can vividly see the exact location of all those books. For a child who became painfully shy after second grade, I could be my authentic self among the countless pages of English text that seemed never-ending.

Throughout elementary school, a couple times a year, a special teacher would come in to talk to us about the importance and fun of reading. Truthfully I only remember her face. I wasn't that interested in her lessons since I was already sold on the whole reading thing and didn't need any more incentive. But I had to answer the question "Why do you like reading?" on an annual survey. Every year, I would write, "Because I feel like it transports me into another world."

For most of elementary school I didn't talk to many people—a stark contrast from my younger self. I became highly introverted and found solace in books that whisked me away from my plain suburban life to faraway lands of magic and adventure. An infinite amount of fictional book characters were always there to keep me company when I felt lonely or had no interest in engaging with other children or school lessons.

Having a different culture from my predominantly

white peers often made me feel like an outsider and made me fear humiliation or mockery if I ever showed my differences. Even years later, when I have much less time for reading, this statement holds true. Whenever I feel stressed or overwhelmed, reading is a source of comfort. When the words start flowing into my brain, they shove the worries out and push them far away.

Though I have always been applauded for my passion for reading and language, in recent years I have discovered a dilemma. As my ability in English swiftly increased, my ability in Telugu decreased at a proportional rate. I had gone years without noticing since I usually answered my parents' Telugu in English and spoke English at school.

But since going back to India to visit family, my lacking ability has become impossible to ignore. I wasn't able to communicate my thoughts to my grandparents who raised me, nor fully understand family members when they spoke to me. I was overcome with a deep feeling of guilt and felt like an outsider in my own culture. I had gained a second language but had forgotten my first.

This realization made me feel ashamed and frustrated at myself. Taking advantage of my newfound endless amount of free time due to the 2020 quarantine, I decided to do something about it. I began to talk to my parents in Telugu and ask questions about the language. "Is this how you say this?" I would ask. "Is that word pronounced like this or like that?"

Little by little my child-level vocabulary increased. The biggest sponsor of my reeducation of Telugu were the ones

who started it—my Avva and Thatha. My grandparents and I began to call each other every weekend to catch up, and in doing so my grandmother would take it upon herself to correct me whenever I misspoke: "Not 'rendu ammayilu,'" she would say. "It should be '*iddaru* ammayilu.'"

My Avva can be unrelenting at times, but she has been one of the best Telugu teachers I have ever had. And clearly her tutoring has worked. Week by week, whenever I speak with my parents or grandparents, I feel better connected to my past and my culture. As I use both English and Telugu in my daily life, I feel as though I am finally being true to all aspects of myself.

questions to consider

1. The author mentions feeling torn between English and Telugu, a language spoken in southern India. How could this childhood dichotomy affect a person as an adult?

2. What motivated the author to learn English? What motivated the author to learn Telugu?

3. What societal, economical, and cultural complications could arise if a person spoke two languages or lived in a world where English was spoken at school and another language was spoken at home?

DAVID MCDONALD
A Chthonic Ferry Through Literacy Sponsorship

Part One: The Beginning

Language as a man-made invention has always perplexed me. Unlike mathematics or the sciences, whose principles seem fixed and always true, the tenets of language have grown and changed throughout human history. Language does not seem like an omnipresent, observable force; it's a complex system of oral and written conventions that have provided humanity with the communication and unity required for our progression as a species.

And sometimes, language seemed so complex to me that it felt more like a science than anything else. As a result, I treated many of its rules as such: observable, testable, and always true. I thought that if I knew the fundamentals of grammar, then the nuances of its application would follow.

And because I saw the rules of grammar as scientific evidence, the thought of swaying from them became an extremely intimidating endeavor. I became increasingly anxious about my reading and writing skills. My inability to challenge myself intellectually resulted in works of banality.

Though I've come a long way in my literacy journey, my com-

prehension of the English language, and all of its nuances, is not complete. Thus, I intend for this work to answer, to the best of its ability, one question: how has sponsorship affected my literacy journey?

I want to visit the bad, the mediocre, and the good. And—through the conventions of a Greek mythology nerd—reflect on the many ways they have influenced my understanding of literacy.

Part Two: My Tartarus of Literacy Sponsorship

The reading program was a place I went to after school every day from first to third grade. My parents did not trust my sister or me enough to leave us home alone, so we were forced to go.

The premise of the reading program was simple: we read books and took tests on the material. Eat, read, test, repeat. Over and over again. Similar to the unending torment of Tantalus in Tartarus. We were not allowed to pick the books we read (that mainly applied to me since I was so young). Instead, we were placed in a small room with ceiling-high shelves containing multiple bins of hazardously placed books. Each bin had a sticker that indicated the books' reading level, and I could only read from books that were level threes.

Day after day, I drowned in predictable reads, each as boring as the last. I read neither for interest nor entertainment. I read out of obligation. If my sister and I got low scores on quizzes (something I often did), we were either yelled at or given more challenging books to read. And if that was not enough, there was always a vague quota of books we were sup-

posed to read within a given day, though no one ever gave a specific number. Condescending comments came from supervisors, who told me my reading total was inadequate. There were rare diamonds in the rough, like *Room on the Broom* by Julia Donaldson, but not enough to initiate a real passion for reading.

In fact, I reckon the reading program was where my anxiety toward reading began. Within the folds of the pale yellow wall in that freezing room, I experienced the oxymoronic spectrum of a horrible literacy sponsor: disappointment for the nameless nothings I spent hours "reading." This turned me away from reading as a whole—I had constant concern for my ability to read and understand material, as canyons filled with failed quizzes left me miserable and unsure of my own intelligence.

Part Three: My Asphodel of Literacy Sponsorship

I remember the first time I went to University Academy's library. I was in seventh grade and new to the school, so I wanted to get a good feel for its layout.

The architecture was breathtaking. I felt like I was on college grounds. The large columns and array of windows harkened back to the democratic assemblies of ancient Athens, and the sight of the sun's light reflecting through the windows told me all I needed to know: University Academy was an environment of scholarship and academic success.

And that certainly was the atmosphere of middle school. However, I felt that we were academically challenged at the

expense of literary appreciation. I do not remember reading a single book that year for English Language Arts—honestly, I felt starved. We focused on FANBOYS, or coordinating conjunctions that illustrate when to apply commas, and the technique for writing grammatically correct sentences.

We learned the fundamentals, but never had the opportunity to apply them to real life examples or experiment with them in order to perform more interesting writing. To me, it seemed our middle school viewed reading as trivial. If the reading program is where my anxiety for literacy started, it was definitely exacerbated by the misguided efforts of UA middle school.

But middle school was not all bad in the literacy department.

Seventh-grade speech class helped me understand how to write using parallel writing. In fact, the first time I learned about a thesis statement was in that class. Mr. Brown taught us to weave more complex forms of writing and vocabulary into our speeches, which I am grateful for. If I had never had that class, my writing probably would not be as developed as it is now. Like much of middle school, there was never any real attempt to build a genuine interest in literacy; they were merely laying the groundwork.

Thus, I cannot look too contemptuous at my middle school experience. It had its successes and its failures, but ultimately, it succeeded at providing the grammatical knowledge needed for later success. Middle school literacy sponsorship at UA is reminiscent of the fields of Asphodel. It is neither eternal bliss nor torment. It may be gloomy, but there is an innate

beauty that permeates its being.

Overall, middle school as a sponsor of my literacy was by no means perfect—that would be impossible. But I appreciate the instrumental way it helped hone my writing.

And in eighth grade, towards the end of the year, I initiated the search for something of substance to read. I went to the library and checked out a few books: one about Robin Hood, Arthurian legend; *The Secret Circle*; and *Love, Stargirl*. I did not finish any of them, but they marked the beginning of my gradual appreciation for reading, continuing through the end of the school year to summer break, culminating in my discovery of *Circe* by Madeline Miller.

I do not know how to describe it but reading and writing have tangible power. And for the first time in my young life, I understood, or at least got a glimpse of, what writing was able to do, the themes it could portray, and the emotions it could coax out. Of course, the mythology was just the icing on top.

Part Four: My Elysium of Literacy Sponsorship

When I was in kindergarten, I learned the basics of reading, writing, and cursive at Border Star, a K-6 Montessori school.

Our class had 26 wooden boards painted lime green and had a letter of the alphabet inscribed on the front and back in sandpaper. I remember spending days tracing my finger along the shape of various letters, trying to perfect their form. The sandpaper was irritating on my skin, but the pain was always tolerable. Still, I remember "K" was my favorite letter to trace

my finger around. I think that may be why it's my favorite letter to write.

Border Star is my Elysium of sponsorship because it is where I learned how to read and write. What Border Star did right about literary sponsorship, unlike so many other institutions in my life, was provide me with a wide variety of books. From grammar to geography, our little wooden kindergarten room had a book for every topic. Perfect stasis, where reading quotas and conflicting priorities could not intrude.

The best parts of Border Star's sponsorship came during the third grade when we "officially" entered what Border Star considered middle school. After that, the class had weekly one-hour visits to the library that—I kid you not—had a book for everything.

We were always given twenty minutes to find at least three books we liked. However, I never needed the full twenty minutes because the mythology and geology sections were right next to each other, so a good read was always around the corner. More often than not, I sat at the intersection of the two, picking one book about Slavic folklore and another about birthstones. Though I do not remember the book's name, I remember learning that the ruby, my birthstone, was even more precious than diamonds.

Border Star encouraged us to sample as many books as possible and see what aroused our interests. And if we did not find a book we wanted, we were not punished or reprimanded at all. On the contrary—sometimes the librarian would recommend books she thought we would like. No pressure, no stakes, no condescension.

I would describe myself as a casual reader when I was at Border Star. Whenever I found a book that interested me, I would read it. Reading was not something I actively pursued, though; if I found a book I liked, I would read it.

There was never a need to actively pursue reading because there was always a good book nearby. And in fifth grade, Border Star gave every upper-class student free access to a virtual library and started a book delivery service for students. We could order books online and have them sent to us for free. There wasn't even a time limit for keeping them. So, there would be days in class when everyone was reading: some devouring tomes of manga, some with stacks of dramas piled up to the ceiling.

At Border Star, there was never a time I felt that I could not access a good book if I wanted one. The school was a well-spring of literary sponsorship that never went dry. Though it introduced me to reading as an entertaining endeavor, my appreciation for it was relatively shallow, especially compared to my older years. The sheer variety, paired with patience and tentative care from teachers and staff, created a literary sponsorship that was Elysium—eternal bliss incarnate.

Part Five: To Conclude

In my younger years, I didn't understand why my parents sent us to reading programs so often.

Now I know it was because they wanted my sister and me to have every opportunity to hone a skill they knew was instrumental to success. I feel that the fear of ignorance and stu-

pidity was highly prevalent among the adults around us. And while I cannot speak for my parents' and sponsors' internal motivations, I believe that their actions were all in the pursuit of making me into something more than a stereotype or monolith.

My literacy is a byproduct of many years of excellent and lousy sponsorship. And while I could rave for hours at a time about how wrong or right my sponsors were, I want to conclude this work by stating my appreciation for those experiences. Undeniably, they are all responsible for the writer, reader, and folklore aficionado I have become.

questions to consider

1. Can schools, parents or mentors, and systems of education introduce any reading practices not mentioned in the text?

2. The author mentions feeling at ease between the mythology and geology sections in the library on page 31. What literary intersections appeal most to you? Why?

3. In what ways can some of these practices—for instance, the time the author spends in the yellow room early on in the essay—be improved?

intermediate level

CAROLINE COOPER

Exploring the LGBTQ+ Experience in the Classroom

Introduction

The LGBTQIA+ community is a growing part of the United States. The community includes those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual.

LGBTQIA+ people have been seen and demonstrated through history, and through different cultures and societies, different opinions on the community have been expressed. This is not a community someone chooses to join or can make themselves do—it is inherently part of one's sense of self. As spoken by Stephanie Mitchem, it is "not a choice of lifestyle, no person can catch LGBTQ, and no person can promote gender-fluid identities" (552). No one can choose their own identity—they simply discover it over time in their lives.

Within the United States specifically, the LGBTQIA+ community has continued to grow, although homophobia still stands. This has been demonstrated by a variety of issues, such as the recent "Don't Say Gay" bill passed in Florida, the nationwide banning of LGBTQIA+ books in certain libraries, and verbal and physical abuse toward LGBTQIA+ members. This hatred and deeply rooted homophobia must stop. Where better to stop it than a source of its roots in the classroom?

The American public education system has prospered in some ways, although it has not in others. While it helps the youth of America move through their academic years and prepares them for higher education, thus far it has failed when supporting, addressing, and teaching about LGBTQIA+ history, information, and issues.

According to Robinson and Espelage, "[LGBTQIA+ students] are at greater risk of suicidal thoughts, suicide attempts, victimization by peers, and elevated levels of unexcused absences from schools" (1). These stated risks can be harmful at best, and life-threatening at worst. No student should have to feel this way solely because of their identity.

Children are in school for around 17-20 years of their life on average. During those years they learn, grow, and become more and more educated. It is important to learn more about oneself during that time, and that includes discovering one's own sexuality. It is my belief that students should receive support regardless of their sexual orientation. They should also learn about being LGBTQIA+ and should have access to resources (books, historical texts, etc.) to further improve their knowledge and help them feel seen.

In this essay, I plan to explore the problems that reinforce LGBTQIA+ students' struggles in the classroom, as well as in the literary world in American education. My argument is that while there are significant issues present that reinforce homophobia and a lack of support, there is also a core set of solutions, some of which have already been explored. With love and endurance, I believe significant change can occur.

Primary Research

The primary research method I have chosen for this essay is a survey. My goal is to better understand just how many people have been affected by inadequate understanding and support. I believe that the absence of support from teachers is tied to the absence of LGBTQIA+ information and stories, which is why this use of a primary research method is so important in order to determine the correlation.

I received about 20 responses on average per question on my primary research survey. This survey was taken by LGBTQIA+ identifying people in order to get the most accurate results that I could. The results of my survey are as follows. When asked, "In your K-12 career, did you/have you learned about LGBTQ+ stories in class?", an astounding 22 people said no, they did not learn about LGBTQ+ stories in class. There were no responses saying yes.

When asked, "In your K-12 career, did you have access to LGBTQ+ literature?", four people said yes, they did have access to LGBTQ+ literature, while 18 people said no, they did not. When asked, "In your K-12 career, did you feel supported and safe when it came to being LGBTQ+?", six people said yes, they did feel supported and safe, and 10 people said no, they did not. When asked, "Would you have liked to have LGBTQ+ studies courses offered in your K-12 career?", 20 people said yes, they would have liked LGBTQ+ studies courses, while one person said no, they would not.

When asked, "Do you believe banned LGBTQ+ books should be provided in K-12 libraries?", 20 people said yes,

banned LGBTQ+ books should be provided, and four people said no. And lastly, when asked, "How do you feel that the support received and/or lack of support received in your K-12 career affected you (being LGBTQ+)?", here are the responses I received: "Upset because the closet was glass when it came to me. But I am happy I figured it out," "I didn't know people could be gay!! Access to LGBT books normalizes being queer," and lastly, "I had amazing teachers and friends who supported me, but my confidence helped."

All of these results demonstrate that there is a need for change in K-12 education on the basis of supporting, educating, and informing the LGBTQIA+ community. These results are what have motivated me to write and research this topic.

Unfortunately, the results I received were exactly what I was expecting. A startling number of people felt that during their K-12 experience, they did not receive what they needed (including support, books, lessons about LGBTQIA+ stories in history and/or English classes, etc.). Many felt alone and confused about their identities during this period as well, and they did not feel that they could embrace who they were. Others had no idea what their identity was, or that they could even be LGBTQIA+.

Knowing that, in broad terms, students across the country feel this way based on their academic experience was impactful on its own. But knowing that people I know and care about have similar experiences is what really motivates me to shine a light on the issues, and better understand what is currently being done and what still needs to be done.

Regardless of one's sexual orientation, they deserve to

feel that they are represented, cared for, and supported in their lives. This message especially holds true in the classroom, where American youth spend most of their time.

Flaws in the Public Education System When Addressing LGBTQIA+ Stories

Homophobia is the root cause of stagnant growth and continuous flaws in the public education system in terms of LGBTQIA+ stories.

Homophobia can be fueled by several different things, such as politics, religion, and stale societal beliefs. A common conception holds that there is a significant overlap between homophobia, Christianity, and Republican political identity. There are ideologies held within different denominations of the Christian faith that essentially say that being gay is a sin and that those who "choose" to be in this community will go to hell for the remainder of eternity. The weight that this kind of message has on members of the community is significant, and it is what leads to religious trauma for many.

To look at someone for who they are and to tell them their identity is invalid and "a choice" is one of the most harmful things one can do to the person that they love. As beautifully spoken by Stephanie Mitchem, "So many churches and religious groups in the U.S. promote, by omission or commission, a patriarchal world view that also endorses binary sex identifications with men in charge—after all, it is argued 'male/female' is in the Christian version of the Bible and women are told to be silent in churches" (553). The choice of telling an

individual that their identity is wrong based on patriarchal beliefs reinforced by religion is hateful and ignorant. Even knowing this, many refute the idea that one can exist outside of the male/female identification, and they use religion to reinforce their beliefs. Through this binary, patriarchal lens, the fire that burns at the root of homophobia continues to burn brighter.

There are several key examples where homophobia has shown itself in the public education system. The first example is the recently released "Don't Say Gay" bill. This bill was passed in Florida on March 9, 2022, and it essentially states that all discussions of sexuality, gender, and gender expression are not allowed in schools.

This bill is specifically directed toward children ranging from ages six to eleven—from about kindergarten to fourth or fifth grade. There should be no expectation that children will know or understand their own identity and/or gender at ages as young as this. But there should be an expectation that, when children are curious and have questions about these things, they will be able to receive supportive, digestible answers.

There should also be an expectation that not all children will be inherently straight, and no assumptions should be made that this is the case either.

The classroom is designed to be a learning environment, and it is also the place where most children spend the majority of their lives until they graduate from high school and/or higher education. Because of that simple fact, doesn't that mean children should be able to learn about themselves, as well as their peers, in the classroom? Shouldn't they be able to express themselves, and be kind and accepting of others' forms of per-

sonal expression as well? This bill is a step backward in time, and it is truthfully unacceptable.

LGBTQIA+ books are commonly difficult to find in school libraries nationwide. These books fall under the "diverse books" category, which includes "LGBTQIA, Native, people of color, gender diversity, people with disabilities, and ethnic, cultural, and religious minorities" (Knox 25).

Diverse books, in general, will typically be banned in school libraries, as they will be viewed as having topics that are "too sensitive for children" or "inappropriate." But, most commonly, these topics are important for children to learn about and understand in order to feel comfortable with their own identities, as well as others' identities.

The banning of these books can essentially be dumbed down to censorship of certain beliefs and ideas in varying libraries—specifically, in this case, school libraries. And as spoken boldly and confidently by Curwood, "One of the key ways that schools condone homophobia is by failing to include LGBTQ literature in the curriculum" (38).

In addition to this, a startling statistic was recently found stating that "only 8.5% of responding schools indicated that they use 'texts, films, or other materials addressing same-sex desire in their English language arts curriculum'" (38). This low statistic truly demonstrates just how little is being done when it comes to expanding the curriculum to benefit and educate about the LGBTQIA+ experience.

To break down just how small that number is in itself, let's say that out of 100 schools, 8.5% said yes, they did have an

inclusive curriculum in this way. That is essentially saying that just under nine schools out of those 100 included LGBTQIA+ topics in the classroom. That is unacceptable and startling, yet not surprising, to see.

Something surprising that many have not given much thought to is that the lack of LGBTQIA+ representation in the classroom can hurt teachers as well, which can affect the way they teach. According to an article by Branfman, "Even when I state my gay identity, and even when I specifically teach about LGBTQIA+ topics, I find that students take me most seriously when I censor my speech and behavior to avoid culturally constructed markers of gayness" (72).

It is a powerful, impactful statement for LGBTQIA+ students to see a teacher who represents them that feels like even he cannot be himself. A message like that can reinforce the idea that being LGBTQIA+ should be a hidden part of one's identity, which is harmful to everyone involved. In order for the students to feel comfortable, the teachers representing them should feel comfortable too.

So, these given examples should give a good understanding of what is currently wrong with public education in America. There is much need for change, advocacy, and support in order to address this lack in the curriculum.

Students deserve to have a fully authentic, colorful experience during their time in the grades K-12. There truly is no excuse for these flaws within the system. Homophobia may linger around the corner, but hope for a more inclusive future still stands.

Current Progress in the Public Education System in Sharing LGBTQIA+ Stories

Although there are significant lingering flaws in the public education system, there has been progress as well, not only in education but also in society as a whole.

The LGBTQIA+ community has continued to grow throughout the last several decades. And in addition to the growth of the community, there has also been significant growth in the community's allies. Allies are those who do not identify within the community, but they have empathy for the community and choose to support it in several different ways (participating in Pride, voting for candidates and lawmakers who support change, and speaking up against acts of homophobia).

The community has also become more and more educated and inclusive about its members. For example, biphobia (homophobia specifically toward those who identify as bisexual) has remained prevalent for a long time, and miseducation was spread within the community about this specific sexuality. This misinformation essentially stated that being bisexual is not a real identity and that someone can only be gay or straight. In the present day, identities are accepted spanning the entirety of the community, and there has been significant education about each identity shared within the community.

There have been varying policies and acts that have been passed on the terms of furthering public education toward an inclusive and LGBTQIA+ friendly curriculum. A wonderful example of this expansion is an act passed recently in Califor-

nia: "FAIR expanded the state's education code to require that the roles and contributions of LGBTQ+ individuals and people with disabilities be part of history and social studies instruction" (Moorhead 23). This act was passed due to a reactionary understanding that this was a significant community, especially within the state of California, and that students deserved to learn about representations of themselves in their textbooks.

Later on, several other changes were made, one example being an LGBTQ studies course that became available to students at Ruth Asawa San Francisco School of the Arts. At this specific school, "about 26 students typically enroll in the class, and the percentage... mapped closely to the school overall percentage of LGBTQ+ students" (Moorhead 23). Offering both of these inclusions to the curriculum proved positive in both areas. Teaching students about not only the history of those who fit the conventional norm but also about LGBTQIA+ stories demonstrated that a much more accepting and productive schooling environment will be produced when allowing students to learn about representation of themselves and others in the classroom. There is no harm in teaching students about these topics, because they are real, valid identities that many students will be able to identify with, whether they are a member of the LGBTQIA+ community themselves or they know someone who is.

In schools where the LGBTQIA+ curriculum is not taught (which, unfortunately, is most of the United States), not only are students affected—teachers are affected as well. Many teachers face a copious amount of stress when wanting to help out students struggling with their identity, but they may feel

that this is something they cannot do because of district policies, or even state policies. Spoken wisely by Page, "Literacy educators have the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of queer-identifying students and to help stem the tide of harassment, violence, depression, and other issues often experienced by gender-and sexual-minority learners" (678). Literacy educators should have the right to help students struggling with their own identities. Not only are they teaching their students different core areas of academics, but they are also teaching them how to care for others based on their treatment of students in the classroom.

An inclusive curriculum benefits students when learning more about the LGBTQIA+ community, and it benefits students when they feel they have teachers they can reach out to or even look up to on the terms of their identity. Luckily, an inclusive curriculum typically also leads to inclusive and supportive teachers who want to see the success of their students, regardless of their identity.

Looking Toward a Future of Solutions for LGBTQIA+ Stories

Change has begun to progress forward, although more still needs to occur. I personally believe that there are several different changes that would be beneficial for this progression. I will further detail some of these plans and ideas and what they are, then explain why I feel that they will bring success and prosperity into the classroom for LGBTQIA+ youth.

To begin, I will detail a plan to specifically increase

LGBTQIA+ content in the English classroom. According to a study where this plan was documented, "To address the silencing of LGBTQ students directly, in our high school classrooms, we propose [a] unit plan using children's picture books frequently banned for their LGBTQ themes" (Burke et. Greenfield 46). I believe this kind of idea is excellent. Using LGBTQ children's picture books may sound a bit too childish for a high school classroom, but I feel that analyzing these books, their images, their text, and their purposes could lead to excellent critical thinking among high school students who may not think much about the LGBTQIA+ experience.

The plan further explains that, to begin, school boards of course must approve the given plan, and then the unit can begin rolling into motion. After that, the writers explain that it's important for the teacher to discuss just exactly how students and their beliefs impact others, which will then roll into learning about what an ally is.

Following this introduction to the unit, students will begin learning about these different picture books (Burke et. Greenfield 47). A gentle progression into this unit would be very important, so I like that thought. It can be easy to think that jumping straight into the unit head-first would work well for most students, but for those who don't know very much about it, it can be difficult and overwhelming. For this unit to really work, it has to be a fairly paced learning experience for everyone. I fully support the inclusion of this unit in high school classrooms, and I believe it would be a huge step forward for LGBTQIA+ progress.

The next set of steps I discovered is less about a specific

plan and more about asking teachers critical questions about what they can do to speak up for their LGBTQIA+ students and support an inclusive curriculum. Two axes are discussed within this article. The first axis is as follows: "The visibility (public/private) axis has to do with how open teachers are in featuring LGBTQIA texts, characters, and issues in their classes" (Page 679). I believe this is a great first step for teachers to ask themselves. If they are not willing to even consider being comfortable with teaching this kind of curriculum, then moving forward requires further thought and reflection. Conversely, for those who are open to the idea of visibility, this helps teachers ask themselves if they are doing enough to help their students.

The second axis is as follows: "The inclusion axis (saturation) maps how thoroughly queer texts are integrated. Are they not included at all? Are they included only in special units? Are they included throughout a course of study, in every unit?" (Page 679). For LGBTQIA+ students to truly feel represented, supported, and understood in the classroom, it is very important for them to feel included in all instances, not just special or occasional ones. When looked at critically and carefully LGBTQIA+ artists, authors, creators, and members of history are everywhere. They just have to be searched for. Because of this, it is possible and fully realistic for schools to include LGBTQIA+ stories in every area of the curriculum, specifically in English and history courses where stories are learned the most.

I feel that with the inclusion of both of these plans, the future of American education can change drastically. Although

including just one unit in an English course may sound small, it is a big step toward progress in the LGBTQIA+ community, considering most educational institutions have no discussions about the community within their curriculum.

In order to truly implement these plans and further courses of action, it is important for teachers to ask themselves what they believe, what they can change, and what can be added or removed to support LGBTQIA+ students. This would be best done by the use of the two axes provided. Progression requires critical thinking, planning, and specific steps like these.

Conclusion

Throughout the duration of this essay, I detailed several different areas of the LGBTQIA+ experience in the classroom. I explained specifics of the community itself, current flaws within the classroom, progress that is being made at the moment, and what possibilities the future may hold for continuous progression for the LGBTQIA+ community in the classroom.

To truly work through these problems, I believe it is important to look at and understand all three of these focal points: what is wrong, what is changing, and what can be done to push the limits and eradicate homophobia in the classroom.

With the education of younger generations in the LGBTQIA+ community, we can hope for the love and support of the LGBTQIA+ community in society, governmental policies, healthcare, and more. With the education, support, and representation of the community comes a brighter, more hopeful, and fair future for the LGBTQIA+ community. No matter

what the future brings, I will stand behind the community and continue pushing for change.

Annotated Bibliography

Abstract

Each article listed is an important piece of the puzzle when it comes to addressing homophobia and its impacts. I find homophobia to be one of the most important topics to address when looking at societal issues because it is so far-reaching and impactful.

This hatred has led to devastating acts against members of the LGBTQIA+ community. The sources here carry an emphasis on several different areas of this essay: negative impacts on the community in regards to refusal of change; positive impacts on the community in regards to progression and advocacy; as well as detailed plans and ideas on how to further progress in the education system.

Not only do the sources provided have significant facts, but they also lead to a better understanding of this issue—physically, emotionally, and mentally. Although they are all unique to each other in one way or another when addressing different working parts of this issue, they work together as a story.

The sources citing negative impacts serve as the beginning, the sources citing positive change serve as the climb toward the resolution, and the sources detailing action plans serve as a hopeful resolution. Each type of source is crucial in my understanding of this issue, as well as others' understand-

ing. That is truthfully what brought me to this topic. I wish to see change and inspire it by providing examples and ideas through my writing. Through these sources, I have found my passion for this topic, and I can only hope that they strengthen my argument further.

Annotated Sources

Burke, Brianna R., and Kristina Greenfield. "Challenging Heteronormativity: Raising LGBTQ Awareness in a High School English Language Arts Classroom." *The English Journal*, vol. 105, no. 6, National Council of Teachers of English, 2016, pp. 46–51, www.jstor.org/stable/26359254

This article hopes for a brighter future for the LGBTQIA experience within literature and English courses in the United States. Educators by the names of Brianna Burke and Kristina Greenfield wrote this article, and they detail how there needs to be a change in the LGBTQIA curriculum. The article explains a unit in English classes that could be used to teach about LGBTQIA history, and help students read, write, and learn about the community as a whole. According to Burke and Greenfield, "… students across the nation—regardless of sexual orientation—is that they absorb heteronormative values, and for LGBTQIA students, that they seldom see themselves and their struggles reflected within their high school curricula" (46). Due to these beliefs, Burke and Greenfield articulate their plan in great detail in their article.

I plan to use this article for the exhibit portion of BEAM. I believe that since it outlines a specific plan, it will be the best fit as something to respond to and pull information from when it comes to my personal action plan.

Curwood, Jen Scott, et al. "Fight for Your Right: Censorship, Selection, and LGBTQ Literature." *The English Journal*, vol. 98, no. 4, National Council of Teachers of English, 2009, pp. 37–43, www.jstor.org/stable/40503259

This article is written by three authors on the subject of the censorship and banning of LGBTQIA+ literature. One of the head authors is Jen Curwood.

In this article, the three discuss the ways that LGBTQIA+ is commonly censored and restricted, and why that needs to change. As boldly stated in the article, "One of the key ways that schools condone homophobia is by failing to include LGBTQ literature in the curriculum" (38). A common theme here is that LGBTQIA+ students not only want to see themselves represented in the literature they obtain, but they also need these representations in order to feel supported, seen, heard, and safe. In addition to these statements, the authors include several book suggestions at the end of the article that are directed toward the LGBTQIA+ community that they recommend reading.

I plan to use this article for the exhibit portion of BEAM because I believe that with the information the authors provided it will be most beneficial for me to analyze this source to best support my ideas.

Mitchem, Stephanie Y. "Embodiment, Gender, and Religion."
    CrossCurrents, vol. 68, no. 4, University of North
    Carolina Press, 2018, pp. 550–60, www.jstor.org/sta-
    ble/26756885

This article is written by an educator at North Carolina University named Stephanie Mitchem. In the article, Mitchem discusses several aspects of why homophobia still exists in the United States today. A few examples that Mitchem details include religion, gender representation, and the embodiment of societal beliefs that have led to a heteronormative, homophobic world.

Mitchem highlights intersectionality as well, stating that it's crucial to see homophobia from all sides in order to understand why it exists, and how to get rid of it. According to Mitchem, it's "not a choice of lifestyle, no person can catch LGBTQ, and no person can promote gender-fluid identities" (552). Mitchem's article is highly effective in expressing what needs to be changed in order to address and reduce homophobia in American society.

I plan to use this article for the argument portion of BEAM. I believe that with its strong opinions and facts in regards to the LGBTQIA+ community, it will be most beneficial for me to use citations from this source to boost my personal argument.

Moorhead, Laura. "LGBTQ+ Visibility: In the K-12 Curriculum." *The Phi Delta Kappan*, vol. 100, no. 2, 2018, pp. 22–26, www.jstor.org/stable/26552438

This article is written by Laura Moorhead. Within the article, Moorhead details how LGBTQIA representation and visibility in American public schooling have been increasingly represented.

Moorhead gives examples of schools within California, for example, that began doing things such as using LGBTQ+ textbooks and including LGBTQ+ studies courses for students. This article further explains how "Excluding LGBTQ+ people and issues from the curriculum deny young people a view into themselves and into their world" (24). It is a reflection on what the inclusivity and visibility of LGBTQIA students have led to, and how further progression could benefit society. I plan to use this source for the background category of BEAM.

I believe that since most of the article is sourcing significant background data about experiences in the K-12 curriculum, it will shed light on how beneficial change in the K-12 curriculum is in regards to homophobia and the lack of advocacy and support in the education system.

Page, Michelle L. "Teaching in the Cracks: Using Familiar Pedagogy to Advance LGBTQ-Inclusive Curriculum." *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, vol. 60, no. 6, 2017, pp. 677–85, www.jstor.org/stable/26630689

This article is written by Michelle Page. In the article, Page explains the taboo of including LGBTQ+ stories in American public school curricula. It also explains why the curriculum needs to be expanded to support LGBTQIA students in order to make them feel successful and connected to their academic

careers.

Page explains the stress that public school teachers face when wanting to help and address issues their LGBTQIA students face, due to restrictions and policies within many schools that deny them from supporting or advocating for these students. Page explains that an excellent way to make progress is to include two axes: the visibility axis, and the inclusion axis. According to Page, "Literacy educators have the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of queer-identifying students and to help stem the tile of harassment, violence, depression, and other issues often experienced by gender-and sexual-minority learners" (678). A brighter, more progressive future in LGBTQIA education is beginning to see the light in America.

I intend to use this source for the method portion of BEAM because I feel that data in this source can be directly applied to making the public education system far more competent and supportive of the LGBTQIA+ community.

Jonathan Branfman. "'(Un)Covering' in the Classroom: Managing Stigma Beyond the Closet." *Feminist Teacher*, vol. 26, no. 1, University of Illinois Press, 2015, pp. 72–82, doi.org/10.5406/femteacher.26.1.0072

This article is written by Jonathan Branfman, who is a professor at the University of Illinois. He is a gay man, and within the article, he details what it's like to be openly gay in the classroom, and how he has dealt with different issues, such as feeling the need to censor himself in order to appease his students and make them feel comfortable. An issue like that leads to a

far less genuine teaching atmosphere and can make for a stiff and awkward environment.

In Branfman's experience, "I find that students take me more seriously when I pitch my voice in a deeper register, minimize my hand gestures, and avoid gay buzzwords like 'fabulous'" (72). On top of the social aspect these issues lead, it also leads to a less genuine curriculum and teaching style, which can deeply affect not only the instructor but also the students who are in the classroom who may be in need of support and advocacy from those who are teaching them.

I plan to use this article for the method portion of BEAM because I believe I can directly apply the information found to my own game plan when it comes to how to change and further progress the LGBTQIA+ experience in the classroom, especially because this information is coming from a member of the community.

Knox, Emily J. M. "Silencing Stories: Challenges to Diverse Books." *The International Journal of Information, Diversity, & Inclusion*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2019, pp. 24–39, www.jstor.org/stable/48645178

This article is written by Emily Knox, an individual who is well-versed in the study of literature. Knox explains how there have been many censorships placed on diverse books not only nationwide, but globally. Knox has specifically chosen to focus on "two common themes found in the arguments that book challengers give for redaction, restriction, relocation, and removal of diverse titles in and from school curricula, school libraries,

and public library collections" (1).

Several reasons included by Knox as to why book challengers have continuously attempted to censor specific diverse titles include homophobia, racism, and an overall lack of education on societal topics that lead to discomfort and an overall attempt to steer clear of these kinds of titles.

I plan to use this source for the background portion of my paper because it provides the back-bones of why there are so many censorship issues for diverse titles (in my case specifically, LGBTQIA+ literature). I believe this source will be a great addition to my bibliography for this reason.

Robinson, Joseph P., and Dorothy L. Espelage. "Inequities in Educational and Psychological Outcomes Between LGBTQ and Straight Students in Middle and High School." *Educational Researcher*, vol. 40, no. 7, 2011, pp. 315–30, www.jstor.org/stable/41239204

This article is by Joseph P. Robinson and Dorothy L. Espelage. It uses evidence and statistics to describe that straight youth in American education are at far less risk of negative outcomes than LGBTQIA youth. It explains that the LGBTQIA curriculum should become included in order to create a more accepting and equal schooling atmosphere. It details that belongingness, visibility, and support are important to decrease mental health risks in LGBTQIA youth. According to Robinson and Espelage, "... [LGBTQ] are at greater risk of suicidal thoughts, suicide attempts, victimization by peers, and elevated levels of unexcused absences from schools" (1). These increased

risk factors are dangerous and must be reduced in American schooling in order to create a much safer, more accepting, balanced, and enjoyable experience for LGBTQIA youth.

I plan to use this article for the argument portion of BEAM because I believe that its startling statistics will further my argument that LGBTQIA+ youth not only deserve but need support in their education.

questions to consider

1. There is an abundance of legislation that may make improvement in the realm of queerness that much more difficult. What are some ways in which students, teachers, and advocates could influence legislative change to incorporate the changes proposed here?

2. Queerness is expressed—commercialized, even—outside of the school setting. What could cause a disconnect between the two worlds?

3. Assisting LGBTQIA+ identities is an important part of affirming students of all orientations. Do some school officials and teachers support students on a non-explicit level? What does it mean for said support to be explicitly inclusive of LGBTQIA+ identities?

4. What are some other ways that could help build a more inclusive future for LGBTQIA+ individuals?

LIDDY SCURATO

Linguistic Analysis of Advertisements:
The Effect of Major Cosmetics
Brands' Advertisements on Women's
Self-Confidence and Worth

Makeup has been used to alter appearances for hundreds of years. The need to wear makeup comes from decades of being told that women are supposed to sit still and look pretty.

Today, makeup can be used to alter appearances, but also to express creativity and a sense of self. Makeup brands produce more and more products every year to help women achieve this. However, in the world of e-commerce and having products shipped to your door, companies need unique advertisements and marketing techniques to push consumers to buy products, which include enhanced images that catch the eye.

European countries have started to act against misleading advertisements, but the United States proves slow to follow. An ABC News report that followed the ban of a Dior mascara ad in Europe in 2012 argued that Photoshopping photos is a routine practice in the United States. The report noted that companies take advantage of the freedom of speech in the U.S., and that it's "really an excuse for anything from deceptive campaign advertising to mascara advertising" (O'Neil 637). Not only are these images frequently enhanced—the wording of the advertisements themselves are strong enough to pull in consumers.

This research project will investigate the different linguistic devices used by cosmetics brands to promote their products and entice consumers to buy them, and how these advertisements affect consumers' self-confidence.

Advertisements can be seen on billboards, in storefronts, and now, in all forms of social media and technology. For the past few decades, women's empowerment has been on the rise. Thus, empowerment in advertising has hit an all-time high. However, are these messages truly empowering? Or are they used as a tool to convey the message to consumers that they must consume certain products to be culturally accepted as beautiful?

Empowerment today is completely different than it was 50 years ago. Empowerment refers to "an individual's ability to gain mastery over their goals and outcomes and control over resources and decisions. It can be described on both structural and psychological levels, and although the levels can be conceptualized independently, they are also interactive" (Couture Bue and Harrison 630). With female empowerment being a subject discussed constantly, cosmetics brands use it to their advantage in their marketing.

The linguistics used in cosmetics advertisements convey a sense of urgency to buy the product, coupled with wording to make the products sound like a magical fix to all insecurities. One of the biggest themes seen in advertisements today is the theme of sexuality, or exaggerating features seen as sexual. One example of this is an ad that reads, "Turn up your lips with gliding sensual shine" (Lancôme lipstick ad). This

language promotes the product as something that will immediately plump lips, typically noted as an overly sexual symbol on the female body in American culture. The marketing of this product states that for a partner to find you beautiful, you must have larger lips.

Another example states, "Raise eyebrows? I do it all the time" (Maybelline eyebrow pencil ad). The marketing strategy behind this Maybelline product hopes consumers will feel the need to raise eyebrows too, so they link the catchphrase with the product. To raise eyebrows automatically suggests an "all eyes on you" mentality, often considered a sexual trope in American culture. Both companies clearly link beauty with sexuality to attract more consumers to buy their products.

Companies also tend to target the older consumer by making them feel they must cover any signs of age to be beautiful. A Revlon foundation ad uses the slogan "Don't deny it, defy it" to sell their product. This ad asserts that their foundation will help cover aging by reducing the appearance of fine lines and wrinkles—in other words, masking natural skin.

By marketing the product as a cure-all to aging, Revlon expects consumers to wear their products to feel beautiful and come to rely on them over time. Another foundation ad reads, "Don't mask me. Fit me" (Maybelline foundation ad). This is an example of the inconsistencies of the cosmetics industry. An ad for a product made to cover skin states, "Don't mask me," so consumers may feel like it has a bit of empowerment in it. However, the fact that the product's purpose consists of covering up so-called imperfections shows that society's need to

criticize any wrinkle, scar, or blemish on the skin is harmful to women and anyone who feels pressure to wear makeup, which cosmetics brands continue to propagate to sell their products and make money.

Supposed empowerment through marketing is something several major cosmetics brands have started to do to convince more people to buy their products. "It's you, only better," explains an advert for L'Oréal mascara that promises "telescopic length for your eyes" (Kilyeni 21). The wording of this ad tells the consumer that to be a better, more beautiful version of themselves, they must buy the product. Another years-old ad with the same tone states, "Maybe she's born with it. Maybe it's Maybelline" (Maybelline mascara ad). These ads suggest that the product applied is what makes the consumer beautiful, which is not what empowerment is or should be. These ads seem to point out that the person applying the product will only be perfect and beautiful in society's eyes if they transform themselves by buying and using a product.

Not only do these advertisements play on wording to make consumers feel they need a certain product, the effect of wearing makeup on women is shown to improve and bring down women simultaneously.

Makeup has a drastic effect on the way women see themselves beyond the mirror, seeping into personality traits and emotions, with some who argue that "makeup functions as 'camouflage' for women who are more anxious, defensive, and unstable or as 'seduction' for women who are more sociable, assertive, and extroverted" (McCabe 658).

In some cases, women hide behind makeup because society tells them they need to, and part of the problem is that advertisements from brands pressure women into feeling this way. The constant rhetoric to cover up and hide behind makeup that cosmetics brands use to sell products weighs down on women and damages them. In Maryann McCabe's essay "Women, Makeup, and Authenticity: Negotiating Embodiment and Discourses of Beauty," Brooke, 22, says, "The media has been telling me all my life that I need to wear makeup" (670). This effect of makeup on women has been reverberated for hundreds of years now. Women feel the need to wear makeup because they are told their sole purpose is to look beautiful.

A study done to uncover impressions on women themselves in various amounts of makeup showed that women not wearing makeup "rated themselves as less satisfied with appearance, less attractive, less feminine, less healthy, and with lower self-esteem" whereas "with makeup, women rated themselves higher on femininity, health, and self-esteem" (Anchieta 3780). So, not only do outsiders judge based on the beauty that makeup supposedly gives women, but the women themselves feel this same way. Linguistics used in advertisements that market to the consumer perpetuate these messages.

No wonder women around the world feel urged to buy and use cosmetics products if the products they buy are telling them how to feel while using the product. Because of society's beauty standards, not only do women look at themselves differently with varying amounts of makeup, so do others who see them.

While wearing makeup, "women may face a trade-off between

the benefits of attractiveness, and the consequences of negative stereotypes of women's sexuality," writes Dax J. Kellie. "Women, although culturally pressured to wear makeup, may therefore experience unintended consequences for choosing to do so" (704). Although society has pushed women to feel the need to alter their appearance to be beautiful, wearing too much makeup has been shown to lower what society considers attractive.

Again, society's standards have created a space where women cannot win, no matter what they look like, because history has told women repeatedly that only traditionally pretty women will succeed. In a study done on the effects of makeup to an outsider, the researcher found that "In mock job interviews, attractive people are more likely to be hired than less attractive individuals and the same pattern holds true in real interviews. Beautiful females in high school are more than 10 times as likely to get married than the least good-looking ones" (Spyropoulou 1872). These statistics show why women feel they must always be beautiful, because their lives are affected based on their perceived beauty.

A study done to examine this dichotomy showed that "both men's and women's negative mental and moral perceptions of women wearing more makeup are due to an association between wearing more makeup and being more likely to have casual sex" (Kellie 706). Being beautiful and attractive are strongly linked to being sexual, because of the common mindset that women look pretty for men. Often, this is alluded to in advertisements, and in the ads previously discussed. Even advertisements that preach empowerment are just used to sell

more products.

　　While ads in the cosmetics industry have been said to be currently more empowering, a study showed that "empowering advertisements were not effective at increasing participants' felt empowerment and self-efficacy, indicating that they held little psychological benefit to the women in our sample" (Couture Bue and Harrison 640). This vicious cycle that women can't seem to escape continues to grow because of society's standards of beauty, but also because cosmetics advertisements are still shaming consumers into buying their products by using their insecurities against them.

　　In a study done exploring the advertising of cosmeceutical products, the author noted that "Female consumers with higher level of body esteem believe that cosmeceutical product-relevant messages exert greater influence on other people and that… this vulnerability is perceived as leading to future actions such as product purchase" (Meng 169). This shows that consumers with lower self-esteem are more likely to be preyed on by cosmetics companies, as they promote a "fix" to insecurity through linguistics in advertising.

By analyzing these advertisements' linguistic attributes and seeing data from studies on the effect of makeup on women, parallels can be drawn between the two.

　　The desire to cover insecurities comes from a culture that tells women they must be pretty to get ahead in the world. However, cosmetics ads seem to perpetuate this stereotype by constantly making claims to cover and mask imperfections, rather than enhance or celebrate them. In a survey conducted

for this paper, 25 participants were shown the Lancôme lipstick ad discussed earlier, which read, "Turn up your lips with gliding sensual shine." Eighty-eight percent of these participants stated a major theme was sexual, with 40% also checking objectification as a theme too.

The same survey showed the Revlon Age Defying Foundation advertisement, which boasted boldly, "Don't deny it, defy it." Eighty-four percent of participants stated that age was a major theme, and a staggering 72% of participants also said the ad promoted masking and creating a new self.

These advertisements echo society's beauty standards under the guise of empowerment, with 100% of participants saying they notice these major themes in cosmetics ads generally. Consumers who are targeted by these ads feel that the only way to truly be beautiful is to buy the product. It is genius marketing, but detrimental to women everywhere.

This research project delved into the correlations between cosmetics brands advertisements, and how these play into beauty standards and the need for makeup.

Marketing strategies for major cosmetics brands may have the intention of empowerment but play into stereotypes that do not uplift women. Although makeup should be used to enhance beauty already within the person, some brands use the language in their advertisements to force consumers to think that they need the product to change their appearance, not enhance it. This subject is important for consumers because it not only allows them to be more knowledgeable about what brands they support—it also inspires consumers to wear

makeup for their own empowerment, regardless of what the advertisement said when they purchased the product.

The effects on outsiders of wearing makeup and trying to look more attractive demonstrates how great the power and stigma around wearing makeup is today. Cosmetics brands prove to be some of the most lucrative businesses around, and their marketing strategies and advertisements may not uplift women like they are meant to. Instead, the wording of these advertisements may be making consumers hyper-aware of their flaws, rather than celebrating their beauty, and ultimately adding to society's unrealistic beauty standards.

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questions to consider

1. The author raises an interesting question about society's obsession with youth and beauty. How can makeup be at once self-expressive and also a product of the limits imposed on the makeup wearer?

2. Are there other current ads that follow these same lines?

3. What can be said about the "evolution" from women needing to wear makeup to women needing to feel empowered by makeup? What are some positives and negatives?

4. How else does advertising influence society? Are there any places where ads don't matter?

advanced level

ARIEJ RAFIQ

TikTok Glow-ups as a Double-Edged
Popular Artifact

With quick and easy access to the latest trends, a variety of genres of content to fulfill different cultural niches, and an immersive interface, it is no wonder TikTok boasts widespread appeal (Vicente 2021).

Serving more than one billion monthly users (Lyons 2021)—and enjoying more popularity than the mega-corporations Google and Facebook (Moreno 2021)—this relatively new platform provides an innovative and stimulating social media forum for sharing ideas. One trend particularly in vogue is the "glow-up" phenomenon; spanning genres from physical appearance to art to home décor, these TikToks enthrall audiences with a dramatic transformation from one supposedly less attractive and older state to a newer and more appealing state (Kulkarni 2021).

Despite the novelty of TikTok, glow-ups could be described as a time-worn concept in brand-new packaging—a trend that has endured across time and a myriad of different media forms to now be presented in a rapid-fire format. In other words, society has grappled with the controversial yet electrifying urge to compare the "ugly" past and the "stunning" present for decades. Whether in the form of fitness programs, makeup, or celebrity transformations, humans have come to

define their personal achievement by their ability to emulate popular standards of beauty and success.

Although glow-ups from these historical examples are well understood, revisiting them in their TikTok style redefines the trend entirely in a world that is more fast-paced and interconnected than ever. This social media platform appeals heavily to young people and is structured to encourage the exchange of ideas in exponential proportions. Notably, individuals oftentimes associate more closely with someone they follow on a shared social media platform as opposed to a celebrity with formidable fame. Thus, analysis can yield valuable insights into the psychological and cultural effects this trend currently has on consumers.

To better understand these impacts, this paper will implement visual, culture-centered, and media-centered methods of analysis to demonstrate both the trend's unique attractiveness within TikTok and its impacts on society. Through the depiction of a striking transformation, glow-ups empower viewers with a sense of knowledge on the past of someone they admire, encourage them to develop a strong parasocial relationship with that prominent influencer, and boost their optimism in their ability to improve their own lives.

However, the glow-up trend is a double-edged sword that may simultaneously damage self-esteem by promoting harmful stereotypes on attractiveness standards. Furthermore, the omission of the process and struggle involved within this transformation challenges the feasibility of following this exact path for all individuals, which may paradoxically shatter the audience's optimism toward achieving their own goals.

At a broad scale, the very style of a TikTok is vital to understanding why glow-ups are so visually enticing to begin with. This trend is set within an attractive, personalized, and immersive interface; most remarkably, the video itself is less than 10 seconds long. Despite the short time frame, the footage manages to illustrate a syntagmatic, horizontal progression from a supposedly unappealing "before" to a more attractive "after."

Throughout this transformation, the audience is intensely curious about what the outcome will look like, providing a satisfying and addictive thrill that appeases the audience's passionate curiosity about someone they follow. This ideal balance between a build-up of anticipation for the final result of a glow-up transformation—the "wait-for-it" factor—combined with the rapidly paced nature evoked by its short duration provides an irresistible dopamine hit that can be quickly replenished with another short TikTok. Ultimately, this thrill is what makes TikTok an endlessly popular platform to scroll through for hours on end (Koetsier 2020).

In turn, this significant time commitment firmly establishes the glow-up trend's prevalence in society and how it fundamentally influences, for better or for worse, the psychology behind young individuals' self-worth, perceptions of the future, use of time, values, relationships with others, and sense of belonging within a comparison-oriented and individualistic surrounding culture.

Consider the following TikTok made by the user @itsjasminenq: the video begins with footage of the influencer's facial acne and inflammation, coupled with the caption, "Sorry, you're just not my type, you look…" with a vomiting emoji at

the end. She exhibits visible disapproval, wears casual lounge-wear at home, and has her hair tied in a loose ponytail.

In a sense, these associations with the "before" phase could give the audience the impression of familiarity and connection, particularly if they struggle with cosmetic issues as well. It would almost seem as if @itsjasminenq is casually video calling the audience as a friend with whom to commiserate over the concerns they share over their appearances. This awareness of a social media user's struggle can facilitate a close connection with that individual and thereby help followers develop a strong parasocial relationship with a prominent influencer. That is, the audience feels as if they know the social media presence personally and consider them a friend because they share similar difficulties, despite the influencer's complete unawareness of specific followers. This bond users feel to the striking personal growth of the influencer augments their hope, albeit vaguely, that they can change their lives for the better as well.

After this "before" phase, the second half of the TikTok shifts to the "after" stage in which the audience is presented with an entirely new visual identity: the woman's face now radiates a clear and fair appearance. She wears trendy clothing, such as an Adidas beanie that tellingly associates a popular apparel company with her transformation. Additionally, her long, red gel nails and bold lipstick connect fashionable stylistic preferences to her acne-free face. On top of the dramatic cosmetic transformation, the atmosphere of this footage is markedly different from the footage at the beginning; @itsjasminenq is now sitting in a car, with lighting that is noticeably

brighter and more vibrant.

These visual associations of style, trendiness, and confidence with the "after" phase, as opposed to the casual, ordinary, and frustrated associations in the "before" phase, emphasize that this transformation is desirable due to its alignment with societal standards of beauty, success, and fame. But perhaps the most powerful association she makes with her new identity is her inspiring confidence, making a special gesture with her hand that imparts an aura of sophistication and style.

More critically, this movement that she makes shifts the focus of visual interest to her face—the keystone sign of the entire glow-up. This subtlety conveys that her self-assurance improved because she was able to eliminate the acne, vilified by cultural beauty standards, that had alienated her from others. As a result, she now feels fully confident, perhaps even confrontational toward those who may have criticized her appearance, to prove that she is capable of overcoming her cosmetic struggle in a short yet astonishing transformation.

However, this TikTok rabbit hole poses devastating consequences for young consumers. Returning to @itsjasminenq's glow-up, the first half of her TikTok immediately orients the audience within the frustration that one's appearance does not align with the beauty standard of an acne-free face. In turn, this reflects the high premium that an individualistic American society, the target culture surrounding the TikTok itself, places on a "perfect" and "confident" face. Put metaphorically, one could argue that at least half of a business proposal is the face that one presents, according to societal perceptions. Certain body types, appearances, skin conditions, and styles

may consequently be shunned to the detriment of an individual's sense of belonging and acceptance in society. Through the long-standing establishment of a strong connection between a "beautiful" physical appearance and success, American culture conveys that it considers an individual's cosmetic profile to be the primary defining factor in their inherent value.

Because the American culture within which TikTok is situated places relatively little importance on more profound personal qualities related to values or character, these perceptions of self-worth and toxic beauty standards bleed into this influencer's experience. This observation then comes back full circle, explaining the harmful psychological impact America's cosmetic culture has had on her relationships and self-esteem as reflected in her first caption. It may have primarily been this pain provoked by harsh societal standards, rather than a solely internal desire for self-improvement, that catalyzed her glow-up, converting the experience from transformative to defensive.

Though @itsjasminenq's "before" and "after" clips have been previously explored, the transition has been specially reserved for separate analysis because it is arguably the most decisive component of the TikTok. After @itsjasminenq's "before" clip, the video quickly transitions to a black screen with the caption "16 Missed Calls." The song "Lost Souls" by lizok plays in the background to situate the shift from "ugly" to "gorgeous." As mentioned previously, the crux of TikTok glow-ups is the transformation from a supposedly less ideal state to a more ideal one as typically dictated by a society's cultural standards.

The fact that this frame is completely black without any additional footage or images is indicative of a pivotal pattern present in many other glow-ups: the means of getting to the "after" endpoint is often omitted. Suddenly, the TikTok shifts from being understandable to ambiguous, with the techniques and products used to reach an acne-free face shrouded in doubt. Because the process of the personal struggle involved in her growth is not presented, the audience suddenly loses an opportunity to connect with the influencer and to grow from the transformation themselves. The practicality of all audiences following this exact glow-up path is unclear because each individual is situated in different personal circumstances, such as finances and access to networks. Thus, if the means to an end are not accessible to certain audiences, this may lower their self-image and optimism about achieving their goals for the future.

In light of a TikTok glow-up's gratifying and addictive "wait-for-it" factor, the parasocial relationship it encourages followers to develop with an influencer, and the hope of self-improvement that it provides audiences, it is clear that this trend can be inspiring and thrilling. Nevertheless, these transformative highlight reels embody a paradox. This popular phenomenon can also harm self-esteem via the endorsement of toxic attractiveness standards, alienate followers from influencers by hiding the struggle that an influencer endures for their success, and ultimately lower followers' optimism toward the achievement of their own goals.

Just as this trend has historically manifested itself in

other ways, such as weight loss commercials, it is virtually inevitable that the glow-up will continue to shape American and online cultural psychology. The emergence of TikTok simply means that this trend will be more heavily geared toward younger audiences, who are already in an inherently confusing stage of life. Considerations of mental health—both of audiences and of content creators—spending extravagance, and the accuracy of social media highlights deserve to be further explored because they affect nearly every individual in an interconnected and globalized world.

As youth become increasingly exposed to cultural standards of attractiveness, fame, and success, it is critical that society thoroughly scrutinizes the destructive influences of glow-ups, their implications for the thought processes of future generations, and how this trend may be altered to create a more accepting online community. Online interactions defined not by shaming others, but by creating a positive and more inclusive environment for all, can in turn lead to a happier and more constructive societal culture.

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questions to consider

1. What does TikTok as a platform offer for the glow-up that other social media platforms lack? Is there any way in which it may be lacking?

2. Do glow-ups reflect a positive or a negative for physical appearance and social expression? Or is there more to it than a typical positive/negative?

3. How big of a role does relatability play in the effectiveness of a glow-up?

4. How would the depiction of the struggle behind the glow-up affect the genre and its appeal?

MEGAN WEAVER

Privilege Personified: Brock Turner's
Apologia after Assault

Just past midnight, on January 18th, 2015, Brock Turner sexually assaulted a young woman behind a dumpster on a bed of pine needles. One year later, armed with messages of support from his community and an apology letter, a judge sentenced him to six months of incarceration and three years of probation. However, he was released from internment after just three months (Xu 2016).

The strategies employed by Turner's family and friends throughout the trial consisted of building up his character and focusing on his alcohol consumption while ignoring the sexual assault he committed. His letter also followed suit as he attempted to evade his guilt by using provocation, bolstering, self-centered mortification, and flimsy corrective action. Though granted a lenient sentence, the public outcry and sheer multitude of lifelong consequences Turner faces make his letter an ineffective apologia attempt.

The night that changed the course of both the victim and the perpetrator's lives started with a college frat party. The victim, unnamed at the time and referred to in court documents as Jane Doe #1, was a few years older than most of the people at the party and felt safe kicking back, drinking a beer or two, and

enjoying her sister's company.

The last thing she remembers of the night was talking to a few frat guys with her sister while passing on another beer. Thus, Turner's account of the night was the first thing looked at by the courts. His account (though originally quite different) suggests that the encounter was entirely consensual—that both he and the victim had consumed far too many drinks to be held accountable for their actions. He claimed he invited her back to his dorm, and on the way over, they fell behind a dumpster. Turner then took the opportunity to partially strip the victim and expose her to the elements and sharp pine-needle-laden ground as he penetrated and dry humped her. Two Swedish bikers happened upon the scene and called out to make sure the situation was okay. This intrusion inspired Turner to flee before getting tackled by the good Samaritans and restrained until police arrived on the scene (Superior Court 2016).

Before sentencing, but after Turner was determined guilty for three felonies, the Judge received letters and pleas from members of Turner's community asking for leniency and pity. These, along with a stellar swimming record and volunteer work with the Special Olympics, gave Turner a good character advantage. Another advantage was that the Judge handling his case was also a Stanford alumnus, had a similar background to Turner, and had a history of victim-blaming in previous sexual assault cases (Stack 2016). However, Turner's greatest advantage was his privilege as a straight white man who came from money and had connections to powerful people.

Nevertheless, the fact that Turner was physically caught in the act, as well as his changing story and attempts to flee the

crime scene, presented barriers to the well-natured persona he attempted to build. Turner's lenient sentencing also inspired nationwide outrage and revolt that helped minimize the effectiveness of his community's general support.

There were two very different kinds of audiences for Turner's letter. The first was the individual the letter was addressed to, Judge Aaron Persky. Still, once all court documents became available—as is usually the custom in California cases—the general public was able to read Turner's words as well as the words of the victim and various statements from both sides.

Soon his words were everywhere; in just one weekend, over five million people read his letter (Stack 2016). This led to national indignation and petitioning, as Turner's carefully written statements were torn to shreds to reveal flimsy narcissism.

The first strategy Turner employs in his letter to the judge is a strange form of denial, or more specifically, a shifting of the blame. While it sounds like he takes credit for what happened that night when he says, "I am the sole proprietor of what happened on the night that these people's lives were changed forever," his choice of wording and continual blame on alcohol reveal the truth (Jackson 2016).

Again and again, Turner admits to drinking too much and giving in to the party atmosphere; however, he never outright calls his actions sexual assault. In fact, he never even writes the words rape or assault anywhere in the letter. Instead, he uses friendlier jargon like "actions" and "course of events" (Jackson 2016). Rather than facing the consequences of sexu-

ally assaulting an unconscious person, Turner repeatedly apologizes for letting his drinking get out of hand. By taking away the attention from the assault by brushing it under the rug and ignoring it, he manipulates the narrative to one about underage drinking getting out of hand. This strategy is ultimately unsuccessful, as when the letter is read by the general public, thousands are outraged that he refused to acknowledge the assault and his public image becomes justly tainted.

This shifting of blame onto alcohol and party culture is also a provocation strategy. Turner leaned heavily on alcohol's reputation of impairing judgment to make his case. He even goes so far as to say, "People make decisions based on the substances they have consumed" (Jackson 2016). Though this ignores the millions of people who get drunk and do not sexually assault unconscious individuals, by blaming his drunkenness, he sets himself up to be another victim in the scenario.

Multiple times throughout the letter, Turner calls out the party atmosphere he fell victim to and ultimately uses it as a scapegoat for his actions. He writes, "At this point in my life, I never want to have a drop of alcohol again" (Superior Court 2016). His words imply that the sexual assault was entirely alcohol's fault and that if he stays away from it in the future, he won't be a danger to society.

Turner also calls out the victim and attempts to shift some of the blame onto her. He does this by calling into question the "sexual promiscuity" he was confronted with at these parties, thus victim-blaming. With this evasion of guilt, his goal is to completely remove himself from the equation in the audience's mind and twist the narrative to frame alcohol as the

villain in this situation.

Following his refusal to call his actions assault, Turner then attempts to minimize the offensiveness of the act. He does this by bolstering or emphasizing all his contributions to society and his good character.

The first thing Turner brings up is his skill at swimming, something many newspapers also referenced in their reporting of the trial, and ultimately something that led to his lenient sentencing (Xu 2016). By putting his swimming and scholarly accolades front and center, he draws attention away from the actual crime of assault and builds himself up as a positive contributor to society.

Next, Turner moves on to his Stanford acceptance and the bright future he had always envisioned for himself, including obtaining a college degree and competing in the Olympics. The final piece of character fodder he attempts is bringing up his lack of run-ins with police and clean lifestyle. He writes, "Before this happened, I never had any trouble with law enforcement, and I plan on maintaining that" (Jackson 2016). However, multiple court documents show that he had previously been stopped by police for underage drinking and had been mixing drugs for years on end, making this bolstering attempt ineffective (Xu 2016).

After he denies the assault and blames his overindulgence of alcohol on party culture, Turner then attempts to employ a corrective strategy. He first swears to never drink again or put himself in a position that could cause someone harm. Then he promises that if he were granted parole, he would be a

positive influence on society.

Seeing as, in Turner's narrative of events, drinking was his only mistake, his corrective actions revolve around raising awareness on the dangers of alcoholism. He promises to "make it [his] life's mission" to spread the word on the destructive influences of peer pressure, college party atmospheres, sexual promiscuity, and general alcohol use (Jackson 2016). He also mentions visiting college campuses around the nation to tell his story in hopes that it will be a deterrence to future students. Since none of these are actual solid plans, rather just vapid statements that offer no follow-through, this strategy can be deemed ineffective.

Throughout the letter, Turner also references his mortification. However, his mortification seems to be mostly focused on the things he lost rather than any concern for his victim. While Turner does offer a throwaway line about how bad he feels that his actions caused emotional stress for another human, he hardly references her or her pain throughout the rest of the letter.

Instead, he chooses to highlight the sheer number of things that have been taken from him, including a chance to swim in the Olympics, the opportunity to graduate from Stanford, multiple job offers, and privacy. Turner then goes on to list the physical ailments he is suffering from because of the "unwarranted attention" his case has gotten. These include a lack of appetite, inability to sleep, and general loss of enjoyment in life. His mortification is solely based on the consequences of his actions rather than the actual actions themselves, making this strategy ineffective.

After Judge Persky charged Turner with six months in county jail—he faced 14 years and only ended up serving three months—Californians were especially outraged and led a campaign to recall Persky for leniency and the inability to recognize his own bias.

The campaign was ultimately successful, and Persky became the first Californian judge in over 86 years to be recalled (Kaplan 2018). The state of California also expanded its definition of rape and imposed a minimum prison sentence because of Turner's case (Ford 2016). This ensures that no judge can give lenient sentencing based on personal biases, and sexual assailants can no longer get off scot-free due to money or influence.

Besides the six months of incarceration, Turner also was sentenced to three years of probation, committed to the national sex offender registry, made to participate in a sex offender rehabilitation program, and engaged in alcohol counseling (Xu 2016). He was banned from ever stepping foot on Stanford grounds and cannot compete for America in any sporting event.

These repercussions, as well as his inability to accept proper blame, will follow him for the rest of his life, as they well should. Turner's attempts to maximize his advantages by playing to his good character failed due to his apparent lack of remorse for his victim and just how obscene the assault was. His barriers, running from the scene of the crime and lying on record, could also not be overcome by his flowery language and attempted apologia.

Though granted a lenient sentence, Turner still faces a lifetime of fractured privacy, and his name will be synonymous with privilege and assault for years to come.

Millions of people nationwide and thousands internationally are aware of his face, his name, and his actions. It is clear from the multitude of protests, walkouts, and efforts to recall the judge who helped him that the general public has turned against him. He also lost his many future prospects, including a Stanford degree, the ability to represent the U.S. in swimming, and multiple job opportunities.

While none of these well-deserved consequences are on par with the tremendous trauma Jane Doe will carry with her, they are still life-altering, and there can be no doubt that Turner's life post-assault will never be as grand as he hoped. Due to the lifelong consequences he faces, his attempts at apologia can ultimately be deemed ineffective, even though they helped grant him a shorter prison sentence.

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questions to consider

1. Would Turner's case be helped any with effective attempts at apologia, or would the assault itself prove to be too damning to garner sympathy?

2. Throughout his letter, Turner avoided addressing the assault itself unless absolutely necessary. Why do you think he chose to do so? Is there any way he could've addressed the assault in a way that would have helped his case?

3. Turner spoke of attempted reconciliation through denouncement of certain lifestyles and potential talks to other youth. The author describes these attempts as vapid statements that led to an ineffective apologia. What would a more concrete, effective apologia look like? And how could Turner express that?

4. These charges against Turner were especially heinous compared to his sentence. How do you feel Turner ineffectively used apologia in a way that effectively leaned on his privilege toward successful means?

LAUREN TEXTOR
Education as a Confirmation of Identity:
An Interview with Professor Jim McKusick

The first thing that a student might notice about Professor Jim McKusick's office space is that the desk is not in the center of the room. It is set up against the right wall so that there is no barrier between professor and student. This facilitates a conversational air that is also typical of the classes that McKusick teaches.

It isn't hard to guess that McKusick is an English professor. He uses colorful phrases and asks his students open-ended questions. He's happy with papers and conversations that veer off topic as long as they are interesting and promote learning. He wears a vest over his long-sleeve button ups. His bookshelf is filled with thick and intimidating-looking volumes.

However, McKusick didn't always know that English would be his path. For him, education was a confirmation of identity and a journey of self-discovery. Over time, he came to love his discipline, his research, and his experiences teaching. Rather than locking him into a cycle of efficiency and rote memorization, education allowed McKusick to expand his sense of identity.

McKusick completed his undergraduate degree at Dartmouth. During his freshman year, he took a course called Difficult Poetry. He describes it as "the most horrendously difficult

course I had ever encountered in my whole life." He says it gave him nightmares, but it also changed the trajectory of his career.

"From that moment on, I was hooked," McKusick said. "I said, 'Wow. First of all, no matter how many years I work, I'm never going to master this discipline. There's always going to be something new to learn and there's always going to be some unexpected twist, some curveball that gets thrown at you, some mongrel cat that comes out of the bag.'"

As a direct result of this revelation, McKusick changed his major: "I remember the day. I marched down to the registrar's office and I said, 'I'm going to be an English major!' And they said, 'Okay, sign here.' But to me, it was a life-changing thing. I was suddenly turning my back on the family expectations that I would go out and be a good droid. I was going to be a fully-rounded human being and an English major. That was like an assertion of my identity and my aspirations and my life story. That was a watershed moment for me. And I've never looked back. I'm always happy with that decision."

Especially as an English major, research became an important part of McKusick's life. He compares it to leaping from one ice floe to another with the knowledge that you might slip and fall at any point. The unexpectedness can be frightening, but McKusick also found it invigorating.

He went on to get his master's degrees and Ph.D. at Yale, where he was amazed at the number of books in the library. He found it empowering that he could ask a question and then search for the answer himself. He put these new skills

into action by tracking down a Samuel Taylor Coleridge poem that had never been published before. His transcription was published alongside his critical analysis in a leading academic journal while he was an assistant professor, which helped his career take off. He views it as a fishing expedition. It required planning and capability, but it was also an adventure.

McKusick's 1986 book *Coleridge's Philosophy of Language* expanded on his interest in the poet. University of California's Robert Essick describes McKusick's writing as "straightforward and unpretentious" (164). Essick praises the book, especially the last chapter, which he found to be the "most intellectually challenging" (165). McKusick's enthusiasm for a specific topic enabled him to dig deep into the historic and linguistic traits of Coleridge's work, furthering his career.

The excitement of research did not immediately translate into an enthusiasm for teaching. McKusick figured that he would end up as a faculty member and acknowledged that knowing how to properly teach would be useful, but says that he was at first grumpy about the prospect. With some guiding examples from his mentors, he soon found his own style.

McKusick said, "It just dawned upon me—this is a truism, but for me it was new information––teaching is not about conveying information to other people, teaching the facts. It's about conveying skills. It's about enabling them to do things that they never dreamed they would be capable of. That's the thing that's also the most difficult thing about teaching. It's so easy to give a lecture and impart information. It's really hard to inspire students to the level of effort that's needed to acquire a new skill."

According to "Interactive Teaching Methods in Higher Education" by Nadezhda Yakovleva and Evgeny Yakovlev, a classroom setting should ensure student participation and create a "relaxed, democratic atmosphere" (76).

As described in the article, it's important to facilitate respect and trust between students and faculty members. The article outlines a variety of methods for creating a collaborative classroom environment, but McKusick has his own that work well for him. To a degree, he allows students to steer classroom conversations to topics of personal interest. For example, in 18th Century Studies, he answers questions about the personal lives of authors and their relationships to their historic environment. He invites students to think critically and consider historical figures within the context of their time. In his lecture over Samuel Pepys, he talked with students about the similarities between the plague that Pepys experienced during his own lifetime and the current Covid-19 pandemic.

Among faculty and students alike, McKusick is a favorite, perhaps because of his animated nature. Every topic that he discusses appears to be one of personal interest. He welcomes tangents as long as students can turn it into a learning experience. While some professors find getting students to participate in class discourse to be like pulling teeth, McKusick usually has plenty of volunteers. On the first day of class, he often has students make themselves paper name tags to set on their desks, and he makes one for himself too. The simplest parts of his teaching methods are the most effective.

McKusick has worked at UMKC since 2015 and has worked in

education in a variety of positions for several decades, but he seems anything but tired. In conversation, he is constantly on the verge of new discoveries big and small. Every aspect of life is like a new opportunity for research.

"Sometimes the thing that you find least promising—the mistake, the failure—is the thing that's most interesting," McKusick said. "That's going to lead to the most powerful discovery of your career, that's going to change the world."

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questions to consider

1. The beginning of this essay mentions McKusick's desk being in the corner of the room, therefore facilitating a conversational atmosphere. Why is this an important detail to bring up to start the piece?

2. Many of the lessons in McKusick's education and career come from, as he says, mistakes and failure. Is this something that others can relate to? Or is this something unique to him?

3. Reviews of McKusick's book lauded it as straightforward, unpretentious, and intellectually challenging. Based on what is seen in this piece, how does that reflect in his teaching?

notes on contributors

Ariej Rafiq is beginning her second year as a student in UM-KC's six-year BA/MD program, pursuing a Bachelor of Liberal Arts degree with a minor in chemistry. As a future physician, she reflects deeply on the cultural and social aspects of medicine as they relate to a patient's holistic well-being. Originally from St. Louis, she enjoys nature, traveling, reading, spending time with her family, and expressing her artistic talents. She is a black belt in martial arts and has experience speaking Spanish, Japanese, and Arabic.

Caroline Cooper is a sophomore at UMKC, 20 years old, and from St. Louis. She is pursuing a degree in marketing and minoring in psychology. She is very passionate about providing knowledge on the LGBTQIA+ experience.

David McDonald graduated from University Academy in 2022. He took dual credit English 110, where his essay served as a reflection of his literacy journey. David will be studying sociology at Bowdoin College in 2022.

Jamaiyah Amerison is a high school senior at University Academy. She plans to major in political science at Harris

Stowe State University this fall. She enjoyed reminiscing about the ups and downs of literacy and how it has become the center of her life.

Keisha Kodidhi was raised in Missouri, just outside of Kansas City. She is majoring in biology and minoring in Spanish in UMKC's BA/MD program. In her free time, she enjoys reading, spending countless hours scrolling on TikTok, practicing photography, and hanging out with friends. In the future, she hopes to become a physician and travel the world.

Lauren Textor is a senior English major at UMKC. Her poems have appeared in *Number One Magazine* and her research essay on the benefits of art programming in prison has been published in *Lucerna*. Currently, she writes for alternative news magazine *The Pitch*, as well as *Her Campus*. Lauren enjoys hiking, paddle boarding, and her own poor attempts at cooking.

Liddy Scurato is a freshman at UMKC and a Bloch Launchpad scholar. She is majoring in business administration with an emphasis in marketing. Liddy is also the communications chair for Delta Zeta sorority, which entails running all social media for her chapter. She enjoys fashion and shoes and loves to travel. She plans to pursue marketing for a fashion or cosmetics brand after graduating.

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