

*SUTRO REVIEW*

SF State Journal for Undergraduate Composition

Volume One

Spring 2016

Front Cover Photo by Daniel Miramontes  
Junior, Studio Art & Cinema, San Francisco State University

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Dear Readers,

We are proud to present the premier issue of *Sutro Review: SF State Journal for Undergraduate Composition*, an academic journal produced by graduate students devoted to publishing undergraduate students at San Francisco State University.

*Sutro Review* celebrates the diverse and talented voices among undergraduates at SF State and aims to share those voices with the broader learning community. Our first issue includes twenty student essays from a variety of class levels and disciplines, as well as showcases some the teaching faculty who innovated those good works. Essays include a rich palette of topics: from adapting to college, body image expectations, and cell phone addiction, to computational chemistry, existentialism, and Beirut... to name a few! In short, we provide a glimpse into the broad spectrum of writing being done for a range of undergraduate courses at our university.

Special thanks goes to English Department Chair, Sugie Goen-Salter, Director of Composition, Tara Lockhart, and the SFSU Instructionally Related Activities Fund for making this project possible.

We hope you enjoy reading!

Sincerely,  
Sutro Editors

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Danuta Mazurek  
Michael Pablo Stevens



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# *FRESHMEN*

Alexa Almira  
**Don't Listen to Them**

*ABOUT THE AUTHOR:*

Alexa Almira is a first-year student from San Mateo working toward a major in Ecology at San Francisco State University. Although she ultimately belongs in nature, reaching the conclusion that she wanted to become an ecologist was not easy. She went from being a Dietetics/Nutrigenomics major, to an Experimental Animation major, to an English Literature major before finally deciding to go with Ecology. In her spare time, she makes certain that all of these different interests stay present in her life. For example, she just finished working on her most recent stop-motion claymation short film called “Forgive Me,” which involved a handmade cherry blossom tree and replica of her kitchen all made from clay.

Alexa has spent a good portion of her life reading and writing fiction in both English and Spanish. She has been working on her most recent novelette *One Way Ticket To Mars* for the past two years. Just a few of her favorite fictional works include *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood, *Black Tickets* by Jayne Anne Phillips, and *A Moveable Feast* by Ernest Hemingway. She loves analyzing and discussing pretty much any piece of fiction, so if you see her around and want to engage in an awesome discussion about a book you've read, please do not hesitate to approach her. She's very friendly.

*COMMENT FROM GTA, RENATO ESCUDERO:*

Alexa chose to present an argumentative essay (with research) on the most difficult and convoluted writing assignment of our semester together. In a nutshell, the prompt was: “Is imitation of Standard Edited English or Formal Academic Writing enough for new academic writers? Or must we appropriate a genre and its conventions to really gain membership into [...] a specific academic discourse community?” Almira gave me an earlier draft of the paper, and I marked the margins up and down. I wasn't simply giving her feedback; I was completely engrossed in conversation with the author. This work shows that the thinker producing it is engaged in the topic to the point that she transcends the prompt and starts asking questions that I want to know the answer to as a reader and a scholar. The revision demonstrated even more depth and development. Her investigation leads Almira to synthesize, analyze and evaluate issues not only of imitation, appropriation, language and conventions, but also of the politics of the education system itself and how students can empower themselves to navigate successfully in academia.

Formal Academic English has been deemed the standard dialect when teaching students how to read and write successfully. Educators across the country under an education system funded by the government use imitation as the main method for teaching their students how to write in a way that will allow them to achieve success in the larger community. Despite this said promise of achieving academic success, new student writers should not learn based solely off of imitation because it hinders their ability to use the power of their individual voices. Using Formal Academic English can restrict student choice. Pure imitation negatively encourages students to succumb to the rigid rules of Standard Academic English in a way that prevents them from criticizing texts they come across, which also contributes to the lack of personal voice in their writing. Students, instead, should be taught to meld bits and pieces of writing styles together to create their own personal style of writing. Appropriation, in turn, will give the students the tools necessary to challenge authority, which will help them have more confidence and authority over their own work.

Imitation is an important skill to have when going through the process of learning how to write, because it serves as foundation. New student writers need to start from somewhere and see examples of what society has so deemed “good writing” – authors who have published their works successfully. It is very important for students to have an understanding of the general template that comes with writing academic essays, a template with its own set of general rules differentiating itself from other pieces of writing such as fiction, poetry, and drama. Imitating the writing styles of many different writers allows students to get comfortable with writing in general. Dedicating a student’s entire academic writing career to copying the same stylistic skills as these other writers and teaching him or her to strictly adhere to the rules of Standard Academic English, however, actually leads a student to drive down a path away from the road to success. Instead of conveying new or important messages to readers using original ideas and rhetorical devices, the student will spend a lot of time copying styles and ideas that already exist. He or she will continue to be stuck in a place that prevents creativity and original ideas.

The act of purely imitating only gives new student writers false depictions of what *supposedly* good and proper writing should look like. Many educators reinforce the ways of writing Standard Academic English either because they themselves were taught that way, or because the institution for which they work puts up restrictions for teaching students otherwise. San



Francisco State University is one of many schools under the California State University System. One professor of English from SFSU (who asked to stay anonymous) explicitly expressed to his first-year composition class that even if he wanted to teach how to do rhetorical analyses of literature or do more to teach first-year writing classes in a way that would give students more freedom to express who they are without the rules of Academic English, he was restricted by the rules the CSU system had in place for what he needed to teach his students. Standard Academic English was one of them.

Richard Boyd, author of “Imitate Me; Don’t Imitate Me,” supports the idea of many teachers feeling an obligation to teach students to trust in Standard Academic English. He notes that “Teachers are invested with the responsibility of introducing students to a set of codes and conventions that will permit novice writers to enter into a new, and purportedly empowering, discourse community” (Boyd 335). Many educators teach students from the beginning of their writing careers how to write in Standard Academic English. They enforce rules that dictate the number of paragraphs or main points that are required in order for an essay to be considered strong (Rose). I remember as a fourth and fifth grader being introduced to the “burger template” for writing paragraphs and short essays: the top bun was for the introduction paragraph, the meat patty was the thickest part which was representative of your three body paragraphs, and the bottom bun was the conclusion. As a result, new student writers get very little exposure, if any, to the idea of taking creative license with their work. Student writing becomes mindless writing because purely copying is like memorizing an equation to solve a math problem. Writing is much more fluid, as there is always room to tweak or completely alter an idea or thought. Having students become accustomed to writing like robots and using the same template without room for interpretation prevents them from creating pieces of writing that are important to them; they never really get to enter the process of exploring what their voices and their ideas combined are capable of producing.

If students are continually taught early on in their collegiate career how to write uniformly in Standard Academic English for the sake of supposedly empowering themselves to swiftly blend into a certain discourse community, then these students will spend years trying to become something they are not. Students may never get a chance to create a personal voice, nor will they be able to convey a message they want to get across to an audience of their choice. Strictly imitating Formal Academic English will only allow

students to reach a limited audience, which is usually the professor, since they are more fluent in writing Standard English.

Professors and higher-level educators make up the audience Standard Academic English was meant to reach. If that's the case, then what's the point of writing? What about the countless other kinds of audiences that exist in the world that perhaps cannot relate to standard academic English? Yes, in order to be taken seriously in an academic society a writer must learn to write using some form of Standard English. However, each student should learn to go beyond the ways of copying and take the liberty to appropriate the writing, take different techniques and rhetorical devices, and transform them to make it their own. Once the student makes it their own, they then have the ability to emit feeling into such a seemingly dull form of writing and convey the messages they want to get across. The Cambridge School of Rhetoric dedicates their entire curriculum to the study of rhetoric. They are a highly regarded, private high school in San Diego, California that believes that in order for a student to succeed in the academic writing world, their writing must be written with

...eloquence, imagination, beauty and persuasion. Lab reports, literature papers and exam essays all make use of rhetorical skill. The Cambridge School students study rhetoric by the principal means of theory, imitation and practice. They study the theory of rhetoric via texts on rhetoric (like Aristotle's Rhetoric). By carefully studying the "masters" of oratory and writing, students learn how to imitate these masters, appropriating the techniques and devices they discover for their own use (Cambridge School of Rhetoric website).

Instead of striving to simply copy the styles of highly regarded individuals, such as a professor or Aristotle in this case, the school encourages students to use creativity and find a voice of their own in order to utilize writing as a powerful tool. Students are encouraged to "appropriate" the techniques they discover and use them to help convey the messages they ultimately want to get across to the audience of their choice.

Once a student learns how to use appropriation to pick and choose what they personally want to get out of the rules or stylistic choices of a specific author or text, they will develop the skills necessary to criticize and question authority. Helping students learn how to criticize a piece of published writing can certainly show them how to view their own work critically and

analytically “--in the context of institutional requirements and expectations, the power relations in a classroom and outside of the classroom, and their own aims as writers and even as citizens who will want to write” (Slevin 141). Slevin is emphasizing that writing is something far more valuable than a requirement taught in the classroom environment. Writing is a powerful tool that can be used to change the way people view this world. Even the Cambridge School of Rhetoric looks up to Aristotle as a powerful influence simply because of the way he chose to express his ideas through writing, not because he’s a famous historical figure.

The American education system, however, trains educators working under its system to teach students how to copy work written in Standard Academic English, and sets up a false image of success for those students. The system falsely depicts an image of academic acceptance and high regard for personal works as successful *if* students strictly follow the way already well-regarded authors and writers have written their pieces. If students stick to copying the styles of these authors, they too, will be deemed “successful” by their teachers. As a result, students will always strive to find the kind of success that doesn’t actually exist. They take it as it is and try to achieve the respect of professors with a quality of work that already exists, instead of inquiring about what *pieces* of a published author is strong writing. The education system is set up with a focus on mimicry so that students know from the minute they learn how to spell “cat” that the rigid rules of writing in Standard Academic English are the only right way to write, in order to fit into a homogenous society where everyone strives for unoriginality. Students must be taught to question authority, to question the validity of a published work and question why the work is so highly regarded to begin with. It’s as if asking for imitation from students is a small price to pay for supposed success and acceptance in a certain discourse community (Arrington). However, giving up the freedom to express oneself through original ideas and personal writing styles for the sake of easy acceptance is a very large price to pay.

Students who question authority and the validity of published texts have the power to transform their own writing in a way that can pretty powerfully convey their own messages and priorities. Having strength and power in writing would definitely help in the event that a student writes an argumentative essay, for example, where their goal is to sway the stance of the intended audience. Achieving this kind of power, however, can only be reached when he or she learns to appropriate the texts. Although the process of appropriation involves imitation, it should only be used in the beginning

stages as a way of practicing and getting a feel for new kinds of writing styles. Appropriation primarily consists of extracting personally meaningful bits and pieces of each text that a student can then use to incorporate into the formation of their own writing style.

In Penrose and Geisler's "Reading and Writing without Authority," a comparison of writing styles between two students, Roger and Janet, is analyzed. One student in particular, Roger, is deemed the student to follow, as he has learned how to criticize pieces in a way that will move his writing forward – "Roger's goal of sorting and evaluating the various claims in the literature enabled him to detect controversies in the readings and to recognize these controversies as critical areas for his own work" (Penrose, Geisler 511). Roger used his criticizing skills to "evaluate" and test the validity of the research he was using, which he then used to enrich the details and findings in his own essay. With skills that enable and encourage questioning authority, students can more easily detect not only controversies, but also contradictions in these works that may end up decreasing the level of trust he or she had at the beginning of reading the article.

Unlike Roger, Janet's essay did not offer new ideas or points of views or criticism on the research she had done. She simply stated what she literally found in the research and did not indicate what she herself had gotten out of the research (Penrose and Geisler). Oftentimes students are brainwashed and, like Janet, automatically assume that every piece of published writing that gets handed to them is true simply because it has been published. This is certainly not the case for everything published. If students learn to criticize the validity of a text, then they will exercise their brain enough to open new doors that will lead them to ultimately think for themselves. Questioning the works of authors, regardless of who they are, will only strengthen the writing of an individual because it will encourage the student to think outside the box, to think of newer or better ways of writing to an audience of their choice. For example, if a student wants to share the discoveries he or she has found after conducting an experiment pertaining to the negative effects of watching television up close to a group of 7th graders, then he or she needs to get more creative when it comes to the way the essay is written. He or she will need to alter the diction, word choice, and sentence structure of the essay so that the essay can reach and stick with that group of 7th graders. If students are able to alter and transform their style so as to convey an important message to audiences of their choice, they will ultimately reach true success.

Appropriation is crucial when writing because it gives young student writers the opportunity to use their own writing style and unique voice to criticize and convey messages they personally think are important. Once new students are able to turn imitation into appropriation, they will be granted the opportunity to gain power through their own writing if they have an important message to share. Imitation is meant to prevent students from gaining any sort of power through their writing. Teaching appropriation whenever possible, however, will help the student find success in writing in a way that will lead them to write for a purpose. Taking bits and pieces of writing styles and rhetorical devices they like will help students form their own ways of writing. Being able to reach the audiences of their choice will allow students to write using a wider range of styles and not just the uniform style that often times comes with the teaching of Standard Academic English.

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Elizabeth Peterson  
**Not So Shitty First Drafts**

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:**

Elizabeth Peterson is a first year student who recently transferred to Palomar College. She had intended to major in Kinesiology to become an athletic trainer but was inspired to study Child Development with a minor in Special Education to become a teacher.

English has always been Elizabeth's favorite subject. She loves reading and writing. Some of her favorite books include *The Great Gatsby*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and *The Longest Ride*. Although she likes serious novels, she's a sucker for romance and mystery novels. In her free time she loves reading new and old books, going to the beach, and being with her friends and family. Elizabeth is beyond grateful and excited to share her work with other students and peers through the Sutro Journal.

**COMMENT FROM GTA, RENATO ESCUDERO:**

Elizabeth Peterson's paper impressed me because of the author's crafty take on the 5-Paragraph essay. In fact, after reading it I felt I had to rethink my prejudice on this very basic genre of academic writing. Peterson was not without a sense of irony as she composed this piece, because she acknowledges the limitations of "standard essays" as taught at secondary education institutions, while delivering her message in a squeaky clean "standard essay." Her task was to share something "new" about the writing process to an incoming class of college freshmen, who have mostly been exposed to standard essays. Many students coming into college have no idea about process, and we tell them that the 5-paragraph essay is one of those "rigid rules" that Mike Rose so famously warns us against. However, Peterson demonstrates that craft and style are much more important and meaningful than genre; that we can write complex thoughts in the most basic essay format.

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In college, you are given the opportunity to broaden your horizons – not only within yourself, but your academic skills as well. Throughout our secondary education, we are taught how to write standard essays. Teachers emphasize the importance of making your writing "perfect" and enforcing rules surrounding mechanics. After reading "Shitty First Drafts" by Ann Lamott, my perspective changed quite a bit. As an incoming freshman, it can

be frightening to be assigned your first writing prompt in English class, simply because you aren't sure how to approach the project. Lamott illustrates for us a perfect picture of the value that imperfections in a first draft hold, whether you're a college freshman or a professional writer. There are three important points we need to remember as evolving writers: both time and erasers are our friends, peer evaluation is crucial, and everyone has a different writing process.

Writing an essay shouldn't be crammed into a single day. In order to not go crazy by looking at a piece of paper or computer screen all night, take the essay one day at a time. A good essay will take time to compose. Try planning on writing one or two pages a day, depending on the time allotted to complete the task. Your draft will not be perfect, and there will be scribbles on the page, and yes, the backspace button will be heavily used. Using these tools is okay. While writing, Lamott would "write a couple of dreadful sentences, xx them out, try again, [and] xx everything out..." (94). It is rare that someone will have a "first-draft-wonder" – it is okay to make mistakes.

As a college freshman, you will be making an abundance of friends, and be introduced to new peers. This is helpful because you need someone to revise your drafts. Worries aside, always have three to four people look over your essays. Peer review is a very helpful tool. I personally always have a friend, a relative, and a teacher look over my work. Don't be afraid to hear criticism – feedback will always help in more than one way. It is important that you don't get too attached to your work because nearly one hundred percent of the time, the final draft will be insanely different than the first one. More than likely, you will receive varying opinions from different readers regarding your paper. Pick and choose wisely from their feedback. Change can be a great thing for writing, and often makes your writing stronger.

I understand that everyone has a different process of going about his or her writing, and that my tips may seem to apply less to yours, but make sure that *your process works for you*. Some people write out long outlines and others just go with the flow. Find your groove and, more importantly, stick with it. Even Lamott knows "some very great writers, writers you love who write beautifully and have made a great deal of money, and not one of them sits down routinely feeling wildly enthusiastic and confident" (93). Forget about the stress, the anxiety, and the pounding headache you get when you don't know what else to write. Why forget these things? Because this is your shitty first draft and nothing about it needs to be amazing. As weird as it may

seem, you will likely come up with an idea that can be completely altered by the end of the first paragraph. Plan accordingly and be flexible so that the essay is easy to edit if needed – these two lessons should stick with you regardless of your process.

Overall, first drafts are nothing to worry about, even though everyone seems so wrapped up in them. As freshmen, we all make mistakes and need feedback. Always make sure you get a peer or teacher to revise your work before turning in your final paper. Don't be worried about time and use whatever process is a good match for you. Write out an outline, jot down some ideas, or lay in bed at night trying to think of what to say. No matter it's your process, your draft will not, I repeat, will not, be perfect – but that's okay! The key to develop your writing is to take a chill pill, get comfortable, **and start writing**. Your work can only get better after the first draft.

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Christine Thomas  
**Letter to My English Teacher from the Philippines**

*ABOUT THE AUTHOR:*

Christine Page Thomas was born and raised in the city of Makati, located in one of the larger islands of the Philippines. She is a freelance artist and writer, who is also the proud owner of two cats named Pastrami and Rye. She lives in Hayward, CA, and is currently a freshman at San Francisco State University. She is a proud graduate of Moreau Catholic High School in Hayward and has decided to dedicate her life to speaking and exposing truths that will only lead to the betterment of society, even if it be in small portions. She is a huge Harry Potter fan, and a great person to have on your team when it comes to bowling, but she does not understand the concept of having only one blanket to use for bed. Three is the way to go. Always.

*COMMENT FROM GTA, ALEX MEJIA:*

Christine Thomas has managed to shine in an assignment that called for a deep level of reflection on her own learning and past experience. My class focused on presenting an argument, and developing strong rhetorical skills. While Christine's essay is not directly an argument, she displays her ability to make skillful use of language and voice. This essay was assigned as a way to promote metacognition in students and offer them the chance to approach their own past with a critical lens – a task in which Christine excelled. Her voice carries weight, and she leads the reader down a narrative path that is as engaging as it is reflective. Christine Thomas impressed me with her writing, and I am happy that she has a chance to showcase it in the Sutro Review.

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With your hardened glares and severe frowns that always seemed to be present, I remember you – chalk in hand and voice as loud as it could go. You taught me how to think for myself and to consider looking at things from outside the box. You scared me to the point where I almost wet myself, Miss Magpantay. Sitting in your class was something I dreaded. All you did was spout out unkind words when no one had the guts to respond to your questions, questions that never made sense to my juvenile ears. Talking to you was like being on trial: I always felt like I had to defend myself from that chilly and unapproachable stare. Looking at you – uniform perfectly pressed, skin blemish-free, and not a hair out of place – was like looking at the very image of what my own mother wanted me to become. My classmates, my friends – we were all terrified of you.

But you were a terrific teacher.

One afternoon, you assigned a five-paragraph essay that required we either agree or disagree with the actions of the protagonist from a particular story. Deceptively calm, your low voice echoed in the silent classroom. You had been walking around, tapping your pointer-stick on your open palm as if you were actually high-fiving it, congratulating its ability to instill fear in mere children. Not one of us wanted to anger you that day: all of us having been on the receiving end of your wrath just the day before.

"It will be due next class, and I expect them all to, at the very least, resemble what we often call the English language. You know my terms." As if shepherded by our collective fear, your demeanor huddled us together. Little lambs, I thought, we were all your little lambs, and you were our vindictive Mary. Of course, like all flocks of sheep, there will always be a black one.

He was a tall, dark-haired boy. His height bestowed upon him an unspoken power over the rest of the school kids. The tall boy was also smart; he appeared to receive academic awards regularly. He was powerful, smart, and he knew it. "What if, say, we decide to agree *and* disagree with the protagonist? How do we write the essay now? Like, can we do that?" His voice carried the arrogance of a smartass. Inwardly, I said my condolences to his parents, for his soul was surely going to be chewed upon.

With bated breath, we waited.

Your eyes, dark brown as they were, flashed darkness incarnate at this interruption, "Excuse me, sir, but I seem to remember mentioning how I absolutely hated those students who talk without raising their hands. Are you so special to think that you are above that rule? No?" At this point, the tall boy, put in his place, shrunk into himself, "Well, what happened with how proud and loud you sounded just a few moments before? That is the impression that I had gotten. From this point on, you are not required to do this essay and are given a zero. Now, class," she turned to address us all, "My instructions were clear: either agree or disagree with the protagonist. Choosing both is not an option."

After all these years, this event has stayed with me and has guided me through all the essays I have written since. “Choosing both is not an option” became a mantra that I did not dare disobey. Imagine my surprise when I discovered that the possibility of a third (even a fourth!) option was available. David Brooks, a well-established sociology writer, is currently a *New York Times* columnist, a *PBS NewsHour* commentator, and author of several books including *The Road to Character* and *The Social Animal*. His article, “The Olympic Contradiction,” is what opened my eyes to this new possibility that you, Miss Magpantay, have kept from me. Brooks writes that “the enduring popularity of the Olympics, teach the lesson that if you find yourself caught between two competing impulses, you don’t always need to choose between them. You can go for both simultaneously” (A23). He draws attention to the idea that two opposing things can embrace each other and coexist in order to become more successful. He argues that people do not have to become “monomaniacs,” people who choose one side of an issue while disregarding the other side.

So I say to you, Miss Magpantay, everything is not just black and white; there is room for some gray. There is a space where the two tensions blur and can coexist side-by-side. There is a place where Romeo and Juliet can safely be together despite their families’ bad blood with one another. There is a place where peace and chaos meld together to create harmony and humanity.

José Rizal, a national hero of the Philippines, considered “The First Filipino,” was a key member of the propaganda movement against Spanish colonial rule. He became popular for his writings which called for a non-violent resistance.

As I am sure you know, he is often presented as a man of many contradictions. Miguel de Unamuno, a Spanish essayist, states in “Rizal: the Tagalog Hamlet” that Rizal was “a soul that dreads the revolution although deep down desires it. He pivots between fear and hope, between faith and despair” (*Centenary*). Rizal’s own books *Noli me tangere* and *El filibusterismo* reflect these contradictions as the former opposes violence and the latter advocates it. Now tell me, Miss Magpantay, if a man as distinguished and influential as José Rizal was able to live a grey life, why did you force me to choose between black and white?

You are the epitome of the straight and narrow, but you also pride yourself on your Filipino spirit. You may not be aware of it, but I follow the

Filipino spirit too. I will become what Brooks calls a “house creatively divided against itself” and this grey life will burn, unify, and become a hero of contradictions just like Rizal (A23). Like him, I will use the power of my pen to continue muddling the lines between black and white. Because seeing in only black and white, like you taught me, Miss Magpantay, is what damned the Philippines so long ago.

Your respectful ex-student,  
Christine Thomas

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Alivia Chegia  
**Richard Rodriguez and Myself**

*ABOUT THE AUTHOR:*

Alivia is a first year student at SF State, currently an International Business major; but she hopes to change that to Communications. She was raised in Oakland and it will forever be the city she loves. Although she has loved her time at SF State, she has always wanted to live in New York City and hopes to transfer to a university there in the Fall.

This essay gave Alivia the opportunity to look at the cultural identity of being a student, something she realized she'd taken for granted. She's thrilled to have it published in *Sutro Review* and hopes you enjoy reading it as much as she enjoyed writing it!

*COMMENT FROM LECTURER, EMMA REMICK:*

For this paper, my class read Richard Rodriguez's piece "The Achievement of Desire," which explores his progression through formal schooling. His story is one of culture, family, language, and education, and sheds light on the ways that we experience education and schooling as an institutional separation from the more familiar ways we use language at home and in the world. I asked students to consider the stages and consequences of Rodriguez's educational journey in relation to their own, thinking about the ways that they use language to communicate with people both inside and outside of the university.

Alivia's paper was outstanding in that she used her own experiences to critically explore the unintentional consequences of pursuing an education. Though she had very different experiences from Rodriguez, she was able to utilize that contrast powerfully to construct a strong argument about the ways that formal schooling often asks us to choose between home and school. She worked through several drafts of this paper, and her finished piece is both compelling and insightful.

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Formal schooling is meant to allow people to learn, to be exposed to ideas and facts they would otherwise not have the chance to experience. However, when parents send their children off to school without understanding that experience, it can be hard for a child to know how school life and home life are connected. For Richard Rodriguez the divide was severe. In his essay, "The Achievement of Desire," he recalls drifting away from his family and their culture, as he immerses in a new world that his

school and teachers provide for him. Luckily, I have never had to experience that devastating dissociation between school and home. My American, middle class background made it easy for me to find balance between family and education; but Rodriguez's family could not understand or relate to the values of his formal education. And once Rodriguez entered school, he felt the only way to succeed was to abandon his connection with his culture and family that, in his eyes, held him back. Reflecting on the differences between Rodriguez's experience and my own, I have come to understand the important differences family can make to a person's academic identity.

Rodriguez's background as a child growing up in an immigrant, working-class family prevented him from experiencing the bedtime stories and afterschool tutoring that many middle-class parents are able to provide their children. Rodriguez addresses the separation that having working-class parents and a middle-class teacher creates by stating,

Good schooling requires that any student alter early childhood change. But the working-class child is usually least prepared for the change. And, unlike many middle-class children, he goes home and sees in his parents a way of life not only different but starkly opposed to that of his classroom (340).

Rodriguez's working-class parents both exhausted themselves during their long days at work, so when they returned home in the evening, they were more focused on ensuring general household upkeep as opposed to specific tasks that did not benefit the entire household, for example, preparing their son Richard for school. Their focus was to dedicate the time they had together at the end of the day to strengthening the bond between family and culture. However, Rodriguez viewed his parents inability to prepare him for school as neglectful and uncompassionate when he was younger.

A youthful Rodriguez assumed that his parents actively decided to not teach him basic reading and math skills that he would need for school, when, in reality, they did not have the ability to commit that sort of time to a son that would learn it eventually. His parents knew that they were not as qualified or educated as Rodriguez's teachers, so they did not try to teach their son because they figured that they should leave it to the professionals who were. Their own self-doubt resulted in years of frustration and disdain that Rodriguez felt towards his loving, but insecure parents. His initial resentment for his parents inability to prepare him to what he deemed the appropriate level, resulted in his whole life being spent trying to catch up for those first few years that he lagged behind.

After Rodriguez's initial frustration towards his parents inability to prepare him for school the way he would have liked, he begins to focus his

attention on how he can strengthen his skills so he will never feel as unprepared as he did before. Rodriguez displays the internal battle between loving and despising his parents by speaking broadly about the concept of a “scholarship boy,” whom describes as,

...enormously obedient to the dictates of the world of school, but emotionally still strongly wants to continue as part of the family circle. Gradually, necessarily, the balance is lost....He takes his first step toward academic success, away from his family (341).

By addressing how he desired to remain close to his family Rodriguez reveals that he embodies the conflicted but driven working class student. Every child admires and looks up to their parents; however, when something as influential, important and constant as school becomes an opposing force, it is difficult for children to distinguish which of the two should be given priority.

Rodriguez initially distances himself from his family because he views time spent with them as time spent not learning. However, as he becomes older, he begins to recognize that he associates avoiding his family as a way of becoming a better student. It became habitual for him as a child to hide out in his room, speaking only to his parents when necessary, but as he gets older, these habits continue because they have been nurtured throughout Rodriguez’s scholarly career. The connection between family and school for Rodriguez had not been made at an early age as it is for many children. This missing connection is the driving reason as to why he became so drastically absorbed with his education, and so deeply removed from his family.

Because time spent at home drops dramatically when a student enters their formal schooling, how they view the relationship between their home and school life will affect the ways in which they will behave towards each setting. Rodriguez’s parents are not people with astounding educational backgrounds or impressive degrees. Although their education has only a small association to their Mexican heritage, young Rodriguez comes to understand that the main reason his parents were not educationally successful is because of their culture and language.

Realizing that culture and language are what held his parents back, Rodriguez settles on believing that only way he can become a better student is to separate himself from all distractions, thereby including his family and his culture. He avoids participating in anything relating to his culture, including speaking Spanish, because he views his life at home as distracting from his educational goals. Rodriguez’s view of his parents as individuals

who stifled his educational journey caused him to pursue a life devoid of what he believed to be, a distracting family, and, in return, his culture.

In my own experience, my family's dedication to my learning starting from when I was young and now as a result, has granted me an understanding that a person should not have to choose between family and school, rather, both should be able to coexist naturally and comfortably in a student's life. My devotion to my parents is an effect of their devotion to me and their ability to ease me into my schooling, as opposed to dropping me in without preparation the way Rodriguez was.

My family has always put pressure on me regarding my grades as a way of ensuring that I always put my education first. However, my parents always held themselves as examples for what I should strive for academically. For example, when I was younger my father would sit next to my bed and give me math problems to do before I fell asleep, his version of a bedtime story. Similarly, my mother would read stories to me, allowing me to have strong reading skills by the time I began my formal schooling.

Rodriguez was not as lucky as I. When his companion told him about how his parents read him stories before bed Rodriguez asked, "what is it like?" (343). He never experienced the admiration a child experiences when their parents teach them something new. The compassion and love that reading a bedtime story provides a child is something that forms how they view their parents in relation to their education. Rodriguez's parents had to focus on providing for the family financially, so by the time they returned home at the end of the day, they did not have the energy to entertain their son. My parents, on the other hand, would spend time with me starting from when they got off of work, all the way until it was time for me to sleep at night because they had the luxury of not having to be concerned about our finances. My middle-class parents used the time they spent with me to bridge the connection between school-life and home-life, thereby creating my understanding that school can and should always be properly complemented by home. I came to believe that parents should remain as figures of knowledge who can also act as a source of safety that a child can confide in. whether that means with their schoolwork, personal problems, or anything else, parents are the first people a child will admire.

Only once I began my upper division high school classes were my parents unable to help me with my schoolwork. I remember one night when I asked my mother to edit my paper, she said that it was "fine" and the only suggestions she had were about grammar. I walked away from that encounter, confused and concerned with how my mother could accept this rough draft as being the best paper it could be. I realized for the first time that maybe my



parents were unable to understand what I spent eight hours a day working on at school. Simply put, what I was learning was above their heads, and because they had jobs that did not require they learn new information, they had no reason to struggle through helping me with my calculus; resulting in me realizing for the first time that I was no longer able to bond with my parents over my schoolwork.

Although my parents were not able to keep up with me academically, because of the foundation they provided me when I was younger that caused me to closely associate school and home, I never drifted away from them in the way that Rodriguez did. I always consulted them about problems with friends or teachers, and I even did my homework in the kitchen with the hope that my physical presence would display my emotional presence, even when I was working on something separate.

Even though I have always admired my mother and father for their knowledge, I can understand how Rodriguez had a harder time maintaining healthy relationships with his parents when his schoolwork took such an opposing stance to his family life. For him to be a good student, he had to build his own understanding of how to be successful; and for him that meant building a wall between his school interests and his family and culture at home. He learned to think of school and home as separate worlds. Because the foundation my parents laid for me when I was a child taught me that school is welcomed inside our home, I have always understood that if it were not for my parents and their ability to be present through my education, I would not be able to be who I am today.

When relating myself to Rodriguez, it seems to me that his relationship between home and school originated from the disconnect that was created by isolating himself from his culture and family at a young age, because he believed that was what he needed to do to succeed in school. However, as a graduate student he came to realize that he missed his family, resulting in an understanding that their relationship did not need to dissipate if they emphasized the value of education before he began his formal schooling. This particular realization happened too late in his life, at a time when there was nothing left to do, but reflect on how his behavior in the past shaped who he is today. Even now, while I am in college, I talk to my parents quite often about my schoolwork and extracurricular activities. Although Rodriguez did not outright discuss it, I am almost sure that he did not call his parents while he was in college to discuss his biology lectures. Rodriguez and I have very little in common when it comes to academics and our relationships to our families; however, I can empathize with his desire to strengthen his weaknesses, and can see how this led him away from his family. Even though

it may be too late for him to begin his academic career again, he can strengthen the bond with his family by reaching out to them, and remaining supportive of them, even though they may not have been supportive of him at the beginning of his education. I am lucky to have had the support that I did, but Rodriguez illuminates the possible consequences of a rift between school and education.

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Jennifer Dang  
**A Different Mirror**

*ABOUT THE AUTHOR:*

Jennifer is a freshman at SF State. She is originally from Orange County, CA, so moving up to San Francisco has *definitely been a change in weather!* She plans on majoring in English Education and has always seen herself as being a high school teacher. Between working two jobs and drowning herself with homework, she enjoys watching *The Bachelor* and listening to anything Kanye. She's excited to continue studying at SF State and seeing where that takes her next. *Go gators!*

*COMMENT FROM GTA, DANIEL CURTIS-CUMMINS:*

"A Different Mirror" is Jennifer's response to a prompt, which asked her to explore an educational issue that was interesting to her, and related to language, diversity, and issues of standardized education. The essay is the result of two essays combined: Essay 3 - students developed an inquiry question and conducted scholarly research with at least three library sources; and Essay 4 - students interviewed a member of the SFSU academic community to add a second voice to their conversation.

Jennifer took this opportunity to explore her academic interests and future goals as a high school teacher, in which she hopes to promote Ethnic Studies. She researched the scholarly discussion surrounding Ethnic Studies inclusion high school curriculum and the efficacy of Ethnic Studies to create positive change, in general. She also connected with Dr. Eric Pido of the Ethnic Studies Department and learned through interviewing him that being an academic is a practical and meaningful way to make positive personal and social change. Her inquiry was particularly meaningful given the recent unrest on our campus regarding the future health, survival, and expansion of our historic Studies Program at SF State.

"A Different Mirror" is a model of the inspiration and lasting influence our students can share through assignments they do for our courses.

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Now that I am halfway done with my first semester of college, I have to say it has been a whirlwind of emotions. Coming from a Vietnamese community, I have never been exposed to cultures other than my own. I have never been surrounded by so many diverse individuals who are passionate about different types of issues in society. Being constantly surrounded by these people has given me a chance to be able to develop my own thoughts

and participate in a community of people that works toward empowering each other. If there is one thing I have become passionate about, it is Ethnic Studies.

Society constantly places stereotypes and judges people based on the color of one's skin rather than treating people as individuals. Growing up, these words struck me: *Race disappears when we see people as individuals*. As much as I believe that people should be treated as individuals, I also believe that race and culture shape an individual's identity. People should be able to live in a diverse world where an individual's race and culture is valued and appreciated. Thus, Ethnic Studies courses play a major role in educating people; Ethnic Studies allows students to ask questions beyond the superficial level and allows them to engage with questions of race and culture.

The history of America taught in schools is incomplete because it does not expose non-white students to their roots. Cynthia Liu, a professor at San Francisco State University, discussed in a Washington Post blog her upbringing in an all-white community. The first time she read *The Woman Warrior*, a memoir that chronicles the experience of Chinese immigrants, it opened her mind. At last, she was exposed to the non-white history of the United States:

It was the first time ever someone had described the foods she ate, or the mildew-and-hempen smells that wafted out of boxes her family received from kin who lived in an Asian country overseas she had never visited. The book told secrets she thought were hers alone about distant women relatives with bound feet or who made and ate strange food or had relatives with names like Second Maternal Aunt or Tenth Paternal Uncle (Liu).

I can relate because the history of my Asian ancestors was not told through their point-of-view, but rather, through the point-of-view of white Americans. I did not learn anything about my culture at school; I only learned about it at home. I would take stories passed down from my family to me with a grain of rice, valuing stories that taught me what it means to be an Asian American. History is a mirror, and people need a mirror that reflects *all* experiences, not just the white experience. Through learning about different cultures and their experiences, people can shed their ignorance and unite together.

Ignorance breeds hate. A failure to understand another's background and struggles can result in hatred and strife. As a society, people tend to have preconceived notions of gender, culture, and race; it is much easier to lump people together in groups rather than to get to know someone as an individual. In order to unlearn these preconceived notions, society must educate people at an early age: "Anti-racism can be learned and racism and bigotry unlearned. But first we have to set aside blinkered monocultural lenses" (Liu). To unlearn prejudices such as racism, Ethnic Studies can play a vital role in educating people about gender, culture, and race.

Racial and ethnic profiling holds society back and divides communities. Unlearning prejudices such as racism can help mend the years of hurt of pain that America has experienced as a result. Hence, it is increasingly important to unlearn racism in order to flourish as a society. From experience, I know that it is much easier to judge someone merely on their race. Growing up in an Asian household, my dad would perpetuate stereotypes when it came to whites, blacks, and Latinos. These stereotypes were the result of a closed-minded upbringing. This narrow-mindedness illustrates how Ethnic Studies is needed in order to improve our everyday life. It can teach others, like my dad, not to treat people as stereotypes.

Including Ethnic Studies in education has been a controversial topic since 1968 when students at San Francisco State University led a strike to establish an Ethnic Studies department. Students and faculty demanded a curriculum that would promote and embrace different cultures and be able to participate in a multicultural world. Ethnic Studies programs have been found to increase a student's reading and math scores as well as to increase academic engagement (Springer). Bernadette Kelley, chair of the Florida School District, comments "If we teach students about where they come from, reading and math scores increase. Every group and every student must feel part of the education process – to reduce suspension rates and increase the graduation rates of all students, particularly African-American males." In the same article, the school districts in Miami credit Ethnic Studies courses as part of the reason why they contain the highest performing urban schools on the NAEP exams (Wetschler). As more school districts incorporate Ethnic Studies courses, more studies are linking Ethnic Studies courses with higher academic achievement. Students tend to do well and respond better when exposed to a curriculum that reflects their own culture. It is important for students to be taught at a young age that their identity matters.

Exploring ethnicity and asking questions creates an environment where students can feel more open and prone to engaging in topics about race and culture. The Arizona Ethnic Studies Network states, “in a globalizing, diverse society, Ethnic Studies teaches students to ask questions and seek answers beyond what is simply presented as fact and to look beyond the accepted dominant narrative” (Arizona). People live in an interdependent society where they encounter different races and cultures on a daily basis; thus, a background and education in various cultures can only benefit people and allow them to better understand one another. Graduate student Meghan McDowell shares her experiences growing up in a white community:

I grew up in a rural, predominantly white agricultural community in northwestern Vermont. This meant that I was not taught about Cesar Chavez, Ella Baker, W.E.B. Du Bois, or the American Indian Movement. Instead, I learned about these individuals and the movements they were a part of in Ethnic Studies classes. These classes did not teach me to hate myself for being white. These classes taught me to advocate for a society that treats all people with dignity, mutual respect, and openness to personal and institutional transformation (Arizona).

This quote is particularly important to me because it is reminiscent of a moment in my Ethnic Studies class when my professor, Dr. Pido, asked the class whether or not they had ever heard of the name of Fred Korematsu. More than half of the class, including myself, have never heard of such a name. When we learned about Mr. Korematsu’s incredible journey of fighting injustice and standing up against the government’s internment camps, I felt confused as to why I was deprived from learning about an Asian activist in high school. Like the Arizona Ethnic Studies Network, I believe it is important for students to learn about people that they can relate to.

Whether they realize it or not, teachers tend to have a big impact on students. Personally, the reason I wanted to become an educator was largely due to teachers that have made an impression on me. Jeff Andrade believes that educators are the biggest influence on a student’s life: “As educators we tend to seriously underestimate the impact our response has on the other students in the class. They are watching us...[When we] punish youth who manifest symptoms of righteous rage or social misery, we give way to legitimate doubts among other students about our capacity to meet their

needs...” (Duncan-Andrade 10). Educators who are open to the idea of teaching and talking about culture inside the classroom will positively influence how students perceive and interact with people from different backgrounds. In order to create a more peaceful world, exposing students to an open ethnic community in the classroom early will help students to better interact with a diverse world.

In the same article, Andrade admits that incorporating Ethnic Studies into a curriculum is not without its difficulties. Educators and schools must be willing to embrace the difficulties of implementing an Ethnic Studies program. After all, it was Socrates who said, “all great undertakings are risky, and, as they say, what is worth while is always difficult” (Plato 220). As educators, we must take great risks. We must accept great challenges if we are going to make a difference. We must confront our failures. Because, regardless of what we do in our classrooms, there will still be forms of social misery that affect our students.

I recently sat down with Ethnic Studies professor Dr. Eric Pido to discuss his views on Ethnic Studies and how it can benefit students in the long run. I asked him how his interest in this field first began and why he chose to dedicate his career on this timely, ongoing issue. As a Filipino boy, Dr. Pido developed personal issues due to racism. In high school and much of his early college years, he felt ashamed. It was not until he discovered social work that he thought of himself as a human being with something to offer people (Pido). Similarly to Cynthia Liu, Dr. Pido believes that incorporating Ethnic Studies into the high school curriculum would help students develop a positive identity. He contends that people develop at different paces, but once students reach high school, an individualizing process occurs where students have a need to establish an identity that is different than their parents.

Thus, Ethnic Studies will help remind students about the context of their individual race and culture. For example, for first-generation children born to Asian parents, they may not be aware of the obstacles their first-generation immigrant parents faced. While their children may want advice on life and relationships, their parents want them to have a better education and career so that they do not have to suffer the hardships of immigrant life. Being Vietnamese, Chinese, or Filipino is not just about eating certain kinds of foods or taking off your shoes when you go into a house. Ethnic Studies give students an identity that strengthens them and teaches them to appreciate the history of minorities in America. It is a vital course to have in high school

because it allows students to appreciate their own race and culture as well as others.

My interview with Dr. Pido answered a lot of questions I had growing up. His class has been a life changing experience for me because it helped me realize that there were many people who had the same background as me and were going through the same experiences that other people could not relate to. There is this invisible struggle that only Asian people would understand such as being raised with higher expectations, wondering why Asians are so underrepresented in the media, and being imitated by strangers when I choose to speak my primary language out in public. It was not until I took this course in college that I realized that there were many individuals just like myself who were also going through these confusing experiences. What Dr. Pido and the previous authors stated was that: Ethnic Studies can only benefit students and open doors for them that they thought were never there. It has done that for me.

Mirrors reflect everything. Depending on the angle, they can reflect multiple perspectives. This is true for Ethnic Studies. It can transform the way people see America and themselves. There is a lot more to race and culture than meets the eye. Compassion and understanding allows people to live in an interdependent society, united together, working side-by-side. America needs a different mirror that reflects many cultures. A mirror that allows people to learn and appreciate the important contributions of various races and cultures. Incorporating Ethnic Studies into the school system will allow students to discover diversity and culture at a young age and prepare them for an open society where culture is appreciated and valued.



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Skyler Dehesa  
**The Impossible Task of Reading**

*ABOUT THE AUTHOR:*

Skyler is a second semester freshmen, currently a Business major but is unsure if that will stick. He was born in North Carolina but moved out to California when he was eight. Before coming to San Francisco, Skyler lived in Ladera Ranch, between San Clemente and Anaheim in Orange County. Skyler chose to go to SF State because he wanted to stay in California but be far enough away from home to be independent from his family. And he wanted to live in the city. His favorite stop in San Francisco is the Castro, but he also loves Dolores Park and thinks the food in the Mission is amazing. Some of his favorite activities are going to the beach or watching movies. Living in So Cal, Skyler spent a lot of time at the beach with friends.

*COMMENT FROM GTA, ALEX MEJIA:*

Skyler took an interesting approach to the question “How did you become Literate?” in his essay, “The Impossible Task of Reading.” The assignment was given as a way for students to explore what, if anything, really compels them to read – for educational purposes or personal reasons. Many students given this prompt would have written about the first time they cracked a book, but Skyler surprised me with his note that videogames were his window into reading. Skyler’s work makes us all think about ourselves and our own prior struggles in education – and reminds us that having small goals for our own personal gratification can push us into places we’ve always thought were beyond our reach.

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It was my turn; how could I have forgotten? Flipping the page, I began to sweat. My heart started beating faster as I pressed my finger to the page. I could feel the other first graders stare – it was my own personal theater and I was center stage. My father’s words rang through my head over and over: “ignore everyone around you and only focus on the words in front.” Taking a deep breath, I began.

Stumbling at first, I eventually got into my groove – or so I thought. I had gotten through a full sentence without any major hang-ups, and I did so at a reasonable pace. However, my dreams were shattered by the high pitched giggles of the other students. Quickly I looked back, rereading my sentence

in my head to catch my error. What I found was that I had mispronounced almost every word in that sentence. I was mortified.

When it came to reading, mortification became quite common. Every time my class broke off into our reading groups it felt like a new time for me to embarrass myself. I felt frustrated and ashamed of my inability to read; the insecurity I developed leaked into the other things I would do. I stopped asking questions and participating in class for fear that I would sound stupid or make a fool out of myself. Eventually, these fears would be overcome by my unrelenting desire for personal entertainment.

I would get discouraged because I thought that reading came easy to everyone else, but to me, it seemed like an impossible task. Every word seemed like a mountain for me to climb, each syllable a peak and crevasse that I had to maneuver around. I was mad: mad at myself for being dumb, mad at my friends for being smarter than me, and mad at my teachers for causing this turmoil with their books.

My frustration hit a boiling point when my failure to read stopped me from playing a video game I had been looking forward to playing. Getting home from school, I would always rush to my TV. However, this day in particular I was especially enthusiastic. Filled with excitement, I flung open the video game case that contained an experience I so deeply desired. Today was the day I was going to play *Kingdom Hearts*.

Just thinking about the name dragged my active brain into a cozy daydream. I had spent weeks – weeks! – thinking about *Kingdom Hearts*. Now, it was finally mine. With a firm press, the game disc popped right out and onto the ground. I hastily grabbed the game off the floor and attempted to insert it. My hands shook as they got closer to the tray, but despite the trembles, I guided the disc into the tray with surgeon-like precision. Nothing was going to go wrong today.

My heart fluttered with anticipation as the title flashed on the screen. Finally, after what seemed like an eternity, the menu screen popped up, and I hit the start button on the controller, scrolling to “New Game.” A short video played, and I fell deeper into the world before me. Everything was just as I imagined, and *I fell in love*. The opening cinematic ended, and I was more excited than ever to start playing.

I was transported to an entirely new world, filled with incredibly deep and interesting characters. But, the problem was... I couldn't know any of it. My excitement turned to frustration as I learned that all of the *Kingdom Hearts* dialog was expressed through text. The hopes and dreams I had for this game burned into ash, and, in a fit of anger, I threw the controller down and turned the game off. This was the last straw; I was going to learn to read, and I was going to play that game.

I was determined. There was no other thing I wanted more than to play that game. Life was no longer about friends or homework. There was only one thing in my way between me and total happiness: reading. Like a blacksmith perfecting his craft, I dedicated all of my time to this tedious task. With each swing of my hammer I got better – I would learn to read if it killed me.

Every day I would get home and start on my readings. At first, starting was the most challenging part, but in no time it seemed that I was burning through them. I could tell that I was getting better, which motivated me to read even more. Day after day I put in the work and my persistence paid off. Slowly but surely I was able to read, but more importantly, I was able to play my game. There was nothing more satisfying at the time than achieving this goal that I had set forth to achieve. It started off about a game, but it became about much more towards the end.

This moment marked a change in my life: it was the first time that I dedicated all my effort to learning. I felt accomplished and proud that my work was showing results. It motivated me to keep going, to keep learning. Needing to play *Kingdom Hearts* ended up changing my mindset and how I looked at learning in general. I began seeing it as a way into new worlds instead of as a chore. This new attitude towards learning impacted my life for the better, and it is something that I believe I have maintained throughout all my years of schooling. It made me passionate about learning and provoked my success through high school. Sometimes, I try to look back to see how my life would have panned out if I never had that desire to read, never popped open that video game case. But, I always come to the same conclusion: though I may have eventually learned to read regardless, this experience taught me to value myself and my education.

Keaton Schmidt  
**Freedom or Respect, Why Not Both?**

*ABOUT THE AUTHOR:*

Keaton Schmidt is an English Literature Major from Santa Monica, CA. Her hobbies include going to the beach to read, drawing, painting, and paddle boarding. She has always seen herself as a storyteller, author, songwriter, and singer. Unlike most kids who played video games growing up Keaton always had the most fun playing make believe; and those childhood games of pretend would later inspire her first stories, songs and poems. She hopes one day to see her screenplays developed on the big screen or her own novel on bookstore shelves. Until then she continues to work hard on her studies at SF State and serve as Secretary for the English Undergraduate Student Association, an organization promoting community among students in the English Undergraduate Program.

*COMMENT FROM GTA, HAYLEY LAIRD:*

In our English 114 course, we wrote an essay that examined free speech on college campuses today. We focused on how a concern for ‘political correctness’ has created an atmosphere of censorship; explored issues surrounding micro aggressions and trigger warnings; and discussed how these help or hurt our classroom environments. This particular essay focuses specifically on trigger warnings, or small warnings before potentially offensive content, which help to prepare sensitive students and create a more comfortable learning environment. This essay deftly explores the positive aspects of using trigger warnings and discusses why we should not be so quick to judge them as a form of censorship. Keaton carefully explores the issues and demonstrates how perhaps a middle ground is the best solution.

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Trigger warnings walk a tight line between freedom and respect. As Americans, freedom is injected into our blood at birth; acquired through cultural habits over time. Nonetheless, as humanity continues, we feel a responsibility to create a more respectful world for others. Trigger warnings in universities can serve as a respectful warning for victims of abuse without infringing on America’s right to freedom of speech. Trigger warnings help victims of abuse to prepare themselves emotionally, physically and mentally; inoculating them from any further damage. Also, trigger warnings do not infringe on our freedom of speech because they are merely a cautious notice and do not censor material or artistic expression.

Adding trigger warnings will make students more empathetic to the seriousness of assault and lend weight to serious and important issues. Trigger warnings are already implemented in other forms of media such as television viewer discretion warnings or movie ratings. Therefore, they have a place in universities because classrooms are meant to teach lessons that stimulate intellectual improvement in a safe learning environment.

Trigger warnings are used to warn victims of abuse and to prepare them for potentially re-opening past feelings or memories. In an article by Kate Manne titled “Why I Use Trigger Warnings,” she brings up the importance that trigger warnings have to victims: “[They] can be intense and unpleasant, and may even overtake our consciousness.” Using trigger warnings does not censor content but allows victims of abuse an option, an opportunity, to confront their past through class readings. Warning them about traumatic content can protect them from reading something that may incite depression, anxiety, or any other negative thoughts/feelings. If there is no trigger warning, then a student who was recently raped may experience a mental breakdown after reading a story about rape.

Trigger warnings will cause less harm when compared to the alternative. It is important for victims to feel safe in class because security leads to confidence; confidence can allow students to open up and share their encounters. This can allow other students to better understand such complicated controversies. College classrooms are not meant to traumatize people by exposing students to unexpected and inappropriate material, but to give students the courage to get involved in tough topics. It is simple for outsiders to say “PTSD is cured by exposure” while having not experienced a traumatic situation such as war or sexual assault themselves. However, trigger warnings are those small, significant steps to exposure. These warnings allow victims to prepare themselves for learning material that may resurface old wounds that are hard to heal. Trigger warnings create a comfortable atmosphere where victims can build strong voices to tell their stories.

I think a huge reason for the targeting of trigger warnings as “coddling” of millennials is because there is still a huge stigma around mental illness. This country holds the idea that if we do not see it, it does not exist. Anybody who has suffered from mental illness such as depression or post-traumatic stress disorder can tell you that this is simply not true.

I remember being ten years old and playing my first video game, *Sims 2*, that I had bought with money I had saved. On the packaging was a warning for the triggering of epilepsy for people who may be epileptic. At the age of ten, I had never thought that a game I loved so much could affect another so harmfully. It made me more considerate to those who suffer from epilepsy because even though I could not sympathize, I could finally feel a connection to people with epilepsy despite that connection coming from a pointless video game. When we see a warning for epileptic seizures, we can imagine a seizure. It is harder to imagine what someone with PTSD goes through. Most people have not experienced seeing a friend shot, the death of a loved one, or even losing a piece of themselves after being raped.

In addition, trigger warnings do not cause major harm to a classroom if they do not abolish material that relates to teachings for the outside world. In “Coddling the American Mind,” an article written by Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt, they propose the importance of discussion in universities: “Such questioning sometimes leads to discomfort, and even to anger, on the way to understanding.” A problem with censoring is that important content goes missing. But trigger warnings are equivalent to a stop sign or a “DO NOT ENTER” sign. A stop sign does not prohibit us to cross the street, but it tells us to look both ways and be cautious where we go.

Lukianoff and Haidt suggest that it is okay for people to be uncomfortable with the hearing of racial slurs and sexual violence; the wrong choice would be to censor and avoid those terms rather than discuss them. Instead, students should learn *why* people still use the n-word and learn about the daily experiences of African-Americans in relation to the n-word. Turning a blind eye will not make a problem such as sexual assault disappear; it will just further deepen the stigma around the harsh cruelties of college campuses.

Learning the meaning behind racial slurs and epithets can help shed our ignorance. Racism, sexuality, and assault should be talked about, not whispered about. Trigger warnings give the validation to talk about controversial topics in a safe environment. They act as a notice for victims to be aware of what people will say. They do not excuse a lesson from any individual or an entire class. Trigger warnings do not infringe on freedom of speech; instead, they try to educate the impoliteness or inappropriateness of certain words and phrases in a respected manner.

Humans should continue to better themselves, to be empathic to each other's voices as well as silences. Lukianoff and Haidt state millennials have grown sensitive and are turning a blind eye to change, which makes “compromise become more difficult.” Now, acceptance and understanding is a virtue that is hard to come across because it is so difficult for people to shed their pride and admit they might have been wrong. It is normal that we may not like what each other has to say.

But we do like to hear our own voices. And taking away what other people can say, even if it is racist or sexist, is a form of oppression. It is unsettling for Americans in particular to lose the ability of stating their opinion. While listening to one another, people learn more about individuals in this world and even about themselves. Hence, there is no room for growth if people continue to not pay attention to tragedies that occur every minute in this country by jamming fingers into their ears.

However, a huge reason for trigger warnings is to make serious issues not be perceived as jokes. Lukianoff and Haidt include in their article “Jerry Seinfeld and Bill Maher have publicly condemned the oversensitivity of college students, saying too many of them can’t take a joke.” Hopefully trigger warnings can make students feel empathy towards victims and make people notice that such material should not be taken lightly. It may even evoke compassion in fellow students to understand that some of their fellow classmates have gone through traumatic experiences and are trying to continue with their lives.

I think the worst thing for a victim to feel is that they are a joke. Most people who have been sexually assaulted do not tell anybody out of the fear of their problem not being severe enough. Instead, students, victim or not, should learn to battle against abuse and other horrible scenarios. Trigger warnings can help victims feel supported to share openly about their own experiences or to learn about others who have been in their exact position.

When I was writing this essay I also wanted to get other points of view from my own friends and family. I called up my mother and talked about the issue of trigger warnings. My mom shared a similar point of view based on a trip to the movies. It was in the ‘90s, and she had gone to see *Bliss*.

*Bliss* is an erotic drama about a young married couple who are having troubles sexually. There is a scene in the movie where the wife has a seizure



after her husband tries a new technique in bed. The seizure was caused by memories from the wife's incestuous sexual abuse that she suffered as a child. My mother did not know about this scene beforehand. Now, my mother would have been able to handle the scene if she had gone by herself. It just so happened that she had been accompanied by her friend, an incest survivor.

My mom had known about her friend's trauma and looked at her to make sure she was okay. My mother told me "If we had known, we would of at least talked about it. Sure we should have checked to see what the movie was about, but you just didn't investigate about movies back then." Now, movies are discussed everywhere, and books have summaries written on the back. It is almost impossible to go anywhere without spoilers. But, class readings are almost never known about before coming to class. Every article given to me has been new. A new experience that can be inspiring, different, and enlightening to me may be triggering, hard, and traumatic to others.

If we put warnings in media and other services, then classrooms should do so as well. In a YouTube video by Mike Rugnetta titled "What's the Deal with Trigger Warnings?" he explains how trigger warnings are indeed used in the public sphere. One stigma against trigger warnings is that they do not prepare students for the "real world." However, trigger warnings are used all the time in media; for example, in movie and television shows. I watch Game of Thrones, and before each episode, it lets me know if there will be sensitive language, sexual images, or violence. Preparing me, as an adult, to not be surprised with any of the mentioned situations.

Trigger warnings outside of the college classroom can lead to censorship just as the public knowledge that a movie will have violent graphics may lead to a decrease or increase of viewers. However, in a university setting, trigger warnings open up the discussion of graphic material and life beyond the walls of a lecture hall. College courses are meant to teach students to prepare for life's unexpected curveballs.

It is true in life that there are a lot of unfortunate events we cannot plan for, but we try our best to prevent those that we can. We have fire extinguishers in almost every building in case of any combustion, most households carry first-aid kits for spontaneous wounds, and even some stock extra canned foods in case of unexpected earthquakes. But, when it comes to mental health, we feel no need to make sure to have a smooth evacuation plan during internal chaos. Trigger warnings seen in the media can lead to

censorship. In a university though, they do not prohibit learning “real” world experiences, but in fact, prepare and even teach students how to talk about intense subjects safely and openly.

Trigger warnings keep colleges caught between the freedoms to say our opinions in hope of intellectual enlightenment while maintaining a respected understanding for fellow peers. These trigger warning help respect victims to be warned in a situation that can be prevented while not intruding on freedom of speech because they should be taken only as a springboard to future lessons. Students should expect to hear and talk about hard controversies of contemporary society such as race, sexuality, and abuse in order to prepare for the real danger in and out of college. Even if we do not share similar opinions, we should try to understand our adversaries. Trigger warnings lead to discussions by letting students speak freely about their own opinions in a safe setting.

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Simeon Alojipan  
**From Shame to Acceptance**

*ABOUT THE AUTHOR:*

Simeon Alojipan's LGBTQ activism began his junior year of high school with the formation of the Gender-Sexuality Alliance, "Operation Equality," in which he helped design a proposed Gender Studies class, advocated LGBTQ rights as Opinion Editor of the school newspaper staff, and served as representative and conflict mediator between high school administration and queer students in movements for improved sex ed and campus tolerance. He continues to mentor students involved in the organization. Alojipan is a first-year Drama major at SF State. In his spare time he performs stand-up comedy, as well as theatrical improvisation with the Endgames Improv Company in San Francisco.

*COMMENT FROM LECTURER, LAURA GILLIS:*

Simeon is a creative and talented writer. His lively intellectual voice and deep concern for social justice helped shape a particularly engaging and unique section of 114, in which students were asked to write a persuasive four-page letter. Their letter could be to anyone and about anything, as long as they constructed a rhetorically effective argument. I reminded students to consider the following three aspects of the rhetorical triangle we had studied: speaker, subject, and audience, and to think about how each element affects their own argument.

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To my community,

On June 27th of this year, I left my home at 6 A.M. to take BART from Fremont to San Francisco. It was my first time alone on a two-hour trip to the city. In the back of my head, I was just planning on taking an improv class at a company in the Mission. From the stuffy summer BART station, I climbed out of a crowded stairwell and onto Valencia and 16th where I was met with an unusual sight: women of all ages were holding hands; elderly men were waiting in line for the premiere of a new gay rights documentary; queer couples were smiling and waving rainbows as they marched down the festive streets. Uncomfortable and scared at the thought of being alone in the city for the first time, I wandered into an empty cafe and ordered a small chai. The barista smiled at me and asked if I was in city for Pride. I assured him with a quick no, saying I was there for a comedy class.

That day, I refrained from taking photos of myself out of fear that my family would know that I happened to be in San Francisco at the same time as the Pride Parade: fear that they would then make the connection that I was gay (not that they didn't assume it before). On one end, I felt comfortable and free — I was a fresh kid in a big city, finally around people who were like *me*, around a certain air of possibility and adventure. Yet on the other hand, I felt cornered and closed-in — that the identity that I have been hiding for so long was manifested in the smiles of those who rallied – liberated – on the streets.

This feeling is not new to the queer person. I put this experience in context: we, queer people, feel a level of shame and embarrassment even when we are in the grip of freedom. That day, I felt the most closeted that I had ever felt even though I was surrounded by kind faces and freedom. I still feel shame for not expressing excitement to the barista at the Parade. I still feel ashamed for being gay, though I know there is no reason to be embarrassed.

When I explain the term “internalized homophobia” to people, their first reaction is: How can a gay person be homophobic? How can someone internalize hatred towards their own community and themselves? It's almost counter-intuitive, but the answer is simple, really: When you are taught to hate a certain group, and you happen to *be* of that group, part of the hate will be reflected in the mirror, staring right back at you, just like how it did the first time I travelled alone to San Francisco. “Internalized homophobia,” as explained by the activist organization Revel and Riot, “happens when LGBTQ individuals are subjected to society's negative perceptions, intolerance and stigmas towards LGBTQ people, and as a result, turn those ideas inward believing they are true.”

These are historic times. Gay marriage has been legalized federally. The younger generation is displaying more tolerance of sexual fluidity than any before. Yet, despite these advancements, I am still shocked to see my fellow queer people manifest a subconscious anger towards themselves and others in our community through ways seemingly innocuous.

Perhaps most shocking is the anger *I* still carry. It would be hypocritical of me to say that I am not homophobic. I, too, carry notions of subtle homophobia that are difficult to deal with. There are times, for example, when I look down upon any male with a remotely “gay” lisp. There are times when I wonder that tomboyish women would maybe, just maybe, look better

in a dress. There are times when I find myself thinking that effeminate men are an embarrassment to be around, that I will be outed for being seen with even several of my closest friends. There are times when I question how “gay” I sound, and when I sense a comfort in deliberately shifting my enunciation to reflect some notion of “straightness” better. There are times when I feel flattered—*flattered*—when someone exclaims, “Simeon, I didn’t think you were gay!” as if the fact of being perceived as heterosexual is somehow superior to the truth.

I know that these thoughts are wrong, but they can’t be ignored. Though I purport myself to be free, though I advocate at every moment I can, I still carry this burden of shame. The fact is that queer people, at varying levels, feel this sense of shame, disgust, and self-hatred; that the thoughts I experience aren’t solely exceptional to me, but to almost every queer person at different stages of life. Our focus on unquestionable pride is understandable, yet it rejects the very existence of this all too important emotion. Internalized homophobia must be addressed if we are to find true acceptance.

This offers an interesting paradox. The blueprint that the queer person is taught to trust in is that shame will disappear, that we will find a sense of belonging and gratitude for our difference after overcoming a single mountain by coming out. But this ideal is impossible, because shame does not end with coming out—it does not end with finding others like us, nor does it end with obtaining rights or raising families or finding love. So long as we live in a society that normalizes heterosexuality, all alternatives to it will inevitably be seen as “different,” and what is different is to be hated. The truth is that I will continue to experience the aforementioned thoughts throughout my entire life, no matter how much progress I make in terms of activism. Perhaps this pain will minimize by the time I’m sixty, but inside, that inexplicable guilt will still undoubtedly remain.

Though we may feel these thoughts at times, we mustn’t allow them to influence our activism. All humans feel fear, shame, and guilt. The difference between these emotions and disorder lies in how disorder prevents a life from being lived to its maximum potential. This disorder of internalized homophobia manifests itself in many ways, from a teen wanting to “not look gay,” who erases all his genuine interests to conform with the heterosexuality of the mainstream, to the scandal of the outed congressmen who votes on anti-LGBTQ legislation. In both cases, the queer person acts against themselves,

against the desire to live an honest life. Manifested internalized homophobia here is the only route for survival—but at what cost? The irony is that an attempt to remain “normal” results in the metaphorical suicide of identity.

Another tragedy that haunts me is horizontal oppression. Another important term, horizontal oppression is the “discrimination of minorities *by* a minority.” For example, this is notably demonstrated by queer people who disdain others in the LGBTQ community who don’t fit in the gender binary, most notably, for example, the stigma against effeminate gay men. As a gay male, I’ve said the phrase “girly guys aren’t attractive” too many times to count. Though this doesn’t seem like oppression on the surface, it is revealed to be with further analysis: The implication that “girly” men are inferior implies that “girly” traits are inferior to masculine traits, thereby placing femininity below masculinity, subjugating women to yet another sexism, this time in the queer community.

The same goes for race. I’ve met many gay men who don’t find black gay men attractive at all. Though this may be seen as a personal preference, one questions why the preference exists on so large a scale as to create terms in gay dating culture such as “whites only.” Similar terms exist: “masc4masc” (“masculine for masculine”), “no fems” (no feminine men), “no azn,” (no Asian men) etc.—all of which I’ve encountered on the gay app scene. In my experience, many of these terms are even listed under the same bio under no coincidence. My point is this: Personal preference, though it exists, should not impede the queer community’s sense of unity. As a gay Asian male, there have been times where I have been attacked for the presumed femininity of my Asian ethnicity, the same as a black man is attacked for the assumed aggressive threat of his skin color, and thus horizontal oppression rears its ugly head again—simultaneously discriminating minorities and genders.

But what if I’m taking it too personally? What if, people tell me, I should just respect that we are on different “levels of being out,” that I should respect taste and refrain from placing these preferences in a larger context? I’ve spoken to queer people, one of them a friend who says: “I don’t know, I think we should just let people find themselves at their own pace.” But what’s the point of finding yourself at your own pace when the road you’re treading down is taking you further away from acceptance for yourself, acceptance for your community? How can we fight for change if we don’t *know* that the biggest change that needs to happen within ourselves? Where are the calls for battling internalized homophobia and horizontal oppression? We have had

cries for gay marriage echo throughout the country—now where is the call for self-acceptance?

Perhaps I *do* take it too personally. I know of queer people who've had greater struggles than myself. I grew up in Milpitas, California, a city with one of the highest Asian populations in the US (whites were in the minority there), and went to a high school where LGBTQ youth were tolerated, if not accepted. I formed a GSA named *Operation Equality*, worked to have it obtain its own commission in the student body advisory, and found my allies long before most people do. Maybe the distaste for internalized homophobia comes easily for me because I have had an easier time accepting myself, and now I grow impatient at the lack of progress with others. I don't deny this. These facts have been pointed out to me, and here I feel a sense of shame, that I *should have* suffered more, that I *should be* struggling more.

Yet, whenever I feel these feelings, I remind myself that I can't compare my life to anyone else's. We are all different, and we all face different obstacles and challenges. I check my privilege and luck at the door, and I remember that no matter the background of the activist, if the end goal and the actions are always driven by love and equality, there is no wrong.

But, what I cannot stand is seeing friends suppress their own identities in order to fit in. What I cannot stand are lovers, both out and closeted, who hide their feelings behind closed doors in order to avoid public humiliation. What I cannot stand is the rate of 30% of suicide attempts in queer youth aged sixteen to twenty, and 14% of queer youth who suffer from major depression, as discovered by the Suicide Prevention Resource Center. "The rates of suicide attempts among LGBT youth have been found to be higher than rates among youth in the general population, but the reasons have not been clearly identified," the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention states. Not "clearly identified"? Preposterous. We know the reasons as clear as day.

People want to be loved. Perhaps the most troubling worry for me is knowing how much more difficult romance will be for myself and my community. How can love flourish in the shadows? I've been on both sides of the coin, that of hiding my partner, and being hidden *by* my partner. The pain by both is almost physically excruciating. I don't think there's anything like it. Secrets are a form of discrimination. By keeping your partner a secret, you are preventing them from taking part in the most vital part of your existence—your public life. For me, this is the worst form of internalized

homophobia: Crying at night because he will never tell his parents, biting your nails as you wait for him to feel more comfortable before he tells his friends, feigning a smile as he introduces you as a coworker to the aunt he bumps into on the street. True pain is when the person you love treats you like a stranger. It leaves you to question: “Do I really love this person?” We all make sacrifices, but the sacrifices for love, under the veil of secrecy and internalized homophobia, offer the greatest perplexity: How can I be happy when I have to live a lie?

Such a lie itself is understandable because the simple fear of coming out is omnipotent. This, I’m sure, every queer person knows. The fear of being “outed” controls every factor of life—from the way one speaks, to the way one dresses, to the jokes one chooses to laugh at and the people one chooses to befriend. There is no greater blackness than knowing you are being controlled by a perpetual hatred and anxiety. Fear is the puppet-master to the queer person. We are controlled by it, and our lives are a series of battles meant to counter it... sometimes we win a small victory, a string or two is cut, and maybe all of its cords will be gone one day, but the very fact that it was *there* is enough to make its presence known throughout our entire lives. Fear is the demon over the queer person’s shoulder, and it would be a lie to say that we do not think of it every day—for it never leaves, even in our total victory.

In the case of love and secrecy, the sacrifice is up to both partners who must decide if love is worth it. Do the joys of love outweigh the burdens of secrecy? Some warn you to never date or interact with anyone in the closet, for fear that it will drag you down. I used to think that way, but after a relationship where I found my philosophy turned upside down, I now think that that stance is unfair and judgmental. We’ve *been* there, and it’s up to those who are more “out” to help those who aren’t. This requires patience and time, but remember that there is no set rule or countdown to determine when someone will feel comfortable. Their security is up to themselves, and your patience is up to you. It’s tricky, but this is the mantra that we must have when we help ourselves understand why we hold our self-hatred: We must be calm, kind, and understanding—strict but never discriminatory, passionate but never angry, and patient but never passive.

Though there is no escaping the shadow of internalized homophobia, there is still the call to educate ourselves of its effects. This is my proposition—that we, as a community, become more aware of our opinions and actions, that we question even the mundane expression of personal



preference in order to battle the many factors that divide our community, that we question the way we treat those we love when we shield ourselves from harm. The people united will never be defeated. Perhaps this internal struggle is the greatest one of all, more difficult to achieve than any piece of legislation or civil rights. Self-hatred must be a topic that we all—gay or straight—learn about, for we cannot fight what we are blind to, and until we change the hate in ourselves, so too will we never find the love.

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Mantano Leavy  
**Dreaming of Beau(oo)ty**

*ABOUT THE AUTHOR:*

Mantano is eighteen years old and says, in all honesty, his life has been pretty easy so far. He was born to two loving parents and moved to the states when he was five years old. He moved around quite a few times before ending up in Roseville, California – a small town in the Sacramento area. There, he did most of his growing up and forged bonds with people he'll never forget. And now, he's here - a freshman at SFSU and currently a Communications Studies major, though that might change. He has no clear idea in what direction he wants to go, but he guesses that's what he's in college to figure out. He has undying love for the amazingly talented Beyoncé, and he enjoys reading comic books. He's half black and half Japanese and takes his education seriously.

*COMMENT FROM GTA, RENATO ESCUDERO:*

Mantano Leavy's research paper surprised me, educated me and delighted me. Under the umbrella theme of "Body Image," he was to choose a style trend and interpret its political and social implications. I thought the first sentence was a joke: "Our society is currently glued to the advancement of the buttocks." It's a humorous, playful sentence, but it is definitely not a joke. Leavy's voice is original, syncopated, unafraid of wit, and it is blended with just enough academic authority to work well. This was a risky move on Leavy's part – it could have been so easy for his subject matter and playful voice to be misconstrued as fluff. But "Dreaming of Beau(oo)ty" is a serious project that deserves our attention, and it has the benefit of being entertaining to boot. Who says that academic writing has to be boring? There's a real person here who is interested the derrière and wants to share with his audience a fine, fresh and provocative line of academic inquiry.

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Our society is currently glued to the advancement of the buttocks. As each year comes to pass, we have seen new trends exit the limelight so often that it is hard to remember which fads have had major impacts. And butts have definitely made an impact – but butts haven't always had the "it" factor that they do in today's society. Over the course of time, the way people have viewed physical beauty has been completely different and always changing. America is not exempt from this. While some of the biggest body focus today is on huge and wide hips, before the 90s, thin was "in." The 60s showed us a

time when “beauty abandoned all curves,” and approached a drastically more slender physique – a pattern which continued through to the 70s (Woman’s Body Image). Butts of the larger variety didn’t dominate the public’s attention until twenty years later, when Sir Mix-a-Lot’s classic music video “Baby Got Back” was first released.

Since then, our country has become immensely obsessed with posteriors. Two very long decades have passed and it appears that this nation of ours cannot let go of the big butt trend. The fixation we hold on the buttocks is quite overwhelming, and our society is doing whatever it can to keep the craze relevant. For those like me, who grew up in the middle of this obsession, it’s hard to believe there was ever a time when butts weren’t in the center of attention. Wherever you look, you see something that has to do with the rear: commercials, television programs, magazines, sports, music, etc. It’s impossible to escape the buttocks! The year of 2014 was even titled the “Year of the Booty” by both *E! Online* and *ET Online* (two very well-known pop-culture websites). The (pop) culture that surrounds us has influenced the rise of “the booty revolution” and as a result people are willing to do anything, even altering their body image, to achieve the best butt possible.

Pop-culture is the primary reason that made the buttocks the center of the public’s attention. Thanks to pop-cultural icons like Nicki Minaj and Kim Kardashian (both known for pronounced posteriors), everywhere we look there seems to be some type of footage or image glorifying women’s derrière. The amount of songs and other such media that promote a certain type of butt image has reached an all-new high, as there are songs like “Anaconda” and “All About That Bass” being released constantly. Both of these songs display the buttocks as something to be praised.

In Nicki Minaj’s “Anaconda” music video, we can see her shaking her rear in provocative ways. Throughout the song she describes being thin as negative, stating “I got a big fat ass” and “Fuck you skinny bitches.” The same can be heard in “All About That Bass,” when Meghan Trainor declares, “Yeah, it's pretty clear, I ain't no size two but I can shake it, shake it, like I'm supposed to do” and “boys like a little more booty to hold at night. You know I won’t be no stick figure silicone Barbie doll.” With the continuation with these ultra-popular videos, we see that being thin is now seen as inferior. We also have witnessed the revival of the fad known as twerking –dancing to a popular song in a sexual manner by shaking one’s hips vertically to the beat while in the squatting position. These songs, and music videos, are just two

of the many examples of how (pop) culture can shape and create new obsessions. Even magazine companies coined in on the buttocks movement as *Paper Magazine* and Kim Kardashian released an image of her backside to the world. The magazine's website received over "34,147,700 unique page views", while it "typically receives less than half of that in traffic for an entire year" (Thompson 3). Just by publicizing Kim Kardashian's bottom, this magazine was able to more than double viewership for the entire year.

Women aren't the only ones having their butts exposed to the world. With pop culture sites like *BuzzFeed* and *MTV* standing proud in their love of the man butt, the spread of the butt craze is still just beginning. Weekly hauls of new butt pictures make other men self-conscious about the state of their own rears, especially when the pictures are of baseball players – who are commonly agreed upon as having the best butts in the athletic and non-athletic world. Man butt has been getting a lot more attention lately as 52 year old actor, John Stamos, posed pants less for, you guessed it, *Paper Magazine*. This country seems to be more interested in the bottoms of celebrities than anything else – even I am starting to bow to the obsession.

With lasting celebrity icons like Jennifer Lopez and Beyoncé Knowles setting the norm for how waists and butts should look, there is an overbearing pressure for women to have fuller backsides. According to a journal article titled "Beyond Thinness: The Influence of a Curvaceous Body Ideal on Body Dissatisfaction in Black and White Women," women often compare themselves to the unobtainable pictures they see in the media. When women begin to feel like men are also comparing them to celebrities, they have the urge to not only compare, but *obtain* those unreachable hips. In the study completed in "Beyond Thinness," where women were measured and then asked a series of questions pertaining to body image, there is actual evidence that white women do feel more dissatisfied with their bodies when being compared to other women. It is also worth mentioning that the black women who participated in this study had significantly larger buttocks than the white women who participated. In the same study, it was discovered that more than half of the participants preferred an hourglass figure (wider hip, bigger breast, and thinner waist) over the rest of the figures provided. This new era of butt envy has only continued the search for bodily "perfection," and women are paying the price with dissatisfaction.

Buttocks, curves, and hips are all generally viewed in a sexual way, but it isn't just (pop) culture and sexual attraction that contributes to the

blatant interest in them. As it turns out, the thick lower half and back side that men, and our society, crave has an evolutionary purpose that many people are unaware of. In a *Psychology Today* article titled “Eternal Curves,” the contributing authors mention that women carry and store a special kind of fat within their lower half called DHA (docosahexaenoic acid). These fats aid the growth process for newborn brains. When men fawn over a women’s buttocks and thighs, his brain is “telling us [him]—that a woman’s figure signals the abundance of her DHA supply” and that “these curvier women also tend to have smarter children” (11-12). In another article in *The Atlantic*, the author referenced a study that was published in *Evolution and Human Behaviors*, where researchers would show 100 men different pictures of a women’s silhouette and the men would pick the picture they preferred. As a result of this, researchers discovered that the majority of the men chose the silhouette where the women’s spinal lumbar curvature had been at a 45 degree angle: the angle that is most optimal for child birth (Khazan).

While these readings denounce the fact that men are in-search for a bigger backside, DHA is still a factor. Together, these two studies and facts show that men are looking for wider and bigger hips, as well as a curved back - which makes it appear like the silhouette is forcing her butt to stand out. So, while (pop) culture makes up a large portion of the obsession with the butt, saying its only part of human nature is a perfectly truthful response.

The increased exposure of the rear has led to a plethora of people changing their buttocks by any means necessary. The amount of customers for buttock augmentation surgery has doubled since 2013, and with four legal techniques within the U.S, it’s easy to achieve if you have the funds. Without diving into cheap and often illegal surgeries, getting work done on one’s derrière is expensive business. Only those who can afford a fuller butt can achieve it. According to “Aesthetic surgery of the buttocks: imaging appearance,” the four legal practices of but-altering are liposuction, surgical lifts, implants, and fat injection. Implants are the most commonly accepted practice for buttock augmentation, next to liposuction, which is the most frequent overall type of augmentation surgery. Surgical lifts are becoming less practiced and unpopular, while fat injections are becoming more and more practiced. The wealthy have access to a plethora of options that the poor do not.

For those who can’t afford the grueling cost of safe surgeries (which can vary depending on expenses), the option of silicone injections is still open

legally outside of the US. These silicone injections involve a lot of risk and in many cases result in fatalities. In a journal article by Uwe Wollina, it is stated that “removal of silicone is impossible without surgery” and “horrendous complications have been reported from silicone injections...[and] After illegal silicone injection, the silicone embolism syndrome has been observed with a potential fatal outcome in about one quarter of patients” (197). These surgeries are often cheap when done within the US, but those who practice this technique are frequently frauds who cause major damage to their patients. The fact that you can only acquire a “discounted” version of a surgery should be the first warning sign as to why some people shouldn’t get the procedure. The quest for a larger caboose shouldn’t draw people to dangerous procedures simply because they can afford them. It appears that safety is no longer taken into consideration when the opportunity of receiving of a big butt is involved. Those with money can afford to safely enlarge their buttocks, while the poor suffer with potential long lasting damages. The surgeons who administer these jobs can thank the world of (pop) culture for the advancement of their current wealth.

For those who don’t want to pay an arm and a leg for a “better butt,” there’s always exercise. Squats, lunges and other stretches involving the lower half of the body are all great ways to forge a better bottom. I can admit there have been times I have attempted many of these exercises, and it is a big commitment. You must stay vigilante on your quest for a better booty, because once you stop, the progress you made will cease to exist – this is why surgeries are often requested. Staying on the path of exercise may not grant you the butt of your dreams, as it is less successful than surgery when receiving that round, meaty shape people seem to love. However, you do save a lot of money and take out the high risk factor that comes with surgery.

The bottom has taken over our society with the help of (pop) culture and science. With the overexposure of the waist down, the amount of dissatisfaction and surgeries has risen to a new level, supporting credible – and sometimes fraudulent – surgeons. Women feel the majority of the pressure to have a large backside and celebrities like Kim Kardashian are the reasons behind it. However, with science backing-up the reasons behind the male obsession with the (female) buttocks, we can finally ask the question: is it nature or nurture that makes us all go crazy over the butt? If some people fancy a little glance at the “man butt,” can we really believe that biology is the explanation behind all of this madness? Our culture is revolved around the need for a bigger and rounder butt, and now the two pieces of meat on

everyone's backs are like trophies that everyone wants. Butts are in and it doesn't seem like the "Year of the Booty" will be enough to satisfy this nation's need for the butt; the "Booty Revolution" is just beginning, and I for one can't wait to see it continue.

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## *SOPHOMORES*



Jennie Rolff  
**Stepping Away**

*ABOUT THE AUTHOR:*

Jennie is a sophomore at SF State, a Psychology Major with a Minor in Holistic Health. She comes from a small town four hours north of the Bay Area in the heart of the Redwoods. She has a cat named Tommy that lives with her, as well as several dogs that live at home with her parents. She has two brothers, an older and younger. She is the first sibling to move away from their hometown. She chose to attend SF State, mainly because of the Holistic Health minor that is offered here, as well as San Francisco being far enough from home, but close enough at the same time. The city is completely different than the town where she was born and raised and has been a nice change of pace. Every day is a new day that comes along with new experiences and every day she wakes up grateful she is able to experience what life has to offer.

*COMMENT FROM LECTURER, CHRISTY SHICK:*

Jennie wrote this compelling essay about cell phone addiction in response to the following prompt:

Discover a cultural subject that interests you (art, music, religion, sports, fashion, romance, etc.) and bring something new to the table (approximately 1800 words). You will develop an original question about a cultural subject of your choice and research answers to that question in a variety of ways. That question will be your thesis, and the story of your research will be the content of your essay.

Three types of resources are required: a **cultural artifact** (poem, song, artwork, TVshow/movie, advertisement, commercial, or other); **field research** (attending a class, event or performance; conducting an interview or survey; conducting an experiment; or other); and a **scholarly resource** (peer reviewed article, newspaper editorial, book, or other respected resource).

Examples of past successful theses are: *When did it become cool to dress like a slut on Halloween? Why do the Jamaicans in my West Oakland neighborhood hate gays? Why do people care if art is counterfeit? Why is there so much drugging in baseball? What does it mean to be a "bitch"? Why is Breaking Bad so popular?* And more.

Jennie's essay is successful for the depth of her inquiry and for the creative and thought-provoking evidence she provides toward answering a question on many of our minds.

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From the time I wake up to the time I go to bed, my phone is attached to me. It's 6 o'clock in the morning when my first alarm goes off, then several more alarms; and I grab my phone before I've even opened my eyes. This is the start of my day. As I walk to my morning class, I check my unread emails. And once I have made it to class, as I sit and listen to the lecture, I subconsciously find myself reaching for my phone and opening Instagram. As I scroll through my feed, I might double click to like a photo of my friends. At the end of class, I put my things away and walk out the door with my phone in my hand and my eyes looking down at the screen. This time, I'm scrolling through my Facebook feed. I'm not interested in the content being posted, but I can't seem to stop scrolling. And I started wondering. Do I have an unhealthy addiction to my smartphone?

That week I tried to go one day without my phone. It woke me up as it normally did, but after that, I set my phone to airplane mode and placed it in my purse for the day. I didn't want to leave my phone at home, in fear I might desperately need it if something came up; at least, that was the excuse I made to be unattached, just not fully. I realize now that was a lame excuse. I was bound to use my phone. And the chances of me actually needing it were slim. I realized I did have obsessive behavior when it came to my smartphone, which according to Christine's Hammond's essay, "The Difference Between an Obsession and an Addiction," is rooted in my fear of the unknown (Hammond, 2015). But am I addicted?

Over the weekend, I turned off my device and left it in the other room, knowing that I had a lot of homework to get done. I am easily distracted and knew to stay engaged in my homework it was better not to have my phone close by. Otherwise, I'd be drawn to my device as a means for escaping, which according to Hammond is the root of addiction (Hammond, 2015). I do sometimes use my phone as an escape, but I don't need my phone to feel satisfied; and those who are addicted never feel satisfied without the fuel of their addictive substance (Hammond, 2015). Doing my homework satisfied me. I did not feel like I was missing out on anything during those hours I'd put my phone to the side. Of course, those were hours, not days.

In the journal of Psychology of Addictive Behaviors I found an article specifically about internet use dependence: "Problematic Internet Use and Other Risky Behaviors in College Students: An Application of Problem Behavior Theory," written by Joseph Anthony De Leo and Edelgard Wulfert in 2013. It stated that the amount of time spent on the internet wasn't the key factor, but rather how the time was spent; those that were internet dependent,

depended on the internet for social interaction, whether it be, “instant communications” or “other interactive applications involving participating online users,” while “nondependents rely on the internet for personal communication and information gathering purposes” (De Leo and Wulfert, 133-134). The article then begins to explain the risks of being dependent by stating that those who rely on the Internet for socialization may have a greater risk for developing Problematic Internet Use and may have higher chances of expressing other problematic behaviors, such as, loneliness, boredom, anxiety, self-consciousness, and depression (De Leo and Wulfert, 134). Although socialization on the Internet can be beneficial to an extent, it becomes problematic for those who depend solely on the Internet for social interaction and begin to lose touch with their “offline activities or personal responsibilities” (De Leo and Wulfert, 138).

After learning the difference between dependence and nondependence, I then began to ponder whether or not I am dependent on my device and the Internet for social interaction. There is no doubt I am dependent. My phone is my primary form of communication with many of my friends and family back home. Although I do still communicate outside of my device, I would say that a large percentage of my communication is dependent on it. I also realize that my dependence is restricting me from being social with those that I don’t know yet, and will never know if I keep looking down at my screen. However, the problem is bigger than just me. The day that I spent briefly being disconnected, I’d felt alone and out of the loop. This was simply because almost everyone around me was focused on their devices, unaware of their surroundings. I was aware and focused on what was going on around me, but everyone else was engaged in his or her own world. Our devices that are said to connect us seem more and more that they are disconnecting us from reality and who we are surrounded by here and now.

As a society I feel our dependence to our own device is a big issue that we are facing today. A collection of photos by Eric Peppersgill called *Removed* made me think about this further. In these sets of photos below, the devices have been removed from the photograph in order to truly capture the essence of how we have come to interact with one another, or in other words, our lack of interaction with one another. We sit with our loved ones, our friends, and our families, but we aren’t really communicating and connecting like we used to, before everyone had their own device, instead, we are stuck looking down at what is on the screen in front of us, or virtual realities. This has become the new normal; although these photos were shocking to me, at

the same time, I didn't understand why, because the truth is, this has become our reality. I can relate to every one of these photos:



*Photos by Eric Pickergil, from Removed. 2015*

The couples in the top photos are touching, but are paying no mind to each other, instead are only looking down, fully engaged with what is happening on the screen in front of them. The friends in the middle set of

photos are “hanging out,” however are not interacting with each other what so ever. The last set of photos I found to be the most shocking. Family time has become so out of reach with the interference of these devices. Although they are sharing a couch or all sitting at the same table, their heads are all pointed down looking at their own individual screen. They are all seeing something different, so there is really not much room to share thoughts and have conversation. Examining these photos see how we’ve become disconnected and unengaged with those who are in the same room as us -those we feel we are the closest to. The photos helped me understand the value of what we are losing. And I began to wonder if anyone was doing anything to fix this problem.

I found an article in *The New York Times* “Technology” section by Matt Richtigel titled “Silicon Valley Says Step Away From the Device” (2012). In it, Kelly McGonigal who is a lecturer at the Stanford School of Medicine and has a focus in the science of self-control, is reported to believe that the constant use of these devices are triggering the body’s emergency stress system (Richtigel, 2012). Dr. McGonigal has worked with leaders of tech companies and discussed the issues and downsides of the new innovations, coming to the conclusion that, those working in tech want for their new innovations to enhance lives, rather than, cause addiction to these devices (Richtigel, 2012). To me this shows that our dependence on our devices is becoming a big issue if the tech companies that are profiting off this technology are realizing how important it is to log off. I think it is important to take note that tech companies are beginning to reach out to psychologists and finding ways to step away from their devices for the benefit of themselves, as well as, others. Richard Fernandez who is an executive coach at Goggle and a leader of the movement stated that if people began to disconnect more, “We can have more intimate and authentic relationships with ourselves and those...in our communities...Consumers need to have an internal compass where they’re able to balance the capabilities that technology offers them for work, for search, with the qualities of the lives they live offline...It’s about creating space, because otherwise we can be swept away by our technologies” (Richtigel 2012).

After reading through the article, I found the message being conveyed to be very important. Many important people in the tech industry, such as, the director in the executive offices of Facebook and the head of learning and development at Twitter are speaking out to warn against the overuse of technology. Technology today is the “all-powerful answer” and is becoming to be seen as addictive (Richtigel, 2012). This constant stimulation of our smartphone devices are creating cravings that can have negative impacts on

productivity and interactions from person to person (Ritchel, 2012). We as a society need to start taking a step back to assess the consequences and make time to free ourselves. We need to start becoming more aware of how these devices are impacting us and make a change to the way we use them. As technology becomes stronger, we as a society depend on it more and as our dependence grows, the more likely we are to become addicted and see negative impacts on everyday life outside of our devices. When these negative impacts start becoming more apparent and widely known, I feel more action will be taken. As of now, tech companies and psychology researchers are just beginning to see and understand the negative implications that their devices are having not only on themselves, but on society as a whole.

Since I have conducted my research and learned that although we as a society may not be fully addicted to our devices just yet, our obsessive behaviors towards our devices are not a healthy habit to have. This can eventually lead to complete dependence and addiction that will begin to interrupt our daily lives outside of our devices if we aren't careful. Being aware of how tech companies are going about stepping away from their devices has really motivated me to take time away from my phone. I personally have realized that when my phone is out of reach, it's out of my mind. By limiting the amount of time spent on my device, I not only have more time to complete day to day tasks that I otherwise put off, but I have learned to become more self-aware and aware of my surroundings. By bettering myself, I in turn have become happier, knowing that I do not need to be dependent on my phone all hours of the day.

So with that being said, I encourage you all to take in the information I have shared with you and begin to take time for yourself and step away every once and awhile, enjoy the presence of the people that surround you and I mean actually enjoy it. Put down your device and engage in meaningful conversation and make connections with those that you might not have had the chance to meet otherwise. I promise you that you won't regret it!

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Rachel Rattan  
**The Need for Multicultural Education Public K-12**

*ABOUT THE AUTHOR:*

Rachel Rattan is currently an undergraduate student majoring in History with a minor in Race and Resistance Studies. She is passionate about ethnic studies, education reform, and social justice. Social justice is defined as the view that everyone deserves equal economic, political and social rights and opportunities. From Rachel's perspective, the definition should expand to include that underrepresented communities are instilled with confidence and have a voice, without fear or threat of retaliation or being silenced. Growing up in California as an Indian American female, society made Rachel feel insecure about her race, ethnicity, and skin tone. And at SF State, she took her first ethnic studies class, which profoundly and positively impacted her.

Through her experiences at San Francisco State University she learned to take pride in who she is, and that being a person of color is not something to be ashamed of, but rather to be embraced and accepted. Paulo Freire, an educator that deeply impacted Rachel, once said, "[t]he teacher is of course an artist, but being an artist does not mean that he or she can make the profile, can shape the students. What the educator does in teaching is to make it possible for the students to become themselves."

*COMMENT FROM LECTURER, LAURA GILLIS:*

Rachel wrote her essay in response to the following prompt:

Write a six to seven page research-based essay. In your essay, you will argue or analyze a position, rather than simply summarize your resources. The difference between these two genres of research paper (an argument vs. a report) can be difficult to distinguish, particularly while in the process of writing. We will employ strategies and check-in periodically throughout the research and writing process in order to help you avoid a summary/report type research paper. The first strategy is to develop a purpose and a question to research before you begin reading any articles. As you research and write your essay, you will most likely continually develop and revise your stance on your question.

As her work reveals, she is a thoughtful and motivated student whose intellect and insight consistently contributed to the rich academic atmosphere of this section of 214.

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The demographics in the United States are rapidly changing and becoming more diverse. Although the minority population is rapidly growing,



the education system in the United States is failing to meet their needs. There is an obvious achievement gap between upper class white students and lower class minorities. In addition, education is extremely Eurocentric in the United States; a European-based education is considered superior to other forms of education. This Eurocentric mentality paints an untrue and almost fairytale-like picture of history: minorities are not accurately portrayed or represented. This inaccurate representation causes minorities to have a disadvantaged and unequal educational experience. By incorporating a multicultural education that embraces non-European cultures, teachers can promote racial tolerance as well as shrink the achievement gap.

One problem in narrowing the achievement gap is that low-income schools receive a lower quality education compared to privileged schools. According to *The Flat World in Education* by Linda-Darling Hammond, low income schools have a lower quality of education because they have unqualified teachers, overcrowded classrooms, and inadequate resources to be successful in school. In most cases, children in these low income schools are students of color. Meanwhile, schools in high income districts have more resources such as SAT preparation courses, updated textbooks, more technological access, and career counselors (27; 51). Low income schools simply cannot afford to have these same resources available to students. This flaw in public education sets up students with a low socioeconomic status, particularly students of color, for failure.

By incorporating a multicultural education, students will have a more complete understanding of history as well as be encouraged to create change in society. Currently, Eurocentric education in the United States enables privileged white students to remain in power while it causes low income students of color to fail and fall behind. Education has the ability to promote equality; however, in accordance with social reproduction theory, education is currently being used to perpetuate *inequality*. According to James Collins in his article “Social Reproduction in Classrooms and Schools,” “Schools are not institutions of equal opportunity but mechanisms for perpetuating social inequalities” (33). This is apparent in the achievement gap. As the dominant class is becoming more privileged and has more access to more resources, the lower class is being left behind. This results in an even *more* unequal society. So the question becomes: how can we improve the education level of a lower class lacking in resources?

I believe incorporating a multicultural education can help alleviate some of these inequalities in education. The aim of a multicultural education is to present a more inclusive, well-rounded version of history. In “Multicultural Education,” Keith Wilson argues, “Multicultural education relates to education and instruction designed for the cultures of several different races in an education system. This approach to teaching and learning is based upon consensus building, respect, and fostering cultural pluralism within racial societies.” Multicultural education attempts to provide a more diverse curriculum, one that fosters respect and understanding for various cultures and races.

Incorporating a multicultural education can promote racial tolerance as well as encourage minorities to perform better in school. According to Wilson, “Reduction of fear, ignorance, and personal detachment are possible benefits to a multicultural education.” Learning about the contributions of minorities can help to dispel racial prejudice. If students fail to learn about these contributions, they may develop a worldview where white people are superior and people of color are inferior. Unfortunately, adopting a multicultural curriculum may not be easy.

In Arizona, the Tucson Unified School District ignited a fierce debate when it voted to ban Mexican-American studies courses. Within the district, many Latino/a students were falling behind in and/or dropping out of school. As a response, at-risk students were allowed to substitute traditional courses with Mexican-American studies courses. Initially, these courses were developed to help students of color succeed in school. It worked. According to Mark Karlin’s “Imposing White ‘Eurocentric’ Education on Mexican-American Students in Tucson: The Suppression of History,” the high school graduation rate for Latino/as enrolled in the Mexican-American studies program was nearly double that of other Latino/as. Implementing a multicultural curriculum increased the connection between students of color and their education.

Tucson Unified students were finally able to learn about their *own* culture and history. Not only did this shift increase student performance, it also encouraged students to value the power of their voice. Despite the success of the Mexican-American studies program, the education board voted to ban it. One parent voiced their concern over the decision, “My son was a senior at Tucson High School last year and he was taught in his Advanced Placement American History class that our founding fathers were opposed to slavery”

(Karlin). Traditional classrooms in the district contained biased and/or inaccurate information that favored historical figures of European descent.

It is important for students to understand the complexity of history rather than have it be re-written for them. The Mexican American Studies program helped many Latino/a students with their education in more ways than one. By removing the program, it further perpetuated the achievement gap; the system failed, and it left behind many Latino/a students as a consequence. Although the events in Tucson are deplorable, they are *not* uncommon.

Across America, efforts to incorporate multicultural education in public schools are unsuccessful. In “Oklahoma Lawmakers Vote Overwhelmingly to Ban Advanced Placement U.S. History,” the article relates how Oklahoma lawmakers are attempting to ban A.P. U.S. History from the state's curriculum because it “only teaches students ‘what is bad about America.’” In Colorado, lawmakers claimed that A.P. U.S. History should be “more patriotic...students would only be taught lessons depicting American heritage in a positive light, and effectively ban any material that could lead to dissent” (Legum). Essentially, lawmakers in Arizona, Oklahoma, and Colorado are attempting to misrepresent the dominate class in a positive light and diminish the contributions of minorities. This disempowers students of color and contributes to the achievement gap.

Multicultural education promotes equality and addresses the needs of minorities; hence, multicultural classes *need* to find their way into the curriculum. Cameron McCarthy provides an eight-point plan on how to do exactly that:

1. Teachers should be taught how to design a multicultural curriculum in their credential program.
2. Multicultural education should be a priority, *not* an elective.
3. The public should agree that a multicultural education will help students better understand current issues.
4. Schools should acknowledge the value of challenging Eurocentric views and notions of privilege.
5. Teachers should be directly involved in the development of the curriculum.
6. Schools should emphasize critical thinking rather than standardized testing.

7. Women, people of color, and people with disabilities should play a role in the development of a multicultural curriculum.
8. Underprivileged youth should receive an education equal to the privileged. (128)

In order to establish multicultural programs, society *must* make it a priority. We should strive to fulfill the above requirements. A multicultural education can help narrow the achievement gap and promote racial tolerance. Minorities are not well-represented in American education. Education fails minorities. But, education has the potential to promote equality and fairness. Let us work together to create a system that is equal, fair, inclusive, and just.

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## *JUNIORS*

Aanchal Narad  
**India and America: Learning From Competition**

*ABOUT THE AUTHOR:*

Aanchal is a Junior, Computer Science major at SF State. She is an international student, born and educated in New Delhi, whose curiosity about culture lead her to embrace this opportunity to be educated in the U.S. Since coming to San Francisco, she has noticed many differences between Indian and U.S. culture, and has poured those onto paper through writing, which has always been something she's enjoyed.

She writes when struggling to make a decision or when she needs to gather her scattered thoughts. She finds it therapeutic! She learns and discovers about herself through writing, which helps her grow as a person. In fact, getting published in *Sutro Review*, validates that process! Aanchal is also fitness oriented, healthy and active with yoga, as well as motivated toward her career in new technology. She is called a "social butterfly" by friends and is welcoming and open to new people and experiences.

*LECTURER, GRAHAM KENNETH ANDERSON* asked students to write a research paper on a topic of their choice.

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How do we judge the economic prosperity of a country? Does the "developed" or "undeveloped" nature of a country determine its worth? The world defines the United States as "developed," a description which recognizes access to good health facilities, convenience in transportation, a high literacy and education rate, high-tech resources, and a right to freedom and equality. Even after 62 years of independence, India, on the other hand, is still said to be in its "developing phase."

The root cause for economic prosperity and development of a country is how good an education system it has. The better the education system, the more productive a country's youth and adult citizens will be, and these productive citizens will help to build a strong economy. The values and the knowledge that we gain throughout our school and college years help us become responsible and active citizens. In this essay, I will compare the education systems of India and America from elementary level up to higher education by focusing on the tech field, deeply analyzing the teaching and learning strategies of both countries, and then evaluating what lacks in the Indian higher education system that is achieved by the American education

system. I will argue that differences in education are the reasons for the wide economic disparity between the two countries.

Americans are widely dependent on young Indian students for help with Math and Science, because of India's more singular focus on those fields of education. Americans even go so far as to directly call their Indian counterparts, picking up the phone and saying, "Hello India, I need help with my Math" (Steve). Indian students have the reputation of possessing better math and science skills than students from the rest of the world, due to the structure of their education. Because of that reputation, India has attracted over 10,000 students from United States to receive online tutoring sessions on math homework problems and basic learning skills via internet and online video conferencing (Steve). Additionally, even though U.S. 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders have improved their performance levels on the Trends in International Mathematical and Science Study, South Asian students still continue to outscore them by large margins (Viadero). This data shows that there has always been a vast gap in Southern Asian and US American students' basic calculating and other math skills both in understanding as well as in performance terms.

The result of this discrepancy is a matter of fear for the U.S., as math and science skills are required in today's world of technical and engineering departments, which drive the economic growth of a country. American workers are in direct competition with high-skilled, low paid Indian workers who tend to dominate the US economy through means of engineering and other technical jobs. An American education researcher Gerald Bracey puts forth the concern that he wishes his grandchildren had the same job opportunities that he had in his time. What troubles Bracey is the fact that Intel has partnered with NEA on the tech-focused Partnership for 21st Century Skills, who hire only foreign employees from countries such as India and China – not because of a cheaper high-tech workforce, but because of a more educated workforce than that of the United States. He recommends finding out what is happening in classrooms around the world, saying that, if he were an educator, he'd "buy a ticket to other countries to see how they do it" (Jambunathan, Caulfield). What actually happens in the Indian classroom is a question of curiosity that dwells in every American educator's mind.

A major difference between American and Indian schooling is the emphasis on *direct competition between students* for success in education and beyond. The cultural belief in India is that emphasizing rigorous work leads to achievement beyond the classroom (Morin). Every child is taught the values of education (that besting one's peers is key) and that repeated practice leads to better grades, which will eventually lead to viable income and a stable

job. Not just the teachers, but parents are involved wholly into their children's academic performances.

Indian parents engage in parenting practices that cultivate and enhance the qualities of dedication, hard work and importance of regular practice, which ultimately enable their children's academic success (Morin). Parents express worry if the child falls behind in class, and that makes the home environment tense, because the child is strongly pressured to study. Not just getting an education, but doing well in every subject is a main focus of Indian culture. Morin outlines India's cultural values as "Qualities such as attentiveness, self-control, motivation and persistence may be as important as cognitive abilities in positively affecting academic performance." As education is regarded as intensely important, the school atmosphere is quite competitive too. Therefore, to achieve high scores on tests and to be ahead of other mates, in the class, students learn to be attentive to the teacher. They gain self-control and do not let any distractions come their way in order to spend more hours studying.

In order to address concerns for US math and science education, we must first look to teachers. For the improvement of mathematical skills of students in the U.S., it is first important to improve the way teachers are trained (Morin). In the U.S., teachers are expected to jump right into teaching. U.S. educators are observed once or twice and are given classrooms to handle right away. What follows is that no one is given the authority to keep an eye on newer teachers, or at least not in any substantial way. This gives the teacher total control over the classroom even though the teacher is not trained thoroughly.

Conversely, ongoing training is given to teachers in India. According to a lesson study by Morin, teachers conduct research with the goal to evaluate how well they are giving lessons to classes and how that can be improved. Every month, teachers chose an important topic to teach to a certain number of students as all the staff from that particular department observes and takes notes. This is the form of research conducted to evaluate every teacher's teaching skills on a regular basis. Thereafter, colleagues participate in an active discussion to mention the flaws in the method of teaching and how to improve them. Teachers learn from one another and help each other out to find the best approach to make lessons clear to the students. For example, they make simple diagrams and colorful flowcharts for a better and easier understanding of concepts that are important for long term gains, and those that have seemed difficult to students from their past experiences. The senior professor ends the meeting with important comments to be remembered. This way, Indian teachers improve and better their teaching style and productivity.



One main reason why teachers in Southern Asian countries have high Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) is because they rotate through the grades (Morin). PCK means the knowledge base for teaching which includes: knowledge of representations of subject matter, understanding of students' conceptions of the subject and the learning and teaching implications that were associated with the specific subject matter, general pedagogical knowledge (or teaching strategies), curriculum knowledge, knowledge of educational contexts, and knowledge of the purposes of education (Lee). One teacher would be given a wide range of classes, from grade one to grade six, for instance, in order to understand how the students' abilities grow with age. Students are also able to make better connections from the study material, and teachers relate class concepts and lectures in a way that allows for students to follow what they learn farther in the next class. The system is contrary to the US, where one teacher likely teaches the same grade for his entire career. This model sets a limit on the teacher's knowledge and therefore his students' as well.

Despite having a good model of education in India, there are still questions as to why the US economy is considered more developed than its Indian counterpart. It is perhaps due to the higher education offered in the US, especially in the Industrial Technology fields. Although many factors influence the economic development of a country, the IT industry acts as the right hand. The major difference in education could be noted by looking at the curricula for IT teaching in both the countries. The Lens Model of IT (Ezer) study shows that both curricula offer fundamental courses in information technology, system development and the basics of operating systems and hardware architecture. Moreover, both curricula offer courses on web technologies and programming fundamentals.

However, India focuses more on instrumental education, emphasizing technical subjects like physics, chemistry, mathematics, electrical, mechanical engineering and thermodynamics. The U.S. spends more hours on technical education along with courses based on social issues around IT. This helps students develop good social skills and be presentable in their work (Ezer). Due to lack of resources or backward mindset, India falls behind in providing this liberal kind of education that America does. But, according to its poverty stricken environment, it is indeed beneficial for Indians to be taught specific technical skills and get more and more people into employment.

The findings of the Lens IT Model study also suggest that India is not well-placed to develop these socio-technical applications. Indian businesses may continue to excel in technology, however, the country may face

difficulties in developing innovations that incorporate both technological and social aspects (Ezer). This study suggests the reason as to why Indian economy is slow in progress, even with its arguably sharper brains, is that future technical applications will not solely be dependent on technical knowledge and skills, but will also depend upon social skills and how one uses those skills to solve technical problems faced by general public.

This fact leads to another essential distinction. Students graduating from colleges in the U.S. are prepared to get into jobs immediately following school, and start to benefit their country's businesses earlier. However, in India, students need work experience before they actually start contributing to some company. We can see that the U.S. gives its students good exposure and practical skills during college education, and Indian higher education only feeds the bookish knowledge all throughout the academic life of students.

In conclusion, Indian students are offered great skills in academic learning and performance. The Indian parenting practices and school environment instills in students' minds that hard work and devotion towards studies leads to academic success and strengthening in areas like math and science. But American kids and teachers alike think differently about education. For them, social practices inherited from their parents play much greater role in academic success or failure. Also, teachers in India go through rigorous training and teaching skill development. In addition, they teach a wide range of grades, allowing them to see student development. On the other hand, in the U.S. teachers are hired without giving any training and receive little career development opportunities. Because of such circumstances Indian students and their minds are welcomed all over the world for *specific* professionalism in technical fields. However, Indian education is quite backwards in the sense that students do not learn social skills and gain practical exposure while in college, which is essentially required to get into jobs and be an asset to the economy. The people of India and U.S. should learn from each other and adapt new ways in their respective systems of education to reach the zenith of success and light up the world with new breakthroughs. India will then be able to narrow the economic disparity and be called a "developed nation," ready to give its citizens a life worth living!

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Sandra Chavez  
**Peanut Allergies: Institutional Challenges and Progress**

*ABOUT THE AUTHOR:*

Although Sandra is from Anaheim, California, she has called the Bay Area home for the past six years. She had dreamed of becoming a pastry chef and moved to the area for love... a love of baking and for her now husband. While teaching herself to bake she became interested in nutrition. Once she knew how much sugar and fat goes into each of the treats she loves, she set out to learn more about the dietetics field and how she could make healthier choices, as well as help others make them. Currently, she is pursuing a degree in Dietetics and hopes to work with the local community to improve their nutritional status and overall health. As a participant of the Student Dietetic Association she is able to connect with classmates and work with them to educate our own SFSU community to make healthier diet choices.

Some of her other interests include taking vacations (based on what restaurants to visit) and running. She has completed three half-marathons and hopes to complete her fourth this year.

*COMMENT FROM LECTURER, CLAIR WALSH:*

Sandra wrote her essay about peanut allergies in response to the following prompt: Analyze and discuss a topic covered in the Special Issues in Foodservice Management lecture using current literature. The analysis and discussion should convey an understanding from both the managerial perspective as well as the population affected by the special issue chosen. Research should support the topic and generate a thorough discussion, which may also include cross-cultural and legal or ethical dilemmas as they relate to the trend or issue. This assignment should communicate meaningfully with your audience while demonstrating critical thinking skills.

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Peanut allergies are one of the most common allergies in the world and allergic reactions to peanuts hospitalize hundreds of sufferers every year; some individuals don't survive their reaction to exposure. Early diagnoses for this allergy are common, however those who are not aware of their affliction are at a particularly high risk of exposure and a potentially fatal reaction. Some of those, whom are aware of their allergy, may only know so because of the severe reactions they get when exposed. The risk associated with a reaction is especially high in undiagnosed groups; the unwitting exposure to peanut

products can lead to reactions varying from skin irritation to anaphylactic shock.

The quantity of peanuts needed to induce a reaction is small, but significant, as Al-Muhsen, Clarke, and Kagan state in their publication “in most people with peanut allergy, symptoms develop after substantially less than 1 peanut is ingested, and highly allergic people can react to trace amounts” (1280). The prevalence and, at times fatal, reaction of this allergy gives institutions such as schools, hospitals, and nursing homes the added responsibility to keep clients safe from exposure to allergens without marginalizing them and to provide a safe, nutritious meal for the entire population they serve.

Schools contain a community of children at various stages of development whom have individual and sometimes critical needs. Those with peanut allergies, as well as the staff entrusted with their care, are in need of additional guidance and training to understand the symptoms of a reaction and the actions necessary to ensure a favorable outcome from any unintended exposure.

Schools, particularly those serving large districts, have the added duty of ensuring student safety from different avenues, and the task of feeding this population while keeping those with allergies safe can be difficult. Challenges to this effort involve legal, social, and individual health considerations for affected individuals and the school systems to which they belong. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 prohibits any action by an institution which could be interpreted as isolating or marginalizing of the individual due to their disability. A student being allocated to a “nut-free” table can be affected socially and the separation may be construed as a violation of the ADA.

The lunchroom has historically been a place for students to gather and socialize over meals. Fellow students may not understand the consequences of cross-contamination of meals, leaving the student vulnerable to bullying and social anxiety. School districts work to provide a safe environment for students with food allergies however, “as a food institution, the school is increasingly becoming a venue for the consumption of food brought from home” (Rouse and Hunt 827). This can complicate the measures already in place for students receiving their meals from the school. Some facilities have banned students from bringing peanut products from home when notified of a student’s allergy, but this relies on the cooperation of individuals for success. Maintaining good communication with parents of all students can drive fruitful discussion of food allergies and cooperation to keep those afflicted by peanuts safe from the allergens.

In institutions such as schools, an informed and competent staff is essential for minimizing risk of exposure to allergens. Members of the food service staff and faculty should be trained in procedures to avoid exposure; this is especially true if the student has severe reactions. Although preventative measures are not a guarantee for an allergen-free environment, they are still imperative to lessen the risk of adverse reactions. In the 2013 publication “Voluntary Guidelines for Managing Food Allergies In Schools and Early Care and Education Programs,” the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommends developing an individualized education plan for each student with a food allergy. The CDC’s recommendations can be utilized for the majority of food allergies, however, peanut allergies are of particular importance due to the risk of anaphylaxis which, if not treated quickly can prove fatal. As noted in the *Voluntary Guidelines* “in the United States, fatal or near fatal reactions are most often caused by peanuts (50%–62%) and tree nuts (15%–30%).” (CDC). The death of Natalie Giorgi at a day camp in Sacramento is a prime example of the consequences of an uninformed or negligent staff (Stanton, Creamer, and Lindel). In this particular instance, the staff members at the camp were negligent in their failure to properly label and separate the treats intended for this young camper and the consequences were devastating. Adherence to a plan and well-trained staff can spare those affected by this allergy from a traumatic or fatal episode. In regards to peanut allergies, the CDC plan includes knowing the type of reaction, symptoms, and appropriate actions to take in case of exposure. The types of reactions vary from hives to the more serious and sometimes fatal reaction, anaphylaxis, which can lead to anaphylactic shock if not recognized and treated immediately. A detailed plan for each student can help differentiate if a student’s allergic reaction needs an epinephrine injection or an antihistamine.

It is imperative that staff are trained to recognize the symptoms of anaphylactic shock as well as possible ways a student may attempt to communicate their symptoms. Access to and early administration of epinephrine are also key factors, to surviving the reaction, in the event of anaphylaxis. The California Department of Education requires school districts to stock epinephrine auto-injectors. Each school is expected to designate a nurse, administrator, or other personnel to undergo training for the device and to administer it in the event of a food allergy emergency (Education Code, 2015). The drawback to this legislation is that it only applies to publicly funded schools; private schools are provided the option to stock the devices. With food allergies on the rise, various states are adopting legislation to protect the lives of those with

these types of allergies and more states are likely to follow in passing similar legislation.

Peanut allergies carry a litany of precautions to be taken by affected individuals, family members, and institutions providing meals for affected individuals. Schools face the added responsibility of maintaining a safe and welcoming environment for all students. For students with anaphylactic reactions to peanut allergies the environment requires extra care in the form of a plan within the school. Open communication with the students, parents, and staff is imperative to avoid a potentially fatal event. School districts are adopting various methods to keep their students safe at mealtimes, but further cooperation from all parties is needed to ensure the safety of educational environments.

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## *SENIORS*



Peter W. Ngoi  
**Solving Structure-Function Relationships– Two Flavors of  
Computational Chemistry**

*ABOUT THE AUTHOR:*

Peter Ngoi graduated from San Francisco State with a Bachelor's of Science in Biochemistry in December of 2015. During his time as an undergraduate, he became interested in computational chemistry/biochemistry under the tutelage of Dr. Anton Guliaev. "I have always been fascinated by science, nature, and technology." says Ngoi. "In this crazy mixed up world we live in, I find solace in the absolutes of science... Being actively engaged in scientific research is a lifestyle all on its own and I am constantly thinking of my experiments." Outside of the lab Peter enjoys camping in Northern California, running, and eating toast with his girlfriend. Peter is currently working as a research assistant at BioMarin Pharmaceutical Inc. and plans to go back to back to school to pursue a graduate degree.

*COMMENT FROM LECTURER, ANASTASIA MICHAELS:*

Peter Ngoi wrote this review article to fulfill the Graduation Writing Assessment Requirement for SFSU's Chemistry Department. The review article assignment and the associated class challenge our students to focus on a single area of current area of molecular science research, review a minimum of five articles, and synthesize their content into a 4,000 word paper. While this exercise is somewhat abstracted from a review article which would be published in a peer-reviewed scientific journal, in completing it, students demonstrate their ability to write within the discipline of chemistry. Arguably more importantly, in writing this review, students are challenged to take ownership of their chemistry education and apply their knowledge deeply.

This article and the author impressed me by pushing that ownership to its limits. Peter came with the idea of the relation between different ways of modeling molecular dynamics using computer simulations. He demonstrated his ideas with a well-developed concept map and a carefully selected set of articles to review. He was very professional, timely and thorough throughout the writing process, and the final product does a nice job of tying disparate and complex computer models together in clear language to explain the present state and application of these tools in chemistry.

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**CONSPECTUS:** In the past decade, computers have become the most promising tool for unlocking the secrets of life (i.e. the fundamental relationships between nucleic acids, amino acids, and biological functions). These relationships separate humans from all other life on earth and oddly their secrets are widely undiscovered. But what can a computer tell us about life? The short answer is nothing on its own. The advantage of a computer lies in its ability to rapidly process information. Scientists with knowledge of computer programming have been able to harness this power to tackle otherwise impossible tasks, such as simulating the dynamic behavior of proteins<sup>1</sup> or annotating entire genomes across various species<sup>2</sup>. This is made possible by: 1) Improved methodologies<sup>3</sup> and algorithms capable of describing atomic properties and depicting patterns and trends; 2) Increased computer processing power; 3) an enormous quantity of unanalyzed raw data. For these reasons, there has been a marriage of computer and biological sciences with the goal of understanding protein structure-function relationships. The current *in vitro* techniques do not offer a complete picture when it comes to minute atomic motions that are often vital for understanding structure-function relationships<sup>4</sup>. Also, the human mind is incapable of matching the efficiency of a computer. Computer software powering molecular dynamics (MD) simulations and bioinformatics techniques are now routinely used for predicting protein structure-function relationships. MD simulations offer knowledge of atomic movement and are a powerful tool when evaluating a single protein structure<sup>5</sup>. Bioinformatics allows for the swift analysis of entire genomes and protein sequences, which have made headway in mapping entire protein families as well as advancing our understanding of DNA<sup>6</sup>. Solving protein structure-function relationships is invaluable when dealing with protein related diseases. For instance, drug designs can be improved through evaluating protein-drug interactions and calculating relative free energies of binding<sup>7</sup>. Protein engineers can test designs *in silico* and observe if desired folds have been achieved<sup>8</sup>. Incorporating quantum mechanic calculations gives clues to enzyme mechanisms<sup>9</sup>. Protein functions can be mined from DNA sequences using algorithms designed to find relationships between DNA and protein structures<sup>10</sup>. In this paper, I will discuss these modern applications used by computational chemists as well discuss their limitations, legitimacy, and future directions.

## 1.0 MOLECULAR DYNAMICS

MD simulations have been coined the “computational microscope” because of their ability to predict the dynamic behavior of macromolecules *in silico*<sup>11</sup>. This is a major advantage over NMR, MS, and x-ray crystallography, which provide static structural data of macromolecules. MD simulations rely on an array of equations to predict atomic motion. In general, atomic trajectories are determined by solving Newton’s equations of motion, where forces and potential energies are solved through calculating molecular mechanic force fields. Once a set of calculations is complete the position of the atoms change accordingly, then the cycle continues for a given length. An example of the force field equations is described in Figure 1.

Force field calculations are the sum of bonded and nonbonded energies. Bonded energies, or covalent energies, account for the vibrational, angular, and torsion forces that arise between covalently bonded atoms. Nonbonded energies, or noncovalent energies, account for electrostatic and steric forces that arise between nonbonded atoms. Nonbonded energies are difficult to calculate accurately because every atom experiences nonbonded forces between every other atom. The number of nonbonded forces that a single atom will experience can be described by the total number of atoms squared ( $N^2$ ). For example, hemoglobin contains 4,387 atoms so a single atom will experience ~19,245,729 nonbonded forces. While it is possible to calculate every nonbonded force, it is not practical or necessary to accurately describe the dynamic behavior of macromolecules<sup>12</sup>. To reduce the number of nonbonded calculations during a MD simulation, a user defined “cut off” value is selected, where the nonbonded forces are only calculated within the cutoff threshold. Different programs have variations of how non-bonded forces are calculated. In general, electrostatic forces are modeled after Coulomb’s law and steric forces are modeled after Van der Waals interactions.

The result of running MD simulations is a detailed “movie” which showcases the dynamical behavior of a system over time. Scientists have been able to use MD simulations as a technique for developing drugs, protein engineering, prediction enzymatic mechanisms, and much more.

$$V = \sum_{bonds} k_b (l - l_o)^2 + \sum_{angles} k_a (\theta - \theta_o)^2 + \sum_{torsions} \frac{1}{2} V_n [1 + \cos(n\omega - \gamma)] + \sum_{j=1}^{N-1} \sum_{i=j+1}^N \left\{ \epsilon_{i,j} \left[ \left( \frac{r_{o,ij}}{r_{ij}} \right)^{12} - 2 \left( \frac{r_{o,ij}}{r_{ij}} \right)^6 \right] + \frac{q_i q_j}{4\pi\epsilon_o r_{i,j}} \right\}$$

**Figure 1. Calculating Atomic Force Fields According to the Assisted Model Building with Energy Refinement Program (AMBER).** The first three summations account for the bonded forces. The last two summations account for nonbonded forces. Van der Waals interactions are represented by Lennard-Jones potentials and electrostatic interactions are represented by Coulomb's potentials. Ref 11, copyright 2012 Baishideng.

## 1.1 DRUG DESIGN

One of the biggest setbacks in developing new drugs is screening hundreds of thousands molecular candidates. *In vitro* testing often results in wasted time and money especially when the desired effects are not met. This can be overcome though *in silico* screening methods with the ability to rapidly analyze molecular candidates without having purchase or synthesize new material.

Scientists from Switzerland have developed an *in silico* screening method to rapidly test thousands of molecules with the potential to inhibit CREBBP bromodomains<sup>12</sup>. CREBBP bromodomains are proteins made of about 110 amino acids that play a critical role in embryonic development and growth control. Mutations in this protein have been linked to cancers such as leukemia. Being a relatively small macromolecule makes CREBBP bromodomain proteins an ideal candidate for the *in silico* screening method which involves MD simulations.

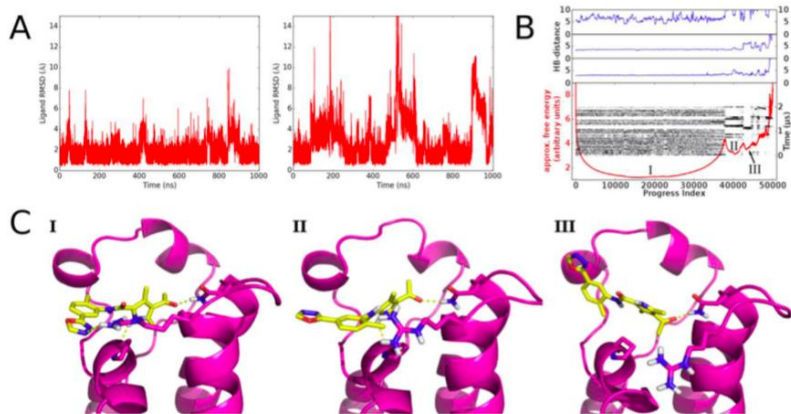
The first *in silico* procedure, involves the program anchor-based library tailoring (ALTA). This program works in four main steps and is able to rapidly screen out molecules based on weak binding affinities. First, candidate molecules are decomposed into fragments by their most flexible bonds. Second, the fragments are simulated docking to the target, Asn1168, and the docking energy is measured. Third, the program identifies potential molecules based on the fragments from step two with the lowest docking energy. Last,

the potential molecules are simulated docking to Asn1168 and the docking energy is measured.

Specific filters were applied so that only the molecules with the greatest potential as CREBBP bromodomain inhibitors were allowed to move on. Following this procedure, the scientists started with 1,984,949 molecules stored in the ZINC Leads-Now library and narrowed it down to 20 molecules. These 20 molecules represented the top 1000 ranked molecules based on desired atomic structures and docking energies. The 20 molecules moved on to the next *in silico* procedure that involved MD simulations. The MD simulations allowed the scientists to investigate the stability and binding mode of the molecules. As a result, three molecules were ruled out based on their weak affinity to the binding domain.

The remaining 17 molecules were tested *in vitro* through two biochemical assays. TR-FRET assays were used to determine the activity of the CREBBP bromodomain proteins and BROMOscan assays were used to determine the dissociation constant ( $K_d$ ). Two molecules, hit 1 and 9, had  $K_d$  values of 13 and 29  $\mu\text{M}$  and were chosen for the last *in silico* procedure, which again involved MD simulations. The goal of this procedure was to investigate the binding modes and energies with the intention of optimizing the molecules to have more favorable interactions within the binding site. The specific parameters observed for hit 1 can be seen in Figure 2.

Specific interactions lead to the synthesis of seven variants derived from hit 1 and 9, which were tested with the same *in vitro* procedure as before. Variant 6 was derived from hit 1 and had a  $K_d$  of 4.2  $\mu\text{M}$ . Variant 10 was derived from hit 9 and had a  $K_d$  value of 0.77  $\mu\text{M}$ . This experiment proved that *in silico* methods could be used to screen and optimize drug designs.



**Figure 2. MD Optimization of Hit 1.** (A) The root-mean square deviation for hit 1 in the binding site as observed in two simulations with different initial velocities. Larger fluctuations in the y-axis correlates to more movement and a less stable binding mode. (B) The free energy profile of binding (red curve) is shown with the trace of the temporal evolution of the system (black dots). The trace signifies a change in the binding mode, which correlates to the changes in the free energy profile. Hydrogen bond distances for Arg1173 (top), Pro1110 (middle), and Asn1168 (bottom) are shown in blue. (C) The three most populated binding modes and their correlation to the free energy profile. Ref 12 copyright Am. Chem. Society.

## 1.2 PROTEIN ENGINEERING

Computational protein design (CPD) is an *in silico* method for predicting protein folds with desired properties. CPD techniques are commonly used by protein engineers to test designs. However, CPD techniques are not capable of sampling different energetic and conformational states that proteins experience in their native environments. This can lead to inaccurate designs. Also, *in vitro* testing of CPD designs can be time consuming and expensive when experimental procedures do not exist or the desired fold is not achieved. For these reasons it is useful to evaluate the predicted protein structures with MD simulations prior to experimental evaluation. MD simulations allow for *in silico* analysis of CPD designs at relatively low costs.

## 1.3 PREDICTING MECHANISMS

Classic MD simulations based on molecular mechanic calculations have proven to accurately describe the dynamic behavior of proteins without the integration of quantum forces contributed from electrons<sup>14</sup>. However, when studying enzyme mechanisms with MD simulations it is useful to integrate quantum forces as part of the atomic force field. Quantum forces are generally calculated through solving Schrodinger's equation. Integrating quantum forces allow for more accurate models at the cost of higher computational costs. Simulations based purely on quantum mechanics have an estimated  $N^3$  number calculations per cycle, where  $N$  is the number of atoms in the simulation. To avoid high computational costs hybrid quantum mechanics/molecular mechanics (QM/MM) simulations were developed. The area of major interests, like the active site of an enzyme, is treated with quantum mechanics and the rest of the system is treated with molecular mechanics. In this way, the QM/MM MD simulation combine the accuracy provided by quantum mechanics and the speed provided by molecular mechanics.

## **2.0 BIOINFORMATICS AND GENOME NEIGHBORHOOD NETWORKS**

The vast amount of solved genomes and protein sequences has led to new bioinformatics techniques to understand this biological data. These techniques make use of statistical analysis algorithms and computational processing power to efficiently decipher entire genomes. The most popular and advantageous uses for bioinformatics have come through assessing relationships between genomes and protein sequences. As a result, structure-function relationships for entire protein families have been characterized.

A group of scientists from the University of California San Francisco have developed a new bioinformatics method called the genome neighborhood network (GNN) with the ability to predict enzyme functions<sup>10</sup>. The GNN technique uses information stored in online databases that contain sequenced genomes and known protein functions to identify unknown functions of protein based on their position in a genome neighborhood. An example can be seen in Figure 3. This method works because DNA is typically organized by operons. An operon is a group of genes that transcribe proteins with related functions, such as all of the proteins necessary for a specific metabolic pathway. The GNN method was tested on the proline racemase superfamily (PRS) and validated with *in vitro* enzyme activity experiments.

As a result, the scientists were able to evaluate the query genes based on the similarities in their DNA sequence as well as their position in the genome. The functions of more than 85% of proteins in the PRS superfamily were predicted and confirmed through enzyme activity assays.



**Figure 3. Predicting Enzyme Functions.** It is common to have sequenced a gene but be unaware of structure and function of the transcribed protein. Gene A is known to be a kinase and gene C is known to be an isomerase. GNN analysis is able to predict the function of unknown sequenced genes by assessing relationships between neighboring genes. Copyright National Institute of Genome Medical Sciences.

<http://efi.igb.illinois.edu/efi-gnt/tutorial.php>.

### 3.0 DISCUSSION

Scientists have been using computational techniques to model biological structures since the 1960s, however computational results should never be fully trusted without experimental results that support each other. It has been proven that nuclear magnetic resonance (NMR) and molecular dynamics (MD) simulations can be used to determine protein structures. However, determining the folding mechanism for proteins has been more challenging to collect experimental evidence for.

A group of scientists have developed an experimental procedure to validate protein folding transitions observed in long-range MD simulations using NMR experiments<sup>16</sup>. The model for these experiments was the single-domain protein gpW. The transition from folded to unfolded was evaluated by analyzing the chemical shifts obtained from NMR experiments while varying the pH (1.5-8.1) and temperature (273-371 K). Cluster analysis of 180 chemical shift curves revealed 15 unfolding transitions, which were exploited to infer key aspects of the folding interaction network. Further refining of the chemical shift curves resulted in a unique residue-residue

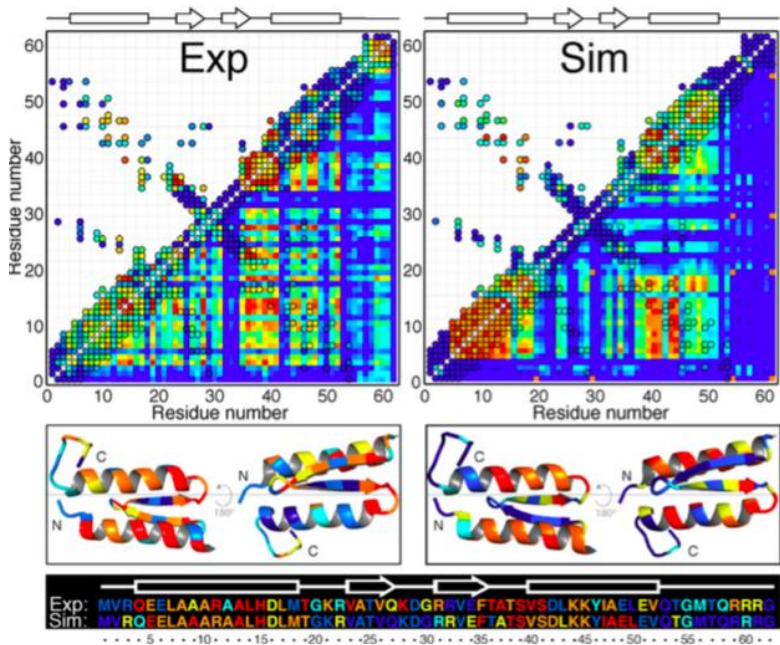


thermodynamic coupling matrix. Using the thermodynamic coupling index equation, researchers were able to determine which residues coupled together and the intensity of these interactions. The NMR derived thermodynamic coupling matrix was then compared to the MD derived thermodynamic coupling matrix Figure 4.

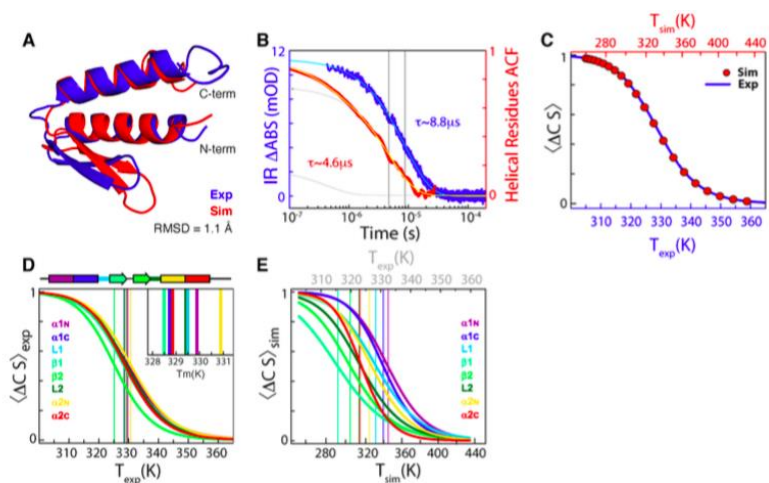
Almost identical to the NMR experiments, long-range MD simulations for gpW were carried out and a residue-residue thermodynamic coupling matrix was constructed from the MD simulations. Comparing the experimental and simulation thermodynamic coupling matrix revealed that the simulation accurately mapped out major residue-residue interactions for gpW, but didn't fully capture secondary structure coupling. While the experimental thermodynamic coupling matrix does not fully match the simulated, the end result (a folded gpW protein) is the same Figure 5 (A). Figure 5 (D) and (E) display the change of chemical shift for folding gpW according to its secondary structure. Figure 5 (D) suggests that the secondary structures of gpW folds concertedly, while Figure 5(E) suggests that the secondary structures fold independently. This supports a cooperative folding mechanism that is not observed in the simulation and supports the differences observed in the thermodynamic coupling matrix.

The difference between experimental and simulated results that is commonly observed suggests that the degree of methodology describing atomic interactions is not sufficient to describe true atomic interactions. This may be overcome by eliminating approximations used in MD simulations<sup>17</sup>. The two major approximations are the use of cutoff values to reduce the number of calculated nonbonded interactions and withdrawing quantum mechanic calculations from force field calculations. These approximations are used to reduce the computational costs for running MD simulations. To eliminate the need for approximations, faster computers need to be developed.

Scientists have made progress overcoming the computational bottle-neck by engineering the supercomputer called "Anton". Anton was design by the David E. Shaw Research group with specialized hardware for the purpose of running MD simulations<sup>7</sup>. Anton has allowed researcher so study molecular motion over on the scale of milliseconds, which was about two orders of magnitude larger than any other simulation in 2009.



**Figure 4. Comparing Experimental and Theoretical Thermodynamic Coupling Matrixes.** Highest coupling between residues is shown in red and the lowest coupling between residues is shown in dark blue. The top left sections on the coupling matrix displays direct interactions between residues while the bottom right sections display the entire coupling matrix. Black circles display native interactions. Ref 16, copyright Am. Chem. Society.



**Figure 5. Comparing Theoretical and Experimental Results for gpW.** (A) Structure of gpW as determined through x-ray crystallography (blue) and MD simulations (red). (B) IR spectrum as determined experimentally (blue) and through MD simulations (red). (C) The change in NMR chemical shift values as determined experimentally (blue) and through MD simulations (red dots). (D) The change in chemical shift by secondary structure determined through NMR experiments. (E) The change in chemical shift by secondary structure determined through MD simulations. Ref 16. Am. Chem. Society.

### 3.0 CONCLUSION

Computational methods such as MD simulations and Bioinformatics are becoming engrained in the research of solving protein structure-function relationships. Advances in this research have had a profound positive impact in many areas. MD simulations allow for accurate knowledge of protein dynamics at the atomic level. This has aided in the discovery and improvement of drug designs, validating protein designs, and predicting enzyme reactions. Bioinformatics techniques have made progress in characterizing entire protein families. Today, the greatest limiting factors for computational chemists lie in the computational processing power and compiling accurate databases. Overcoming these limitations will allow for faster and more accurate results.

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Kaitlynn Holmes  
**Hydrarchy: Power, Globalization, and the Sea**

*ABOUT THE AUTHOR:*

Katie Holmes was born in a quaint suburban town in the sunshine city of San Diego, California. After a semester of life changing classes at her community college, she left the beaches to head for the big city to pursue her dream career in museum curation and exhibition design. Her passions for the arts and the quirkiness of San Francisco encouraged her to pursue a degree in Art History, specializing in photography and classical Mediterranean studies. Her practice involves an introspective look at how politics and cultures have shaped the development of the modern world, and in turn our relationship with the way in which we create and express ourselves. Aside from reading plenty of text books and blinding people with the flash of her 1980's Canon camera, you can find Katie Holmes grooving at a local show in the Mission or enjoying some good ol' cartoons.

*COMMENT FROM PROFESSOR SANTHI KAVARI-BAUER:*

The seminar for which Katie's paper was written provides an overview of art historical methods. It familiarizes art history undergraduates with a range of methodological approaches to art historical analysis. Students were asked to choose a topic and provide an original argument with historical support.

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## **Hydrarchy**

The ocean is undeniably an inspiration to all, using its neutral and connecting nature to bring the world together, creating the modern world we live in today. While looking into the ocean's histories, we are often brought to the story of Hercules battling the vicious, many headed Hydra of Lerna. This many headed monster is often used as symbol of disorder and resistance, proving a powerful threat against society and capitalism. The idea of Hercules battling this creature influenced the conceptual book written by Marcus Rediker and Peter Linebaugh, *The Many Headed Hydra*. In this text, they attack the "many heads" of capitalism and coin the term *Hydrarchy*, whose etymological roots mean "water" and "power". Through the examination of *Hydrarchy*, we are shown the incredible influence the ocean has over the development of our modern world, and how it affects the people who are a part of it. The purpose of this research paper is to examine art that is related to the concept of *Hydrarchy*, and the political power of the ocean.

This conceptual idea of *Hydrarchy* has shaped many gallery exhibitions, showing throughout London, England; Cairo, Egypt; and San Francisco, California. These exhibitions strive to portray the “many heads” of the Hydra, referencing the ongoing human struggle experienced throughout the development of capitalism. The ocean is viewed as both a point of strength and struggle for communities near its borders. The art of *Hydrarchy* provides us with an aesthetic of maritime culture to better understand the development of capitalism and modernization. By analyzing works from artists Jenifer Wofford, David Huffman, and Bouchara Khalili, we can get a glimpse at how influential the ocean is on topics such as race, immigration, and labor. The fluid nature of the ocean reveals how assumptions of race, immigration, and history can be expanded to include alternative views in the narrative of global power.

## **Hydrarchy: Power, Globalization, and the Sea**

### Chapter 1: Historical Background

*We are tied to the ocean. And when we go back to the sea, whether it is to sail or to watch – we are going back from whence we came.* - John F. Kennedy

The ocean is the connective link across the planet, not only providing necessary resources for survival, but also in creating international bonds of travel, trade, and storytelling. The sea has been an essential part of the modernization of today’s society, allowing trade, immigration, labor systems, and capitalism to substantially grow throughout the years. Realizing the incredible impact that the ocean has had on the development of modern society, a large community of artists, historians, and anthropologists use the ocean as a new lens for critical analysis. The authors of the text, *The Many Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic*, Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, investigate the history of resistance to the rise of capitalism and growth of the English speaking Atlantic, by those dependent upon their common rights. They notice connections between those who are made the victims of modernization, and those forced to be a part of culturally dominant European world.

This book was a major influence to the creation of the conceptual idea *hydrarchy*, referring to the power of the ocean, providing a maritime critique of globalization. The collaborative efforts of curators Ana Collins and Mia

Jankowiz, introduced this new lens as a smaller part of their innovative project, *Disclosures*, aiming to create a new platform for cultural thought. Personal heritage, strife, and cultural influences have always made an impact on artists and in turn their art, addressing many of the “heads” or issues that are tackled in *The Many Headed Hydra*. Collins and Jankowiz used this sense of expression to create the dynamic exhibitions that exemplify *Hydrarchy*, searching for the hidden histories discovered through considering the neutral perspective of the sea (Contemporary Image Collective). Examining art through this neutral context extends our viewpoints in ways that allow for alternative connections. As articulated by Kobena Mercer in his text *Cosmopolitan Modernisms*, if we examine art through a neutral context it allows us to see the struggles non-western people experienced as western ideals took over, and in turn bridge the gap of our understanding of art from both a western and non-western perspective (Mercer 8). Looking at art and history through this unique lens leads to numerous ideas and subjects, all of which disrupt our current views of topics such as culture, race, immigration.

## Chapter 2: Displacement and Identity Loss

The ocean allows for two way traffic between different environments, encouraging disparate cultural and geographical spaces to conjoin (Lienbaugh, Rediker). Predominantly Western or “white” culture tends to exercise its influence across the Atlantic. The authentic roots of many non-white artists are essential to their identity, for heritage and past experiences form the person and the art they create today. As stated by the artist Judy Baca, “The process of making art is the transforming of pain... And if you deny the presence of another people and their culture and deny their cultural traditions, you are basically committing cultural genocide” (Lippard 170).

The establishment of colonialism provided a massive mixture of cultures and identities. Exploration and immigration displaced many peoples from their native territory, leading to an eventual intermixing between races and heritages. Art critic Lucy Lippard explores such concepts of multicultural art movements in her book *Mixed Blessings*, where she determines that a great deal of art is expressive of the internal exile that haunts those affected by cultural globalization (Lippard 105-106). This displacement from a homeland leaves people in search of identity in an unsupportive, foreign place. Such dislocation leads individuals from a variety of cultural backgrounds to assert the need to claim a new identity, or reclaim a lost one.



Using a vocabulary of images, African American artist David Huffman explores reoccurring themes of westernization and race throughout the use of UFOs, basketballs, and his Black astronaut figures known as “traumanauts.” Having a foot in both African and white culture, Huffman has a complex source of inspirations that help him identify with the human experience of minority groups. Very inspired by toys, comics and popular art, Huffman created the imaginary group of astronauts known as “traumanauts,” who on their mission to earth search for the inward and outward markings of identity taken from them by their experience in a racist society (Baker). In a 2009 interview in *White Hot Magazine* Huffman stated,

“The traumanauts are the psychological personalities coming from the rupture of slavery for Africans. I would label them TRAUMANaut, rather than astronaut, because of this traumatic rupture of existence. From being captured, brought to America and parts of Europe, as workers, as slaves, there’s a culture identity that’s been decimated. The traumanauts are constantly looking for a location, for home” (Scarboro).

Figure 1: David Huffman, *Promiseland*, 2009



In his 2009 mixed media piece *Promiseland* (Figure 1), we see a group of traumanauts stepping off a ship into a vast unknown land, their faces, bodies, and overall identity concealed by an astronomical suit. Symbolizing the effect

that modernization has on third world societies, Huffman expresses the forcible stripping of many people's cultural identities, forcing them to succumb to an assertive Western culture. His concealment of the figures identity signifies the struggle that many people of color seem to battle with, the struggle to identify themselves within the complexity of their heritage. These astronaut suits are a sort of mask, for the suit allows the individual to be concealed and allows the chance to make up and create themselves, along with a new identity. Through a hydrological analysis we can understand the internal sense of exile and identification displacement that Huffman conveys. He exposes how modernization has stripped down cultural individuality, sending individuals in search of uniqueness in a society that does not celebrate it.

Figure 2: Bouchra Khalili, *The Mapping Journey Project*, 2008-2011



Figure 3: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l2D6UYPDZas>



French-Moroccan artist Bouchra Khalili devotes herself to using the experimental and fine art qualities of documentary and cinema to display the wide gap in the stories of immigration. During Cairo's Contemporary Image Collective (CIC) 2012 showing of *Hydrarchy: Transitional and Transformative Seas*, she displayed her multimedia piece, *The Mapping Journey Project*. For her project, Khalili embarked on numerous journeys throughout Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East between 2008 and 2011, encountering variety of different immigrants, migration paths, and stories (Contemporary Image Collective). *The Mapping Journey Project* (Figures 2-3), is a multimedia project that was launched as a juxtaposition of the many illegal immigration routes that are taken in order to cross borders within our current geographical map. Her piece includes eight video installations along with eight silkscreen prints titled "The Constellations", both which strive to create an alternative map of contemporary migratory paths (Khalili, Galerie de Marseille). The videos depict an unidentified person using a thick black marker to inscribe their routes across official maps of the state, while a voice over narrates the everyday concerns, emotions, and events that constitute the singular lives of irregular immigrants (Pugliese). In a brief video excerpt from *Mapping Journey #1* (2008) (Figure 3), we hear a fusion of dialects ranging from Arabic, Spanish, and French, mixed with tones of sadness and distress. Only with the growth of colonization could such languages be introduced and blended together (Harvey). Using an anonymous voice as the subject, the onlooker is forced to discern the power of displacement for those who are not a part of the dominant culture. Khalili illustrates journeys that would be otherwise excluded from official history, and in doing so she mocks the state for its desire to control the cross border

movements of the undesirables (Pugliese). Khalili's piece critiques both modern governments and the restrictions of borders, while also addressing the shift in people making these journeys.

As stated by Lucy Lippard, "The art being made about dislocation today is a critique of modern society" (Lippard 107). Exposing these pieces to a hydrological context allows others to understand the internal sense of displacement and identity loss that many underwent throughout the history of a developing western culture. Both Huffman and Khalili's artworks examine the dislocation of immigrants, along with the subtle effects on the personalities of both the individual and community. They express how modernization has stripped away cultural individuality and how norms of western culture are celebrated rather than worldly uniqueness. The diaspora of many peoples are triggered by the connectedness of the ocean, creating a wide variety of artistic achievements.

### Chapter 3: The Struggle for Power throughout History

The increased interest in trade and travel encouraged the growth in globalization, creating a massive shift of power among people. Border towns that were once sovereign were forced to adhere to new authorities, creating major shifts in politics and governance. Nations subjected to undergo this colonization process lost their sovereignty, forcing hundreds of native men and women to release their personal power. People of different ethnicities and gender were influenced succumb to the Western man's ideal, one of great wealth, entrepreneurship, and empire. Filipino-American artist Jenifer Wofford uses a thorough examination of her heritage to inspire her work. A woman of Filipino descent, she uses the continual trials that people of her ethnicity undergo to inspire her practice, attacking many stereotypes that are associated with the Filipino-American.

The female Filipino nurse is a common theme in Wofford's art, often depicted in a fluid state of work. With the passage of several immigration laws in 1998, foreign nurses have a much easier time obtaining working visas, progressing the history of the Filipino nurse into a continual tale of American influence and immigration. Nursing schools throughout the Philippines are based on United States English and curriculum, driving immigration rates up in hopes of a hopeful future. With many of the at home nurses moving across the ocean

statistics show that almost 75% of the 17,000 foreign nurses come over from the Philippines (Prystay, “Nurse Shortage in U.S. Drains Philippine Pool”).

Figure 4: Jenifer Wofford, *The MacArthur Nurses*, 2014



Figure 5: Life Magazine, *The Beachhead Scene*, 1944



Realizing what an effect this trade had on overall Filipino culture, Wofford was inspired to create *The MacArthur Nurses* (Figure 4), in 2014. *MacArthur Nurses* is based off the famous staged photograph from Life Magazine’s “Beachhead Scene” (Figure 5), signifying General MacArthur’s 1944 return

to the Philippines during World War II (Wofford). Serving as the military adviser to the Philippines for many years before and the duration of World War II, MacArthur had strong ties to the land and community. Two years after barely escaping death during a Japanese invasion in 1942, leaving thousands of his men under Japanese control, General MacArthur and his men waded ashore on the island of Leyte where this famous photograph was snapped (History). Using the fluidity of the ocean, General MacArthur created lasting maritime connections.

Wofford has a strong interest in the political histories of people of color, appropriating this icon in a way that identifies with political and social issues of both the past and present. This painting depicts eight women of Filipina descent wading through the tide while wearing a crisp, white nursing uniform. Each individual wears an expression of grim determinedness as she's trudging towards a new shore calling for her caring nature. The purposeful expressions they wear on their faces expresses the fighting strength that individuals of non-European descent experience while searching for recognition in our modern civilization. Body language of these nurses conveys an image of Filipina women pushing through boundaries that have not been crossed before. They take strong, powerful steps through a fluid body of water, expressing that like the ocean, borders are fluid and meant to be passed through (SFSU Fine Arts). By replacing American military men with female Filipino nurses we not only see the shift in gender powers, but also see strength and change in an ordinarily undermined group.

Using the concept of *hydrarchy* to examine this piece, we can see from an outside standpoint how the fluidity of the ocean shapes the cultural connections between the Americas and Philippines, encouraging continual change. *The MacArthur Nurses* (Figure 4), exemplifies the term *hydrarchy* through the use of an unobjective oceanic state to display their heritages fight for power and strength in the developing world. Wofford intertwines geography and gender in this piece, displaying how the East/West and male/female bonds become mobile positions in a field of power relations (Lippard 231). The use of a neutral ocean landscape allows the viewer to focus on the willpower of the Filipina nurses as they push through to regain both their personal and cultural power.

Figure 6: Hans Holbein the Younger, *The Ambassadors*, 1533



#### Chapter 4: Tying It All Together

The ocean has been viewed as both a point of strength and weakness throughout history, leading to the blending of cultures and the complete displacement of others. The growth of globalization encourages a western viewpoint on world history, rationalizing events of history to show only progress rather than the ugliness that affected the development of our world today. In 1533, Hans Holbein the Younger created the famous piece, *The Ambassadors* (Figure 6), in which he exemplifies this rise in globalization along with the positive and negative effects that become of it (The National Gallery). The painting depicts two young English ambassadors, surrounded by a variety of books, instruments, and tools. There is a wide variety of apparatuses essential to voyaging and mapping strewn about the selves behind the ambassadors, symbolizing their knowledge and desire to explore. Initially, these are seen as positive symbols of globalization, hinting at the new, enlightened desire to explore and discover. But through further examination one sees the anamorphous skull lying in the foreground, symbolizing our human mortality, which is only reaffirmed by the partially hidden crucifix in the upper right hand corner. This distorted image of the skull brings to our attention the dualism of the piece, for this was an age of both exploration and genocide (Kavuri-Bauer). “The Ambassadors” (Figure 6), is an excellent example of the political prowess of the ocean, because only with its connective abilities would the travels and goals of ambassadors be

possible. The ocean allowed for the development of colonization leading to our modern world, but did so at the expense of others. The principles that were expressed in Holbein's piece are still applicable today, expressing a sort of influence over many contemporary artists.

Using a hydrological lens to critique art and society, we open ourselves to explore various alternative aspects of the sea, in which traditional narratives of exploration and danger can be pushed to the side. In a 2011 interview for the Rolling Bulb, Mia Jankowiz explained that,

“We think of history as something that happens on land, but when you look at the ways in which the sea is used by pirates, offshore financiers, smugglers and ‘irregular’ migrants - not to mention the enormous wealth of cultural material about the sea - you realize the sea provides a lot of amazing ‘loopholes’ for us to break the rules and consider the world differently”  
(Cooper)

In conclusion, *hydrarchy* provides an alternative way to thinking about the past, present, and future. This lens allows for a variety of different cultural intakes, while displaying the suffocating power of Western domination. Using this maritime critique we are provided with an aesthetic to better understand the development of capitalism and modernization, and the relationships that are formed because of it. By using the fluid nature of the sea as a direction for thought we are shown how our common misconceptions of culture, race, immigration, and labor can be expanded to incorporate alternative views. The oceans flowing nature expresses a sense of change and motion forward, forever pushing through new boundaries, just as contemporary artists contend to do today.

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Jack K. Azar  
**Architecture & Travel Ideology: An Analysis of Los Angeles  
International Airport**

*ABOUT THE AUTHOR:*

Jack is a Lebanese-American born and raised in Santa Barbara, California. He attended the Fashion Institute of Design and Merchandising in Los Angeles where he received a degree in apparel manufacturing and design, and held marketing and public relations internships at *Los Angeles Magazine* and Giorgio Armani. Shortly after graduation, he ventured off on a three-month, solo backpacking trip throughout Western Europe. Traveling is a way of connecting to his spirit, where feelings of possibility and clarity are often signs of being in his element. Jack was inspired to pursue his education while on his first trip to Lebanon in 2013, where he learned that his three Lebanese cousins had all earned their master's degrees. This was a drastic turning point in Jack's life, realizing that in order to be an eligible candidate outside of his hometown, and to have the opportunity to work internationally, he needed to pursue his bachelor's degree.

Currently a full time student at San Francisco State, Jack is pursuing his degree in Communication Studies with minor in Marketing. He aspires to work internationally within the advertising industry to integrate his career with his passion for travel.

*COMMENT FROM LECTURER, NICO PECK:*

I met Jack in August 2015 in my Rhetoric of Social Semiotics course, where he immediately distinguished himself as a serious thinker and thoughtful student. As a scholar, Jack demonstrated his ability to lead meaningful discussions, engage with theory, and think critically. For his final paper, he chose to analyze LAX and tackled this challenging topic with energy and curiosity. His thoughtful analysis reveals the semiotics of the airport and how it communicates the often bewildering groundless experience of global travel, as well as the linear nature of time. For anyone who has experienced LAX or any international airport, this essay is a must-read.

The assignment was to write a rhetorical analysis of an artifact with particular attention to the course topic of social semiotics. Jack chose to perform an ideological analysis of LAX.

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## Introduction

Every person has somewhere to go within the parameters of an airport, whether landing at their destination, moving from one gate to another to catch a connecting flight, or arriving to pick up or drop off passengers or begin their own journey by air. Though you may never see the same travelers again, the airport is a transitory place, a place of mystery that makes you wonder who your fellow travelers are, where they came from, and where they are going. Recognizing fellow passengers at your destination who originally boarded the same plane as you 7,000 miles ago is a telltale sign that the world is not a large place—at all. But what fascinates me the most is pondering the reason behind their travels. Are they coming back from or going on a life-changing trip? Are they moving to a foreign country to study abroad or reconnect with an old lover? The airport is like a Petri dish, a space filled with rich and diverse cultures that allows the world to become as small as the airport's walls can accommodate, at all hours of the day, every day of the week.

International airports have always captured my interest as being a place of extraordinary energy, where people who represent different parts of the world congregate happenstance and interweave together like a mosaic. The big picture portrays an ephemeral representation of the world's inhabitants, moving, folding, and blending like the materials of a kaleidoscope. It transforms every second and never paints the same picture twice at any given moment. To be one of many citizens under one roof, whose purpose is to navigate in the direction of their scheduled destination, brings with it a sense of support and belonging for one another.

It is important to identify that an underlying lesson is learned about humanity through the act of travelling, where benefits are reaped in the *process* of getting to the final destination. Energy is flowing in, out, and around so quickly that I usually feel as though I am part of something more meaningful than to focus solely on arriving to my destination. Airports are not just a place to get from Point A to Point B, but a place that represents a rich and inspiring global community of people with lives, stories, and families that exist beyond the boundaries of an airport.

Everyone is part of a larger system that demands constant change and motion. We move about our days by foot, car, bicycle, and public transportation, and oftentimes cross paths with people who embark on the same, daily route as ours. Little are we aware of what goes on beyond our

own schedules, expecting that everything - the bus arriving on time, rush hour traffic - will unfold the way it always has. Why wouldn't it? However, what we do not realize is this system relies on everyone else's participation. No matter how far, how often, or to where we travel, everyone relies on each other to keep it moving. With the advancement of technology, our means of transportation have become more efficient in getting us safely from Point A to Point B.

At the turn of the twentieth century, Wright brothers Orville and Wilbur revolutionized transportation forever, inventing the first motorized aircraft. As aviation technology advanced, so has the convenience to apply this technology from industrial use to commercial demands. Airports play a critical role in this system, fulfilling the demands of transporting millions of bodies around the globe. The airport is a microcosm of the constant change and motion the world experiences at every moment. This requires a sustainable infrastructure necessary to accommodate the needs of travelers, airline companies, and airport vendors and employees. One of the largest and most important airports in the world is Los Angeles International Airport, built with structures designed to embody a common theme, influencing travelers, airport employees, and everyone who accesses the airport grounds.

### **Artifact Background**

Los Angeles International Airport (LAX) has a rich history dating back to 1837, when the land was part of the Mexican province known as the Rancho Sausal Redondo. It encountered a series of landowners, the earliest being real estate agent William W. Mines, who offered 640 acres to be used for an airport in 1927 (LAWA, 2015). With an interest in creating a municipal airport, the Los Angeles City Council officially inaugurated LAX, on the land originally known as Mines Field, in October 1928. Commercial airline service started in December 1946. Today, LAX is known to be the fifth busiest airport in the world and third busiest in the United States (Business Insider, 2015), transporting 70.6 million passengers domestically and internationally.

The Theme Building, built in 1961, was designed by architectural firm Pereira & Luckman. It was originally designed as “part of a major postwar expansion of the airport and represents the scaled-down version of an original vision in which an enormous glass dome served as the central hub for the terminal buildings and parking structures” (Los Angeles Conservancy, web).

The Theme Building was designated as a City Cultural and Historical Monument in late 1992. With its space-age interior, the Encounter Restaurant (*fig. B*) opened in 1997 for the public to dine in and enjoy a 360-degree view of the airport. However, it closed in 2014 due to lack of business (Forgione, 2014).

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) decided that LAX needed a new control tower in 1988. According to the FAA's specs, the national prototypical "plain Jane" tower is required to be tall, functional, and unadorned. However, the tower requirements were rejected by the Los Angeles Cultural Affairs Commission, and instead called for a design more unique to Los Angeles (Malnic, 1995). This led to a team of five women, Kate Diamond of Siegel Diamond Architects, Adriana Lovinescu of Holmes & Narver, landscape artists Pamela Burton and Katherine Spitz, and artist Sheila Klein to design the new 257-foot tower (adding an extra 92-feet from the original tower). The new tower was dedicated March 1996 at a total cost of \$19 million (Brown, 1996).

These historical artifacts are significant to what is known worldwide as Los Angeles International Airport. I will explore the common thread that exists among these self-standing artifacts. The goal of this essay is to apply ideological criticism, a method looking beyond an artifact's surface structure to discover beliefs, values, and assumptions it suggests (Foss, 2009), to describe how Los Angeles Airport is designed to imply a safe, global travel experience through circular architecture.

### **Theme Building Analysis**

The Theme Building is a half-domed structure supported with two beams that circumvent on top, from one side to another (*fig. A*). The Theme Building is designed similar to how airplanes take-off and land. As the parabolic arches ascend from the Earth, they descend on the other side. The Theme Building also represents the shape of Earth. The beams begin and end at ground level, just as an airplane begins its journey and ends it on the ground. When an airplane takes off, it ascends into the sky until it reaches the planned altitude, and slowly begins to descend back to earth once it gets closer to its destination.

If the beams continued to circumnavigate below ground, it completes the shape of a sphere. These elements represent a plane's navigation using

latitude and longitude coordinates. No place on Earth cannot be accessed by flight, as airplanes travel in endless directions to endless destinations. The beams circumnavigate on top as they do below, representing two distinct points similar to Earth's North and South Poles, embodying a frame of reference regarding direction.

The Encounter Restaurant is located in the middle of the Theme Building and supported by the beams. In retrospect, with the windows angled outwards, the lounge emulates a traveling airplane with nothing but space around the aircraft, a sensation that visitors are in the sky. This sensation can be feared or enjoyed, depending on the customer's feelings about flying. One can speculate the reason for the restaurant closing in 2014 was a response from customers who visited the lounge about flying in general, such as feelings of claustrophobia, fear of turbulence, or fear of heights.

### **World Way & Location Analysis**

The airport is designed predominantly for cars and busses. Walking onto the airport grounds from the outside is possible, but not obvious. Vehicles commute on one-way roads prior to arriving LAX. The main roads leading to LAX include West Century Boulevard, South Sepulveda Boulevard, and Pacific Coast Highway. If the exit is missed, vehicles must drive a distance before the next opportunity to navigate back toward their intended destination. All vehicles arriving at LAX enter the one-way thoroughfare World Way, located on the north side of the airport (*fig. C*). The thoroughfare allows commuters to access the eight domestic and one international terminals, and the short and long-term parking lots.

World Way consists of four lanes, oftentimes congested with vehicles expecting to drop off or pick up travelers. To access a terminal's loading and unloading zone, vehicles are required to merge into the far right lane.

In the course of arriving to the preferred terminal, vehicles can drive on routes that cut through the middle of the airport, all named Center Way, instead of approaching one terminal at a time. To access Center Way, cars must merge into the far-left lane. For example, if someone needed to access United Airlines at Terminal Eight, the last terminal before exiting LAX, they could access Center Way to get closer to the terminal.

An airplane always travels in a forward direction and navigates by

turning left or right. Similar to an airplane, commuters must plan ahead prior to arriving the airport, knowing the course, or routes, they must travel. All routes, including the thoroughfare, are one-way, which require drivers to be strategic about arriving to their destination: knowing when to merge into the far left lane to access Center Way, or far right lane to access the terminal's loading and unloading zones. Driving one-way also signifies only moving forward and not going back, similar to time. As time moves forward, we cannot go back and reclaim what has been lost. However, we can re-encounter a situation, though it will not be the same experience. Although missing an exit can be frustrating, going back will be a different experience the second time around and requires some effort to reposition towards the desired destination.

All the airport routes are circular. Just as airplanes taxi on and off the runway and navigate towards their destination in long, circular motions, so do commuters who travel to and within LAX's grounds. Airplanes and vehicles also use the same technique to get around. Commuters always drive in designated lanes and in the same direction, merging in and out of traffic flow, as airplanes ascend into the airspace and merge out by landing.

Located on the edge of the West Coast, every LAX outbound plane ascends over the Pacific Ocean before turning in the direction of their flight path. Water is the only tangible Earth element that connects all land mass to each other. Every coastal region of the world will experience, to some degree, the repercussions of oceanographic phenomena regardless of where it takes place. This signifies that whether we travel or not, we are all connected and considered to be one embodiment. Flying over the ocean subliminally reminds travelers of this unity.

### **Control Tower Analysis**

Air traffic controllers are perched at the top of the control tower, having a 360-degree view of the airport. Every domestic and international flight landing at and taking off can be observed at this location. It is the most important job at any airport, helping pilots navigate the skies by safely positioning them amongst other planes.

Being the tallest building, the control tower takes precedence over all other buildings at LAX. To be the tallest of anything symbolizes leadership and power. Looking up at something or someone makes the observer feel



small, including the grounded airplanes. The control tower is the authority figure that pilots from all over the world must adhere to. The control tower is the conductor of a symphony who sees everything that goes on in the near and far vicinity, responsible for guiding the airplane, pilots, and passengers to safety.

When the LAX control tower was redesigned, the curved dome received its share of criticism from locals, describing it as palm tree, treehouse, and old bi-wings (*fig. D*). Design Architect Kate Diamond explained how it is the ultimate high-stress treehouse (Brown, 1996). While analyzing this artifact, the LAX control tower's design resembles that of lighthouses, which are typically built along coasts to forewarn passing ships of land ahead. A lighthouse does this using a bright, 360-degree rotating light in conditions that hinder a captain's visibility, such as night time and unfavorable weather conditions. Similar to a lighthouse, control tower employees can observe the airport in every direction through glass walls. This panoramic view is essential to observe a plane's location in the sky, all the while making sure they travel with a safe enough distance from each other.

### **Tying It All Together**

The Theme Building, control tower, and thoroughfares are designed to imply a safe, global travel experience through circular architecture. Circles and 360-degree views take precedence while analyzing these artifacts. The 360-degree view makes a complete circle, resembling the vantage point required to conduct efficient and safe air-travel. There are no limits to where an airplane can travel on Earth, so long as the proper equipment, and a long and safe enough runway, is available. The compass is a tool, a circle which represents completeness and uniting of polarities. Even for farther destinations that require connecting flights, the number of destinations airplanes can travel to is as endless as the points on a compass.

Whether looking eastward or westward down the center of LAX, the Theme Building is built perfectly centered to the control tower (*fig. E*). This vantage point signifies that safety takes precedence in the air-travel industry. The control tower soars over the Theme Building, administering the safety of inbound and outbound flights involved with LAX from all around the world. All the while, a constant activity of vehicles bustling within the airport, picking up and dropping off travelers. The airline industry is constantly in motion. A moment never goes by without an airplane in the sky.

## **Conclusion: Travel Safety & Efficiency**

Air-travel safety and efficiency relies on everyone's participation, from commuters on the ground to airplanes in the sky. Local, domestic, and international travelers who access LAX's grounds participate in a system of movement, influenced by implied messages through architecture and design. There are millions of people who travel from every part of the globe into LAX. A massive import and export of individuals, consisting of visitors, residents, and those waiting for a connecting flight, plays a vital role to the rich, cultural diversity of the region, and to the West Coast. Without the airport, this diversity would not be as prevalent. This phenomena, since the beginning of commercial airline services dating back to December 1946, has sustained its integrity through a set of values that permeate far and wide from the parameters of Los Angeles International Airport.

I have encountered many first-time experiences through LAX, consisting of 99% of my domestic and international travels. These include my first time on an airplane to Washington, D.C., my first international trip to Europe, my first trip to the motherland of Lebanon, and most recently, my first time traveling international with my mom. I have picked up and dropped off countless friends and relatives, waiting at the passenger loading zone and constantly driving in circles among shuttles, taxis, and fellow commuters around World Way and Center Way. Its ideology had subliminal impacts on me, to the point in which I was able to unearth and identify the concealed messages of its architecture that represent the foundation of its existence. I have established a relationship by association with the international airport, and one which has influenced my life-long fascination of global affairs including travel, people, and culture.

## **Identifying Presented Elements**

Control Tower

- *tallest building* - most important building at the airport; see furthest distances; power
- *360-degree view* - see all around (the world); panoramic view; circular

- *lighthouse* - protects distant vessels from danger (cliffs); safety; illumination; rotating light; edge of land/cliffs

#### Theme Building

- *crossing arches* - creates complete sphere (full circle would continue into Earth); arch beams are the foundation; parabolic; longitude/latitude; intersection
- *all circular* - represents (round) world; infinity; ball/globe
- *lounge/restaurant in middle* - supported by beams; 360-degree view of airport; sit down and relax

#### LAX: World Way & Location

- *one-way driving direction* - committed driving direction; destination-oriented; requires planning ahead to know where to go; airplanes only move in forward direction
- *located on the coast* - on the edge of California; ocean connects all continents
- *cars/buses only* - not pedestrian friendly (except in pickup/drop off areas); rely on motor transportation to get around; travelers rely solely on planes to get around from point A to point B
- *many circular loops* - get to other parts of airport without having to go all around; shortcuts through airport; planes move in circular motions to navigate towards their destination.



*fig. A.* Theme Building, exterior. Two parabolic arches circumventing at the top and the Encounter Restaurant & Lounge in the middle. Photo source: [myarchetypes.wordpress.com](http://myarchetypes.wordpress.com)



*fig. B.* Encounter Restaurant & Lounge, interior. Photo taken by Jason Rzucidlo.



*fig. C.* Aerial, illustrated map of LAX, showing the domestic and international terminals, World Way, Center Way, parking structures, and thoroughfares leading to/from LAX. Image source: PerryPlanet, Wikimedia Commons.



*fig. E.* Theme Building and LAX control tower aligned center. Photo source: airwaysnews.com.



fig. D. LAX control tower, exterior. Photo taken by John Murphy.

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Bradley Penner  
**No Truth or Lie in an Extra-Poetic Sense**

*ABOUT THE AUTHOR:*

Bradley Penner is a fourth-year Creative Writing student born in Fresno and raised in California. His poems are found or forthcoming in *Milvia Street*, *sPARKLE+bLINK*, and *Transfer*, as well as the Berkeley-based journal/zine *Something Worth Revising*, which he co-curates with cohorts. He lives under a rent-controlled roof in the East Bay and won't take the settlement.

*COMMENT FROM PROFESSOR SANDRA LUFT:*

Brad Penner was a fine student in one of my Nietzsche classes. For a final paper in my Nietzsche course, I ask students to write a paper on Nietzsche and whatever other artifact—philosophic or literary text, work of art, film, etc—they could discuss meaningfully in relation to Nietzsche's ideas, style, perspectives, etc. I am looking for the student's understanding and appreciation of Nietzsche in relation to other works of the student's own interests. Brad's discussion of the relation of poetic structure to meaning in this essay is an excellent response to that assignment.

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Doors have a back side also. And grass blades are double-edged. It's not use trying to deceive me, leaves fall more by the buds that push them off than by lack of greenness. Or throw two shoes on the floor and see how they'll lie if you think it's all one way. — William Carlos Williams, *Kora in Hell*

Since Nietzsche's passing at the dawn of the 20th century, many poets have attempted to locate not only "the thing in itself" within their poetry, but have extended their voices past the traditional conventions of poetic structure in order to test the value of "truthfulness." This has mostly been achieved by eschewing the moral basis of poetic language through experiments in visual prosody, or how the poem appears upon the page. By stepping beyond the expectations of what was once considered a "true" poem—whether that be the metrical constraints of iambic pentameter or the manufactured structure of a sonnet—the poem is no longer obligated to replicate the fixed expectations of traditional prosody but is instead liberated in the pursuit of a word's potential signification among fixed or learned associations of meaning. Therefore, the



poet is allowed exploit language beyond metaphorical conventions and their supposed "meanings," as Nietzsche notes in his essay "On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense":

One designates only the relations of things to man, and to express them one calls on the boldest metaphors. A nerve stimulus, first transposed into an image—first metaphor. The image, in turn, imitated by a sound—second metaphor... we believe that we know something about the things themselves when we speak of trees, colors, snow, and flowers; and yet we possess nothing but metaphors for things—metaphors which correspond in no way to the original entities. In the same way that the sound appears as a sand figure, so the mysterious X of the thing in itself first appears as a nerve stimulus, then as an image, and finally as a sound. Thus, the genesis of language does not proceed logically in any way (Nietzsche, "Truth and Lie" 46).

This illogical manipulation of metaphor may deem the poet a "liar" (Nietzsche, *Zarathustra* 238) in a field of fixed meanings, but if poetry is to be considered a "form" in itself—one that is expected to compact language through the conventions of meter, diction, and rhyme—a rejection of the visual expectations of a poem's form allows the reader to look upon it in not only the context of the poet's intent, but through an individual interpretation of its value. In both the Modern and Postmodern traditions, poets such as William Carlos Williams and Jorie Graham have emphasized not only the fundamental insights of Nietzsche's philosophy within their work, but have stressed the capability of both poet and reader to step outside of the fixed conventions of poetic structure in order to argue that "true" poetic form—whether on the page or in the context of learned values—is a mere interpretation that one must be willing to confront, disassemble, and piece back together into a form of their own.

In "On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense," Nietzsche poses the question, "Is language the adequate expression of all realities?" (45). While language is not necessarily concerned with curating an objective account of "the thing in itself", it remains the main artery of designation that drives our disproportionate understanding of the world in which we live. The signification of objects into perceived "forms" thus leads to a learned acceptance of how we differentiate between what is to be considered a truth and, subsequently, a lie (45; 43).

Yet, if all language is essentially "an army of metaphors... a sum of human relations, which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically", what is the role of the poet in society if he is to be considered one "who lies too much" (46; *Zarathustra*, 239)? The answer may be found in Part Four of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, in which Nietzsche writes:

Suitor of truth?" they mocked me; "you?"  
No! Only poet!  
An animal, cunning, preying, prowling,  
That must lie,  
That must knowingly, willingly lie:  
Lusting for prey,  
Colorfully masked,  
A mask for itself,  
Prey for itself—  
This, the suitor of truth?  
No! Only fool! Only poet! ("The Song of Melancholy" 410)

For Nietzsche, the poet must be willing to confront the fixed conventions of unreliability through the manipulation of language outside of fixed, expected forms. In effect, the "lie" becomes a transcendent pathway toward the infinitesimal precariousness of an unexplainable reality that relies more so on the interpretations of one's imagination than the learned values of metaphysical absolutes. In this way, the poet's "lie" is an argument against the lies expressed in these proposed absolutes.

In the chapter entitled "On Poets," Zarathustra admits that his issue with poets is not only their superficiality, but their constant rumination of absolutes that are sought "between heaven and earth...and especially *above* the heavens: for all gods are poets' parables, poets' prevarications" (240). It is only through the renunciation of these absolutes, whether in the poem's structure or content, that the poet will be able to break the barrier between a fixed subject and the eternal object, using the concept of the linguistic "lie" as a vehicle of abstraction apart from traditional, accepted styles of poetic argumentation.

William Carlos Williams could be considered one of the first American poets to break from the influence of absolutes in poetry. Originally influenced by the short-lived school of Imagism—made popular by his friends Ezra Pound and H.D.—he refined his poetic pursuit of "no ideas but in things"

through a self-proposed shift in poetic structure (*The Delineation of the Giants*, 1.14). Whereas the expected, if not required, elements of meter and rhyme had permeated the work of early Modernist poets, Williams called for "a new measure" in poetry that strayed away from the "wish for aristocratic attainment—a 'spiritual' bureaucracy of the 'soul'" ("The Poem as a Field of Action" 52).

Much like Nietzsche's comments in "On Poets," Williams's 1948 essay entitled "The Poem as a Field of Action" criticizes the lasting effects of Nietzsche's romantic contemporaries well into the 20th century:

There was then a subject matter that was "poetic" and in many minds that is still poetry—and exclusively so—the "beautiful" or pious (and so beautiful) wish expressed in beautiful language—a dream. That is still poetry: full stop. Well, that was the world to be desired and the poets merely expressed a general wish and so were useful each in his day. (52)

In using the past tense in stating "that *was* the world," Williams distances himself from a traditional adherence to poetic form. What *was* useful to the poet "in his day," Williams argues, should no longer be considered the driving force of Modernism. Rather, the poet should rise to his place in time in order to create the poetry of the present moment.

In the next paragraph, he continues on to define what he calls "a new subject matter," or what he will later refer to as a "new measure":

Words are the keys that unlock the mind. But is that all of poetry? Certainly not—...There is something else...The one thing that the poet has not wanted to change, the one thing he has clung to in his dream...*structure*. Here we are unmovable. But here is precisely where we come into contact with reality. Reluctant, we waken from our dreams. And what is reality? How do we know reality? The only reality we can know is MEASURE. How can we accept Einstein's theory of relativity, affecting our very conception of the heavens about us of which poets write so much, without incorporating its essential fact—the relativity of measurements—into our own category of activity: the poem. Do we think we stand outside the universe? Or that the Church of England does? Relativity applies to everything, like love, if it applies to anything in the world. (53)

To manifest these newly-relative forms of measure, the poet must "expand the structure, the basis, the actual making of the poem" by defying traditional versification and exploring subject matter beyond metaphysical absolutes, thereby allowing spontaneous language to take over the process of a poem's creation (57).

Rather than structuring a poem in the "hierarchic or tapeworm mode" of dated poetic schools, Williams argues that it is only through a poet's *listening* to his individual poetic process that language will manifest itself on the page in a way that is not prescriptive, expected, or absolute (56). If relativity is the basis of all measurement, the visual quality of language should allow the poet to no longer differentiate between the conventions of "truth" or "lie" in poetry, but rather, experiment with metaphor and form in order to continually remap the relative nature of their unrestrained reality. If "the [traditional] structure, the staid manner of the poem cannot let [the poet's] feelings through", it is only through the revaluation of poetic process that a poem will transcend the formalization of absolutes (53).

A representative example of Williams's proposition can be found in his poem "To Have Done Nothing," in which he ponders the language of nothingness in stripped-down stanzas:

No that is not it  
nothing that I have done  
nothing  
I have done  
is made up of  
nothing  
and the diphthong  
ae  
together with  
the first person  
singular  
indicative  
of the auxiliary  
verb  
to have  
everything  
I have done  
is the same  
if to do  
is capable

of an  
infinity of  
combinations (ll. 1-23)

In his utilization of enjambment and short, stand-alone stanzas, Williams is able to fragment the poem's language to imply more than one expression of thought. If a line's syntax is ambiguous enough to blend between the lines above and below it, the relative interpretations of a poem's meaning are left for the reader to illustrate for himself. The poem's lack of punctuation is also essential in the creation of these possibilities, as the reader's delineation of syntactical phrasing can only be defined by the eye or vocal reproduction. For example, the fifth and sixth stanzas can be read as fragmented phrases that stand alone from one another, or can be conjoined by associating the line "to have" with the line "everything." As the phrase "to have / everything" is in direct juxtaposition to Williams's surface level argument of "nothingness," the reader is not bound to a fixed interpretation of the poem's structure, as it is very well possible that Williams is disguising a phrase behind the expected pause of a stanza break. However, this insight remains a mere speculation that could very well be one example "of an / infinity of / combinations."

Extending these concepts into Postmodern poetics, the poet Jorie Graham continues to experiment with the possibilities of visual prosody in order to grant the reader an opportunity to decipher their own interpretations of a poem's "meaning." Whereas the major themes in her book *Sea Change* speak to the unsustainable nature of civilization in the 21st century, there is no fixed moral of which the reader is meant to adhere to. Each poem is set in one continuous stanza though the indentation of short lines between longer, prose-like lines create an effect of fragmented verse, subsequently allowing the reader to read into the poem's contradictions.

In the poem "Full Fathom," she designs the poem to be read in at least five ways:

& sea swell, his of incomprehensible flat: distance: blue long-fingered  
ocean and it nothing else: nothing in the above visible except  
water: water and always the white self-destroying bloom of  
wavebreak &, upclose roil,  
here, on what's left of land,  
ticking of stays against empty flagpoles, low tide, free day, nothing  
being memorialized here today—memories float, yes  
over the place but not memories any of us now among the living

possess—open you  
hands—let go the scrap metal with laughter—let go the  
upstairs neighbor you did not protect—they took him  
away—let go how frightened you knew he was all (ll. 1-15)

Using both long and short indented lines in one continuous stanza, Graham offers a loose set of visual boundaries for navigating "poems within the poem," utilizing punctuation and fragmentation of syntax in order to guide the reader from one interpretation to another. Apart from the text in its entirety, a separate poem can be found in reading only the long lines, the short indented lines, the five-line sparseness of the poem's left tier, and the fifteen-line alignment of the right tier. By visually juxtaposing the form and moral foundation for each reading through patterns of punctuation and white space, the reader is granted the access to the "infinity of combinations" as noted and implied by Williams. For example, lines 11 through 15 can be read as such, with each italicized line indicating its disappearance in the following example:

possess—open your / *hands—let go the scrap*  
*metal with* laughter—let go the / upstairs neighbor      you  
did not / protect—they took him / away—let go how frightened  
you knew he was all

possess—open your / *laughter—let go the /*  
upstairs neighbor you did not / protect—they took      him /  
away—let go how frightened you knew he was all

possess—open your / upstairs neighbor you did  
not / protect—they took him / away—let go how frightened you  
knew he was all

Not only does Graham remove the phrase "let go" twice within these reductions, but in doing so asks the reader to instead "open / your neighbor," subsequently turning the two prior statements in on themselves. Whereas the reader is asked to "let go" of "scrap metal" and "your neighbor," it is possible that Graham is also hinting at the reader's predisposal to interpret the poem for its surface level appearance on the page. The visual transcendence of lineation and punctuation are then to be considered clues that unlock the layered argumentation of the poem. If the poem's argument is in fact meant to be moralistic, Graham has offered multiple variations of juxtaposed metaphor that further rely on the reader's interpretation in order to form meaning. Like Williams, Graham's experiments with poetic structure are purposefully

rendered to deconstruct the conventions of poetic absolutes, whether in form or subject matter, and thereby challenge our preconceived judgments of language and metaphor through the abstraction of visual prosody.

If language is *not* the adequate expression of all realities, the closest a poet can come to the essence of "pure truth" is through the renunciation of absolutes in words, metaphor, and significations of meaning. It is only when a word or phrase is meant to represent an absolute that man is capable of dividing his perceivable world into a mixed bowl of truth and lie. When unbound from the metaphorical distinctions of what is or isn't unconditional in language, the poet is able to traverse the mountainous peaks of fixed poetic value in an attempt to examine the abyss for what it "truly" is: eternal.

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Matt Bragg  
**A Perspective on Bob Dylan:**

*ABOUT THE AUTHOR:*

Matthew Bragg is a Bay Area native who came to SF State by way of Portland, Oregon. He is currently a senior pursuing his B.A. in Literature, and has an application pending with the English Department to continue into postgraduate studies.

He has nurtured a love and respect for reading and writing from an early age. Over the years, he has been involved in many collaborative projects, beginning years ago with tiny, pop-up flash-fiction magazines out of the South Bay. Most recently, he began working as a contributing writer for the Rock 'n' Roll Archaeology Project podcast.

He currently resides in Oakland, Calif.

*COMMENT FROM PROFESSOR GEOFFREY GREEN:*

Matt Bragg's "Bob Dylan: The Artist's Identity as Crafted by History, Society, and His Unconscious" originated as an essay responding to a prompt concerning the nature of Bob Dylan's identity as an artist, a persona (or authorial "mask"), and human being. The quote in the prompt was from Stephen Scobie's *Alias Bob Dylan Revisited* (2004): "The theory of the death of the author...depends upon a fundamental questioning of the notion of the self. In what sense can an author, or indeed anybody, be said to be an autonomous, coherent individual? Or to what extent are our selves and our images of ourselves the product of networks...of language, of history, of society, of the unconscious? ...The notion that we are not singular entities but variable and multiple personalities—is also a major concern of Bob Dylan's work, finding expression in such images as the mask and the alias." Scobie, of course, questions here the idea of an author or a self as a "coherent individual," instead interrogating whether an author or a self may be the product of such influences as language, history, society, or the unconscious. Matt Bragg's resulting essay is a substantive, sophisticated, and insightful meditation on these themes, displaying admirable close readings of important texts, as well as many creative observations. I'm pleased that readers of *Sutro Review* have the opportunity to appreciate it.

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*Considerations on the Artist's Identity as Crafted by History, Society, and His Unconscious*



Bob Dylan is seen by many today as a spokesman and motivator of social and political activism in the 1960's and onward. But his songs and the identities they shaped for him, while clearly inspirational and influential, were not designed to spur on the various movements for social change in the 1960s. Rather, they were a product of those movements and the ideas they represented, reflected back at his audience. Bob Dylan's artistic masks are a reflection of the activity and sentiments of different parts of the American culture and psyche of his time, as well as the history leading up to those feelings and actions. Dylan is more conduit than catalyst; he is an artistic, musical, and poetic filter through which the events of a turbulent era and a flood of ideas passed. Scobie's assertions of the creation of identity via such forces as history, society, and his unconscious notions of himself are very much validated upon examination of Bob Dylan's assorted artistic masks. History shaped Dylan's mask of the wise and world-weary hobo, society made him a progressive prophet, and his unconscious, that artistic personal force that affected him without his truly realizing it, revealed another side, introspective and difficult to aptly characterize.

The malleability of Bob Dylan's identity and his ability to invent and reinvent himself are evident right at the onset of his career. Recounting an interview with a Columbia Records public relations agent upon signing his first contract, Dylan admits he told boldface lies about his background and the way he found himself in New York playing folk music. "I told him I was from Illinois... I said I'd worked construction... I told him I'd been kicked out" (Dylan 7). His persona was a blank canvas, ready, willing, and able to be transformed by social and historical forces swirling around him as well as unconscious forces from within. "I really didn't see myself like anybody," Dylan said (Dylan 8). This statement was possibly more telling that he realized. He was not like anybody, and yet he was going to be a mirror for most anybody who cared to have a look. In his own words, in order to achieve the artistic ambition of writing his own songs, Dylan "would need... some philosophical identity that that wouldn't burn out [and] it would have to come on its own from the outside" (Dylan 73).

Even his name chose him. The pseudonym "Bob Dylan" came to the artist in a sort of random, perfect amalgam of history, contemporary society, and unconscious. The name evolved first from his own "Robert Allen [which] sounded like the name of a Scottish king," gleaning a spelling from a contemporary "West Coast saxophone player named David Allyn," and finally morphed into Bob Dylan because he had "seen some poems by Dylan

Thomas” and there already were “a lot of other [famous] Bobbys” (Dylan 78). The history is present simply enough in Dylan’s association of his own name with that of some unreal Scottish king of yore. Musical society is responsible for his taking up a “y” in the spelling of “Dylan,” because of the sax player. And his unconscious reveals itself in his own ambiguous, if thoughtful, reconstruction of how he arrived at the name; his unrelated love of Dylan Thomas and his vague awareness of those other Bobbys.

History played a significant role in shaping Bob Dylan’s identities. Not only the events of historical significance which were taking place during his rise to fame, but important people, movements, and events that came before. From the very beginning of his career, Dylan was profoundly interested in and influenced by the history and tradition surrounding folk music. This passion shaped his persona of the world-weary traveler, and he identified heavily with the songs and style of Woody Guthrie, a fellow midwesterner who had begun his own musical journey a generation before.

It is nearly impossible to overstate the scope of influence Guthrie had on Dylan’s early career. Guthrie’s sounds and sentiments are evident in the songs and ideology with which Dylan began his body of work. Dylan’s “Only a Hobo” echoed Guthrie’s folk imagery of a cold and hard world failing to acknowledge the plight of the weary, migrating poor of the Depression:

*A blanket of newspaper covered his head  
As the curb was his pillow, the street was his bed  
One look at his face showed the hard road he’d come  
And a fistful of coins showed the money he bummed.*

Although Dylan was not born until the Depression was coming to an end at the onset of World War II, the impact of this historical period and the ballads Guthrie produced is clear. Dylan was captivated and moved by the image of the freight train-riding hobos of Guthrie’s day, “men of all colors bouncing along in the boxcar” (Guthrie 19). These men and their trains represented a part of America and of history that were integral in shaping the identity of the artist to come. Dylan mused, “the sound of trains off in the distance more or less made me feel at home... and that everything was fitting together” (Dylan 31).

Historical world events also played a role in shaping Dylan’s identity. What would become a whole century of unprecedented global conflict had

already taken shape by the 1960s, and he was not immune to its effects. His uncles had fought in World War II, in the shadow of “Hitler, Churchill, Mussolini, Stalin, Roosevelt -- towering figures that the world would never see the likes of again” (Dylan 28). This personal connection to history, coupled with the escalating Cold War with the Soviet Union and the war in Vietnam made a mark on the young songwriter. Perhaps no song better encapsulates Dylan’s personal link to global historical conflict than “Masters of War.” Released in 1963, the song channels anger and frustration of a common man who recognizes that those who fight in wars are not those who begin them:

*You play with my world  
Like it's your little toy  
You put a gun in my hand  
And you hide from my eyes  
And you turn and run farther  
When the fast bullets fly.*

The personal ownership in the line “You play with *my* world” very clearly indicates the impact of historical events (in this case, armed conflict), on Dylan’s identity. He was never a soldier, but the war-torn 20th Century had both Dylan and everyone else thinking in these terms. Geopolitical history, as well as musical tradition and personal history, were shaping the man and the artist.

The mass fear created by nuclear tension between the United States and the Soviet Union was a further aspect of war Dylan managed to tap into. In “Let Me Die in My Footsteps,” he put into words the weariness of wariness that the population of the entire country - really, both countries - was perpetually feeling:

*There's been rumors of war and wars that have been  
The meaning of life has been lost in the wind  
And some people thinkin' that the end is close by  
'Stead of learnin' to live they are learnin' to die  
Let me die in my footsteps  
Before I go down under the ground.*

In this way, it was not only war, but the exhaustion and exasperation of contemplating it that sparked Dylan’s subject matter for the song. Here again, his identity is shaped as a protester, but in reality he is putting another

mirror in front of his audience, showing them their own fear and their own fatigue.

The society reacting within this realm of historical events was as responsible for shaping Dylan's identities as the events themselves. He was heralded as a harbinger and poet-laureate of the times. He humbly puts it thus, "America was changing... I was riding the changes" (Dylan 73). The Civil Rights Movement saw hard-won triumphs like the integration of the University of Mississippi and hateful setbacks like the murder of activist Medgar Evers, both of which Dylan commemorated in "Oxford Town" and "Only a Pawn in Their Game," respectively. While he may well have personally supported the goals and doctrines of the movement, these tracks were more complex than the blanket label of "protest songs" under which they were often covered. A closer examination of the lyrics and style reveals how Dylan is crafting this part of his musical identity by holding up a mirror before society and reflecting back a complete picture of the times, rather than simply penning anthems of support.

"Oxford Town" is anything but a call to arms. Rather than invoking a feeling of protest, the song reflects feelings of skepticism and fear in response to a sometimes violent retaliation by some Southern whites against integration efforts:

*He went down to Oxford Town  
Guns and clubs followed him down  
All because his face was brown  
Better get away from Oxford Town.*

Lyrically, this sounds like a song of retreat, rather than one of protest. Contextually juxtaposed against a traditional-sounding upbeat Southern melody, "Oxford Town" cautions the listener to steer clear of the place entirely. However, Dylan is not advocating the abandonment of integration efforts, nor is he necessarily endorsing them. Rather, he is reflecting the practical fear that the proponents and direct participants of the integration movement must have felt. This is a reflective picture of feelings of apprehension surrounding a movement facing incredible opposition, rather than a ringing endorsement. The difference is an important one in understanding that society very much helped to shape the identity of the artist, rather than his personal beliefs alone.

“Only a Pawn in Their Game” is even more complicated and nuanced. The hero of the song is clearly slain civil rights advocate Medgar Evers, as he is eulogized thus: “Today, Medgar Evers was buried from the bullet he caught / They lowered him down as a king.” Despite this, the focus of the song is an enlightened pity for Evers’s killer. Here again, Dylan is transcending the “protest song” label and forging an identity that reflects a portion of society, specifically, impoverished, racist white Southerners. This time, Dylan’s mirror is set before the “poor white man” who he equitably presumes assassinated Evers. The lyrics are fraught with pity and understanding, if not total absolution:

*The deputy sheriffs, the soldiers,  
the governors get paid  
And the marshals and cops get the same  
But the poor white man’s used in the hands  
of them all like a tool  
He’s taught in his school  
From the start by the rule  
That the laws are with him  
To protect his white skin  
To keep up his hate  
So he never thinks straight  
‘Bout the shape that he’s in.*

Dylan is able to see the reasons behind the racism motivating Evers’s killer. The racist opponents to integration and civil rights were as much a part of the society shaping Dylan’s identity as their progressive counterparts. Again, the artist is a social mirror, reflecting starkly the conditions that gave way to the murder. The ability to uncomfortably characterize the killer as another victim of society is a part of Dylan’s identity which is created by society itself, comprised of all the complicated components and individuals leading up to the killing. The artist’s desire to somehow exist outside mainstream American society belies its impact on his identity, but underscores his reluctance to take formal public positions. Said Dylan, “...why be part of it, by even trying to criticize it?” (Marqusee 105). Statements like these are tantamount to conceding that his prophetic identity is one bestowed upon him by society, and not his own personal construct.

In addition to the masks crafted for him by history and society, Dylan’s own unconscious exposed a part of his identity that can perhaps only be negatively defined. That is, it is only recognizable as something other than

his previous masks. Songs like “Mr. Tambourine Man” and “Like a Rolling Stone” are long, lyrically and emotionally complex ballads that seem to mark a distinct lyrical turn inward for Dylan’s source of subject matter. What he ended up creating were epic songs, masterpieces, that he himself was never able to fully explain. He wanted to “say something about strange things that [had] happened to [him], strange things [he had] seen” (Dylan 51).

The change in Dylan’s songs and tone were not lost on his audience. Members of various protest movements became concerned that they had lost their quintessential bard. Irwin Silber wrote a letter to *Sing Out!* magazine, claiming that Dylan had “lost contact with people” and his “new songs [seemed] to be all inner-directed now, inner-probing, self-conscious” (Marqusee 104). Silber was correct, and evidently had not considered that Dylan’s prophet-bard identity was bestowed upon him by society, rather than being something he was cultivating or even attempting to adhere to. Dylan had indeed turned inward, and it was just as complicated for him to decipher what he was discovering as it was for his audience.

“Mr. Tambourine Man” almost feels like a submission anthem written by Dylan for his own unconscious. In the lyrics, he seems weary and ready to begin to travel artistically where his own inward road takes him, rather than remain focused on depicting political events or social changes:

*I'm ready to go anywhere, I'm ready for to fade  
Into my own parade, cast your dancing spell my way  
I promise to go under it.*

He wants his “own parade,” possibly opposed to the marches which had bent his astute cataloging of the times to their own purposes. The lyrics are poetic and enigmatic, and thereby very personal. This is not a song which draws from historical influence or social phenomena, but brings to the surface something coming wholly from inside the artist himself. He directly appeals to the Tambourine Man for an introspective respite in asking to be taken “disappearin’ through the smoke rings of [his] mind.” It is perhaps that Dylan is tired of having his artistic identities hoisted upon him, and wishes to compose more of the self-reflective material presented in the song.

“Like a Rolling Stone” is perhaps a personal and existential sequel to “Mr. Tambourine Man.” In what has been hailed by many critics to be the greatest rock and roll song of all time, Dylan seems to turn his internal

monologue outward and address an unknown individual who seems to have undergone some kind of personal, socio-economic reversal of fortune:

*How does it feel  
To be without a home  
Like a complete unknown  
Like a rolling stone.*

Here, in some ways, he may be addressing himself. The previous masks and identities Dylan had worn may have left him feeling sentiments similar to those he penned for the song. Once he had taken off the masks created for him and begun to explore inwardly to continue to find his voice, the change left an ambiguous road ahead, which would be curious and complicated to navigate for the artist and his audiences alike.

Bob Dylan is undoubtedly one of the most diverse musicians and personalities in the American musical canon. His evolution has included numerous identities from the forlorn traveling hobo-bard, to poet laureate of a turbulent generation and beyond. His masks are sometimes a result of interpretations by his audiences, sometimes a remnant of influential bygone eras and events, sometimes of his own design, and all combinations thereof. Regardless of the source of his personae, his multifarious identities are products of multiple forces and remain sources of seemingly endless acclaim, criticism, and fascination.

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Lewis Baden  
**Hammy Brentwood**

*ABOUT THE AUTHOR:*

Lewis Baden, born 1973, is a talented word smith, a published poet, and a passionate unique San Francisco experience. Lewis grew up in Westport CT and at age seven began writing in his diary— a practice which continues to this day. In high school he helped publish an underground newspaper, had his own radio show and began writing poetry.

In 1995 Lewis moved to Charleston, SC and was quite prolific. With his outlandish ways, witty and insightful poetry, and amazing Frisbee skills he quickly earned the nickname, The Frisbee Guy. (A local record company released a CD, "The Frisbee Guy Doesn't Live Here Anymore", when Lewis left the city in 1999.) While in Charleston he was part of an emerging street-art scene. As such, among other eccentric practices, he put up his own mazes and tagged abandoned buildings with pictures of genitalia to advertise for upcoming events.

In 1999 Lewis relocated to San Francisco, where, since 2000 he has lived in his Tenderloin apartment. Lewis has hosted several poetry readings, is published in anthologies, most recently was honored by the SF Browning society and, most importantly, writes daily.

Lewis is excited to be back in school. He is currently working on a Bachelor's degree at San Francisco State University in Creative Writing with, astonishingly-to-his-friends-and-family, a minor in Mathematics!

Always creating, continually engaged in many avenues of pursuit, Lewis Baden is certainly an artist to keep an eye on.

*LECTURER, CARSON BEKER* asked students to: Consider the characters who interest you most: the people you most want to talk about; the mysteries of the human consciousness you most want to explore. Take one of those characters, write a quick character sketch, have him misbehave, and try putting a bullet through his brain the way Tobias Wolff does in "Bullet in the Brain." It need not be a bullet in the story – it could be a hit to the head or some other affliction – but take us into your character's soul.

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Suave, styled, poised.

Sly as a caterpillar.

Shiny as an Owl.

Bright as a Cappuccino.



Hammy, wearing a dark blue three piece striped suit, white buttoned down oxford with a pink, almost lavender tie, takes off his dark Armani shades after waiting over ten minutes and says, "Soy Latte."

To lips

To table

To Mac Book Pro with a faded green Notre Dame sticker on the lower right hand corner where his roommate, Sal Griagniallia had placed it five years ago when Hammy was bitching during his freshman homecoming weekend on how much he hated the Fighting Irish.

Hammy has never forgotten that weekend or the long paddle out with Ginny, away from the quad, after the big game, over to Bekka Blue's Brews & Chews for some post game wings and pool. Ginny was so excited too, visiting her big brother on his first semester away from the family! In fact, he has always secretly blamed Ginny for that sticker yet frequently chortles in fond remembrance of that idyllic weekend. Wasn't she wearing Dad's faded old green cap the entire weekend anyways, she must have put it on. He never, even for a brief moment, suspected that Sal, after receiving another one of Hammy's infamous "organizational" lectures, specifically directed at the roommate supposedly to help him, stuck it on.

What if life were like that?

How preposterous that I am unable to pronounce Sal's last name, like God creating a maze in which God could not escape.

"I am a field systems meta-engineer," Hammy has drolled countless times in various states of consciousness. Never another word about his job. Women he meets ask, and the occasional taxi driver might enquire further after he divulges, but he always, very daftly changes the subject.

"Fly fishing on the Seine."

"Catching twig insects in Peru."

"Net-flicking till piss dry."

Hammy cannot stand his work and cannot grasp why people must know precisely what he does. Hammy does however, like the money that comes

with his job and does enjoy online footwear bidding as a direct result. He currently owns ten pairs of “drunken Himalayan soldier boots” which he proudly shows off at informal gatherings, such as wine and cheese soirées.

The Latte is finished.

Hammy, young thirties, athletic build, one inch scar below the right side of his mouth, packs up his computer and smiles. Thoughts turn inwards towards the *New Mountain Modeling Summer*.

He must have been about fourteen, fifteen. Away from Mom, Dad, Ginny, for eight weeks. Oh, how he loved to build them! The Eiffel Tower, a Star Trek Enterprise, a T- Rex, you name it, he built it! He was a voracious micro-engineer. He was never going to stop, but high school, college, life... he somehow forgot how much he loved it.

Lost in this memory Hammy was oblivious and obliterated by and to the catastrophe that was and is happening, happened.

To those far removed it’s a cliché. To Hammy and those in that particular Starbucks on that particular day it was a horrendous shocking upheaval of the normalcy they had banked on. "A drive by gang related shooting" as described on Live Five's news at five, the first and best in the tri-state area.

One moment Hammy was standing, Mac Book Pro, snug in its shoulder bag, about to go to Freehand Lilly's for wine and cheese with some of the racket ball geeks, and the next he was crumpled over, unable to stand. Clutching his shins, lower legs, thighs— bleeding profusely, a look of confusion, anger, and pain swept over him. Hammy, as Handerly has been known since grade school, took four bullets to his legs, three to the left, one to the right and currently was unable to stand up. No one came over to ask if he was alright. In fact, relative to the others that took bullets, he was.

Ambulances show up.

Hammy is helped.

Several months pass.

Hammy wishes he could forget about that day in the Starbucks, but he never can. Strangely and rather unfortunately for Handerly, in his attempt to forget that day, to cease the relentless memories that always seem to flood him right at five o'clock when he gets off work, or to prevent him from falling

immediately to sleep like he did before that awful day, the only thing which he *never* seems to shake off is an odd feeling when he opens his Mac.

Who, Who Who, put this gruesome green Notre Dame sticker on my Mac Book Pro?

Gary William Hallford  
**Excerpt from *Under Advisement***

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:**

Gary is a senior in Creative Writing at San Francisco State, and is simultaneously a senior in Communications at Southern New Hampshire, and should earn these B.A.s in December of 2016. He also holds an A.A. in Arts and Humanities and an A.S. in Social and Behavioral Sciences, both from City College of San Francisco, and has previously attended Lassen College and the University of Idaho. The most prestigious literary award to date involves being banned by the State of Missouri for an article published in “*Cry Justice Now!*” No. 35. He has also been published in assorted small magazines and newspapers domestically, as well as in India. He hopes to pursue an MFA upon completion of his B.A.

**ACKNOWLEDGMENT FOR PROFESSORS:**

Gary would like to thank the following faculty for their advice and support with *Under Advisement*: Professors Lauren S. Muller and Ellen Peel; Lecturers: Doris Bellamy, Donna De La Perriere, Matthew Iribarne, and Anne Galjour; and GTA, Brandon Diaz.

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Chapter 3 (Beirut 1986)

Being bored is usually a bad thing, but in Beirut, it is a blessing. Civil wars typically have only two major factions involved, but here you could load a room with 100 people and you might have 95 different groups represented. As an outsider, I have damn near no clue who’s who in this nightmare, but am thankful for having the good sense to not have anything that identifies me as an American. The Canadian passport and medical card are great in airports, with the only possible exception being maybe Argentina, after their failed Falkland Islands annexation. Here, I have a couple pair of *Levi’s*, but everything else is from anywhere but the USA. After the Marine barracks bombing in 1983 killed 241 Marines, Navy, and Army personnel, 30 seconds later the same thing happened at the French compound, where 58 paratroopers were killed, no military presence existed other than the assorted Israeli and Syrian excursions. So, wandering around Beirut wearing assorted Canadian sports memorabilia kept me off the radar of any faction I may have trouble with. *Calgary Flames*, *Calgary Stampeders*, *Toronto Blue Jays*, and even a t-shirt of the Maple Leaf flag, were sufficient to allow me passage through the

assorted road blocks and check points. After having done so regularly for a couple weeks, I was rarely even checked out. A simple nod of recognition and I was on my merry way to the small market to pick up two packs of *Players* cigarettes and a copy of *The Times* from London. I once grumbled to one of the English-speaking check point guards that I would prefer a copy of the *Calgary Herald*, but *The Times* at least had a little coverage of Canada. He seemed sympathetic, but probably wanted to get back to whatever he was doing before I wandered by twice each day. Very few others were interested in walking the rubble strewn streets, so maybe I served as a distraction for him too.

The journey to get cigarettes and a paper were initially an excuse to visit a message drop. At 0730, I would begin the trek, and would usually arrive by 0900. The proprietor was unaware of this scheme officially, but I got the impression that he was far more knowledgeable than he let on. When I finally got there, I would reach for the bottom copy of *The Times*, then ask for the smokes. More often than not, there would be no message. When there was one, it was usually encrypted and I had no idea what it said until I got back to my hotel and translated the message into useful intelligence. Mostly it was confirmation of deliveries of weapons to Afghanistan, but on one occasion it involved an operation in Karachi that went sideways. I relayed information to those who needed to know, helped facilitate payment, and once even arranged a birthday gift to a young lady in Florida who was turning 12. In an odd way this was kind of like a precursor to modern day social media...

One morning I did my regular trip to the little store and having received no message, decided to take my time on the walk back. The Mediterranean climate was as pleasant as ever and from a few of the street corners I could actually see all the way to the sea. I reflected back to stories my dad had told me about visiting Beirut a little more than 30 years before, during his final Navy deployment. He had referred to Beirut as “the Paris of the Middle East”, so I imagine it was far kinder and gentler in 1955 than in 1986. *If he could see through my eyes today, he'd be spinning in his grave*, I thought, but kept heading to the hotel.

In an area between the second and third checkpoints, there were several blocks where the rubble had been cleared and the road was still passable as a motorway. I was lost in my own thoughts when a rather boxy sedan putted by and pulled over about 50 meters ahead of me. Functional automobiles were rare, so I kept an eye on it to make certain some faction or other had not

mistaken me for one of their targets. The passenger side rear door opened and a petite strawberry-blonde emerged. She was kind of cute and I gave a semi-flirtatious smile as I walked by, which was shyly responded to with a similar smile. That little exchange was unexpected, so I kept walking. I might have been trying to formulate some lame come-on line, or rehearse what to say to her, but I never got a chance. Five steps past her all Hell broke loose...

## Chapter 5 (Beirut 1986)

I had just passed the strawberry-blonde and thought about stopping to try and chat when a group of well over twenty armed men came running from around the corner, carrying AK-47's, rocket-propelled grenade launchers (RPG's), and a variety of other weapons. They opened fire on a building almost directly across the street from the girl's sedan and a window from the second floor returned fire. By the time the spent cartridges hit the ground, I had spun around and took three leaping bounds, tackling the strawberry-blonde, and pulling her to some relative safety behind her car.

Her driver emerged and was almost instantly hit by gunfire. He crawled to the back of the car and barked "Натассия!" and glared at me.

"Я в порядке. ВВ попали!" She yelled at him and placed her hand over his bullet wound.

"Shit! I hope to fuck one of you speaks English!"

"Да, I speak a little" she replied while maintaining pressure on the hole in his shoulder.

"You got any other weapons?" I barked at her.

"Нет, only his pistol."

"If we're going to live much longer we're going to have to work together, okay?"

She nodded.

"Tell him to make every shot count. I'm going to try something..."

They stayed close together on the driver's side with her trying to make a bandage, while I crawled to where I could peek around the passenger side of the trunk. The firefight from the street was vicious and they had taken some casualties. None of their dead or wounded were close enough to reach, but a young man with an AK-47 was nearing my position, focused on his shots to the second floor across the street. When I saw an opportunity, I sprang up and landed as hard a right cross punch as humanly possible. He went down like a sack of potatoes and I was happy to find that he did not have the shoulder strap

of his weapon around his neck. I grabbed the rifle, fired one round in the middle of his chest, and retreated to the rear of the car. After a quick check of the magazine I guessed I had twelve to fifteen rounds to work with.

The girl saw me return and check the ammunition. Her eyes asked the question and I replied “Not enough, but better than a few seconds ago...”

Prior to my weapon retrieval we had been taking sporadic fire from both the building and the street. It was obvious that there was no neutral ground here and neither side considered us as allies. The driver had regained enough composure to take a few shots at both the window and one or two street fighters, but he was conserving ammunition. I peeked around the trunk and saw two men within fifteen meters of our position, fired one round at each and eliminated them as potential threats. I also fired a round at a man in the second floor window and he died instantly from the 7.62 X 39 projectile entering by his left nostril and exiting from the back of his skull with most of his brains splattering the wall behind him.

The girl crawled over to me and asked “How many rounds left?”

“Not many.”

“Cover me.” She said, and crawled over to the first man I had killed. *Shit!* I thought, and kept a bead on anyone on the ground who might pose a threat. She stayed low and when she reached him patted all of his pockets and felt around his waistband. A few seconds later she returned with two full AK-47 magazines and three hand grenades. Just as she returned one of the men on the street, maybe thirty meters away, swung his weapon in her direction. I fired one round killing him, and a second round at another man a few meters past him, but missed.

We were taking a lot of fire from the street and I wondered how long the car would survive as our barricade. I changed magazines and handed her the one that now only had a handful of rounds in it. “Don’t lose that, we’ll need it” I said. She nodded, then her eyes got really big from something she saw behind me. I turned around to see an RPG pointed at our position from the building across the street. *Oh Fuck!!!* I thought, and spun around to fire several rounds at that most imminent threat. The target slumped and dropped the RPG out the window.

“Give me some cover fire!” I yelled at the driver, and sprinted twenty meters toward the RPG that had been dropped. I heard his 9mm fire several times but

had no idea which direction he was firing. I dove for the RPG and the wall behind me was being hit repeatedly by assorted small arms fire. The AK-47 is a handy weapon that has a pistol grip, so I was able to fire it using only my right hand. The girl had sense enough to grab a grenade, pulled the pin, and lobbed it in the direction of some of the remaining targets on the street. The explosion dazed those who were close to it, and gave me a second to sprint back to our position.

“That was fun” I muttered under my breath, but also noticed the girl looking for bullet holes on my body. “I’m fine. Thanks for chucking the grenade.” I took a quick look at the RPG and was disappointed to see it was a style I wasn’t familiar with. “Shit. How do you fire this God damned thing?” I asked.

She yelled at the driver “Борис! Можете ли ВЫ стрелять это?” He nodded yes, so I crawled over to him. His left arm was out of commission, so he gestured for me to get in front of him. This made sense because I could use the AK-47 to do suppression fire while he readied and took aim from my right shoulder and barked an order to the girl. “When he says Да, hold your breath and do not move. He will fire then.”

“Fine by me!”

“Да!” He barked, and as I stayed still for a second, then he yelled “Die Ублюдки! Умереть!” and fired. The back-flash from the missile burned my neck, but the explosion across the street rained rumble and debris on both the street between us and the target and on our position. No further shots were received from that building.

The combatants on the street were almost all dead or wounded, so other than an occasional shot in our general direction, it appeared they were trying to retrieve the wounded and leave the area. Once they left the scene the girl said something to her driver and then commented to me, “Let us go to hospital. Both of you need help.” All I could do was nod with exhaustion.

Her former driver now crawled into the backseat while I entered the passenger side of their sedan. I quickly brushed shards of broken glass off the seat, then leaned forward to help her remove what was left of the windshield from the metallic frame it could no longer inhabit. She pushed it to the ground and did similar actions to remove the remaining broken glass from where she would sit. The dashboard had been riddled with bullet holes, but when she fired up the engine almost all of the gauges and components seemed to be operational.



I heard her mutter something under her breath and noticed that one round had taken a chunk out of the steering wheel, but could not determine how much the damage would impact her ability to navigate this rolling wreck.

“I’m not sure how to get to the hospital here.” I stated, “I think it is all the way across town, at least six checkpoints from here.”

“We go to Damascus. I have friends there and work there. Beirut not safe for us now. If car keep working we go to Damascus.”

“If you say so.”

“Да. I say so.” She looked at me and asked “What is your name?”

“Dennis Collins, but my friends call me Denny. When this thing started I think your driver called you Natasha. Is that correct?”

“Да, I am Натасиа. His name is Борис. Thank you for...” she struggled for the appropriate word while slightly blushing, “everything today.”

“Have you ever seen the *Rocky and Bullwinkle* cartoons?” I asked with a smile. “If not, it won’t make any sense to you yet, but I’d like to show them to you someday.”

She smiled, then asked Boris something, probably how he was doing. They conversed for a few seconds in Russian then stated “He is doing well. We should make Damascus before his wounds cause more problem. The border will be no problem.”

“Yeah, I was going to ask about that. Why would the Syrians not stop us?”

“We have Diplomatic Plates. This car is Союз Советских Социалистических Республик soil. Syria is our friend here.”

“*Soyuz Sovetskikh Sotsialisticheskikh Respublik* is one Hell of a mouthful. Can we stick to СССР? It makes it far easier, right?”

She started to smile but in the distance saw one of the innumerable Beirut roadblocks less than 200 meters ahead. She did not speak, but her eyes pleaded for guidance and support. In an instant I noted that there were only a couple of guards and that this location would not be very likely to create much trouble. “Just keep heading their way at a steady pace. Once they get a look at our ride I doubt they’ll want to fuck with us...” I said, then added “If I saw this car coming I’d back away too. Looks like *Christine*.”

“Who?”

“A haunted car from a book by Stephen King.”

She beamed with pride and a confident smile, “СССР make terrific cars! This is a 1984 *Volga GAZ-24*. She serve well in combat, Да?”

“I ain’t going to complain Natasha.” She did not realize it yet, but once we stopped at our destination I did a relatively thorough assessment of our infamous *Volga*. I lost count of the bullet holes at over 300, but some of them may have pierced the hull more than once, so an accurate count will never be known.

As we approached the checkpoint, the three men guarding the post stood and gawked at the bullet-ridden sedan that approached their position. My rifle was by my leg and she had one of her grenades sitting between her legs. Were the guards to offer any resistance we could easily defend ourselves without much worry. Boris was still conscious behind us, so if anything could be considered a threat, I had no doubt he was ready as well. As we got close, Natasha stopped the car and called out to them in French “Bonjour monsieur. Comment allez-vous?”

The guards did not respond, so she asked them another question “Avez-vous l’eau?”

“Oui madame. Nous avons trois litres pouvons épargner.”

“Très agréable. Merci.”

The speaking guard approached with two canteens and Natasha asked him a final question. “Avez-vous un pneu de rechange pour la voiture?”

“Un Russe voiture? Désolés, je n’ai pas pour vous. Je peux être en mesure d’en trouver un.”

“Non merci.”

He handed over the canteens and seemed awestruck by the condition of the *Volga*. He asked a simple question first in French, then in Arabic “Rude journée?” / رحلة الخام؟

“Oui. Très mal.” She said, then with a more cheerful composure she pointed to all the damage around her and with a sly smile added “Mon *Volga* a très bien fait, fait-il pas?”

“Oui madame, très bien.”

“Merci pour l’eau. Que la paix soit sur vous. Au revoir.”

“Bon chance madame.” Followed by a very polite blessing: السلام عليكم.

Natasha shifted the *Volga* into gear and we left the final checkpoint behind our shattered taillights. Damascus was just under 100 kilometers away, with only one main town along the way. Boris began speaking and Natasha translated for my benefit, about Joub Jannine. It was also known as a major

archeological site in the Béqaa Valley, and has not been used by any of the assorted Lebanese factions as a stronghold, and all neighboring countries have provided it with a certain level of independence during the conflicts, much like Paris in World War II. Boris went into sufficient detail that eventually Natasha stopped translating and simply began a new conversation between her and me. Nothing in-depth was discussed yet, just more relaxed tones and allowing ourselves to further explore who we each were. Two hours later, near sunset, we were parking at the same hospital that had been swamped by casualties during some terrorist attacks during March and April. Today they only had the normal influx of patients.

## *ACKNOWLEDGMENTS*

*Sutro Review* thanks the following faculty for their comments:

Professors: Santhi Kavari-Bauer, Sandra Luft, and Geoffrey Green; Lecturers: Emma Remick, Laura Anne Gillis, Clair Walsh, Anastasia D. Micheals, and Nico Peck; and GTAs: Renato Escudero, Daniel Curtis-Cummins, Alex Mejia, and Hailey Laird.

In addition, we'd like to thank English Department staff Lisa Poehlmann and Jace Allen for their invaluable time and support, as well as Amanda Bent and Kitty Quinn-Friel; and again, English Department Chair, Sugie Goen-Salter and Director of Composition, Tara Lockhart, who made this project possible.