

2016

Intertext 2016 – Complete Issue

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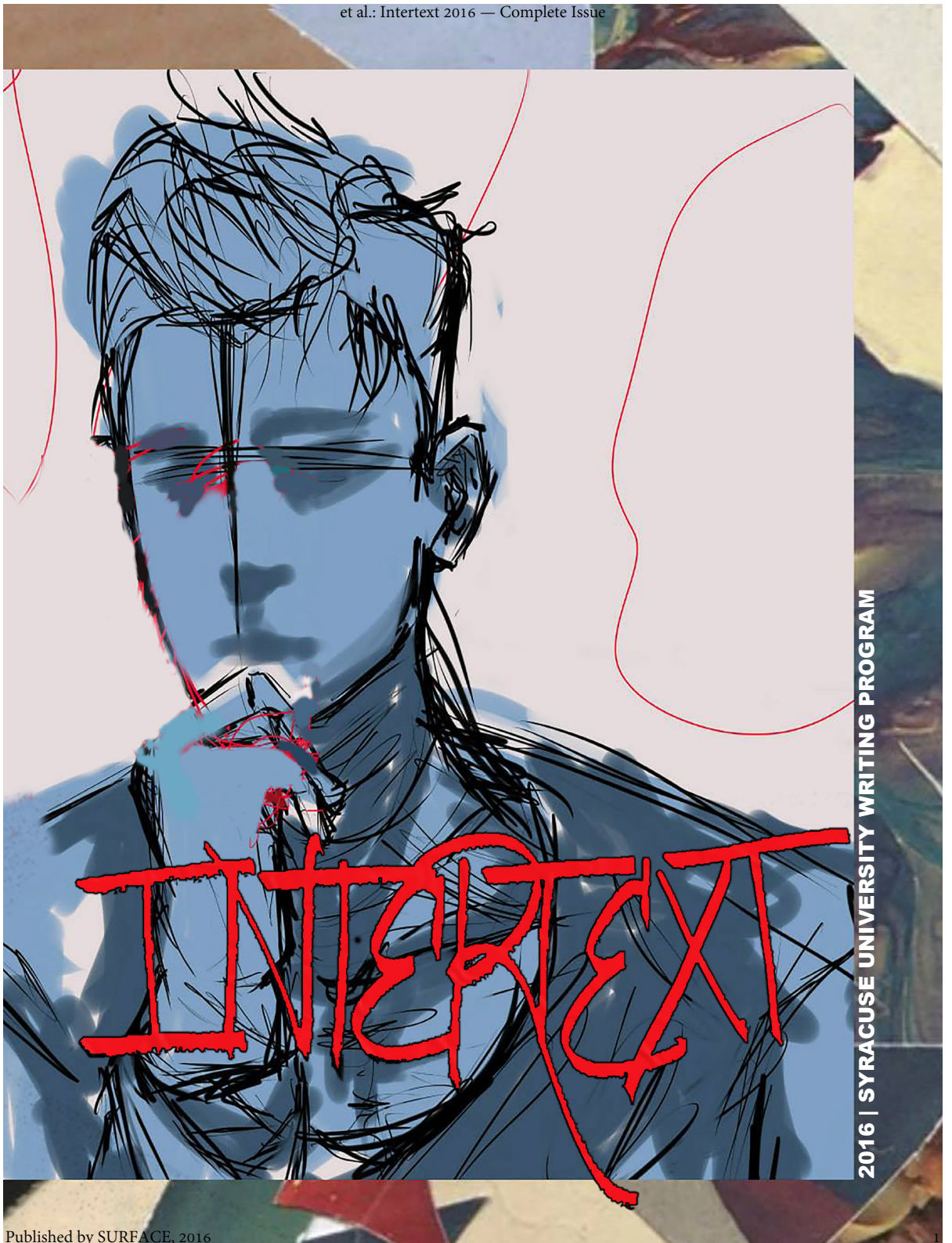
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2016 | SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY WRITING PROGRAM

INTERTEXT

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Intertext is a publication of the Syracuse University Writing Program. It features the work of Writing Program students and represents the quality and variety of writing produced in its undergraduate courses.

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The Louise Wetherbee Phelps Award recognizes excellence in writing in the Writing Program's courses. Submissions are evaluated on depth, complexity, technical control, emotional and intellectual appeal, and how well they reflect the goals of the Writing Program. The 2016 winners are Taskina Tareen for "The Plight of the Angry Tweet" and Benjamin Fox for "A Father's Smile."

Cover image and this spread: Eli Akinbamidele.

INTRODUCTION



The editors of *Intertext* welcome you to the 2016 issue of the publication. This year's editors and contributing authors have worked to strengthen the bonds that unite our diverse student body through active reflection and self-expression. The voices of undergraduate students from across the Syracuse campus, including the Writing Program, explore three pressing concerns we face each day: the power of recollection, the confrontation and awareness of injustice, and the necessity of acceptance. Propelled by a natural desire to investigate the unique experiences, interests, and perspectives found at Syracuse University, the work included in the following pages has expertly captured a snapshot of the complex realities manifested in many individuals' daily lives.

Addressing where society has been and where it can go, the thoughtful discourse exhibited on each of these pages promotes both the acceptance

and awareness of the colorful personalities and points of view which exist right here in our campus community. Most importantly, each piece echoes the burgeoning passion and talent for the craft of writing that is prevalent throughout our campus.

While many of the editors this year entered the process inexperienced in designing a publication from start to finish, we remained motivated by our enthusiasm and determination to produce a product that inspires our community beyond the breadth of the Writing Program. Sometimes conflicting, but always collaborative, our spirited teamwork has allowed us to embody the vivacity and zeal of SU and its neighboring communities. The masterful writing and creative innovation of this year's contributing authors have encouraged the editors, and undoubtedly our readers, to mindfully reflect on our own growth within the Writing Program and the many formidable, provocative moments that



Layout by Antoinette Zeina. Photograph by Zach Barlow.

have sparked the creative composer in us all. After months of hard work, we hope you will enjoy the issue and continue to develop and foster your own writing abilities. Without the help, and good faith, of the Syracuse University Writing Program, we would not have been able to create such a wondrous edition—and for that reason, some special thanks are needed.

First and foremost, we would like to thank our professor, Patrick W. Berry, for his dedicated expertise and enthusiastic guidance in making this publication possible. Without his assistance, we would not have been able to realize our ability or appreciation for publishing—no matter how many bumps we hit along the way.

We are sincerely grateful to Professor Lois Agnew, the Writing Program, the College of Arts and Sciences, and its iLEARN program for their continued support of this work. Without this

support, the aspiring writers would miss out on the opportunity to be published in such a remarkable compilation of student initiative.

We would also like to thank Benay Bubar and Wendy Mansfield for providing professional contributions to the edition and guidance in style and design choices. Special thanks also go out to the judges of the Louise Wetherbee Phelps awards for best writing: Jessica Corey, Rebecca Moore Howard, Ariane Vani Kannan, and Faith Plvan.

Lastly, we would like to give a huge thanks to all the authors for their submissions. We hope that as the relationship between readers and aspiring writers strengthens amidst Syracuse University, *Intertext* continues to hold an integral role in this process. We can only hope our community continues to speak, listen, and be heard for many years to come.

—Madison Firkey, Charlotte Oestrich,
and Antoinette Zeina

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MEET THE CONTRIBUTORS



CAROL PELZ | "SEMPER FIDELIS" | WRT 114

Carol Pelz majors in Information Management and Technology at the iSchool. Her piece, "Semper Fidelis: Always Faithful" was written during her first semester at Syracuse University when her boyfriend of three years, Michael, was in basic training for the Marines. It's been a year and a half since she wrote this piece, but all the feelings that she felt then continue to be prevalent in her life.



MACKENZIE STONE | "ALL I KNOW..." | WRT 114

Mackenzie Stone majors in Fashion Design at the College of Visual and Performing Arts. Her essay, "All I Know..." details her struggle to navigate the complicated world of body image as a female in modern America. She is a sarcasm-loving, fashion-obsessed student with a tendency to overanalyze just about everything.



BENJAMIN FOX | "MY FATHER'S SMILE" | WRT 114

Benjamin Fox is a TRF major at the Newhouse School of Public Communications. "My Father's Smile" addresses a burning question he had about himself, specifically how his father's coming out had challenged and changed the conventions he once held about happiness and sexuality. From Washington D.C., he is a sophomore who spends way too much time watching movies, and he hopes to one day work in the film industry as a producer and screenwriter.



Laurie Thompson | "PILED HIGH" | WRT 114

Laurie Thompson majors in Neuroscience and Linguistics at the College of Arts & Sciences. Her piece, "Piled High: Controlled by the Clutter," is about a struggle that her mom has dealt with over the years and how it has affected her along the way. Laurie has loved writing ever since she was a little kid, including stories and poems about foreign princesses, premonitions, special abilities, and ordinary, daily life.



ANGELA M. ANASTASI | "A SIMPLE TIME" | WRT 114

Angela Anastasi majors in Marketing and Public Relations at both the Whitman School of Management and the Newhouse School of Public Communications. Her piece, "A Simple Time," is a reflection on the world through a child's eyes, filled with wonder and amazement. Growing up in suburban Philadelphia, Angela has always loved travel and the arts and aspires to someday write for *The New Yorker*.



MORGAN CONOVER | "MOVING OFF THE EDUCATION CONVEYOR BELT" | WRT 424

Morgan Conover majors in Writing & Rhetoric and Middle Eastern Studies at the College of Arts & Sciences. Her essay, "Moving Off the Education Conveyor Belt," both reflects her experience as a student and guides her aspiration to be a professor.



PETER MCSHANE | "SHARING THE SCOURGE OF WAR"

Peter McShane is a member of the Syracuse Veterans' Writing Group. His piece, "Sharing the Scourge of War," was written in response to the following prompt: "What is a lasting memory of your tour in Vietnam?" He wants readers to know that offspring of combatants often share the physical, psychological, and emotional burdens of war. Of all the personal and commercial success he achieved in his life, he considers being the father of three children and the grandfather of nine as the crowning achievement of his life.



ABIGAIL COVINGTON | "SEPARATE BUT UNEQUAL" | WRT 105

Abigail Covington is a double major in Writing & Rhetoric and Sociology. Her piece, "Separate But Unequal," was written with the intention of highlighting the great divide in the public education system that directly correlates to race and socioeconomic situations, especially in urban environments. Abigail aspires to a future career in telling narratives that celebrate our intersectionalities while simultaneously highlighting our individualities.



NASHWAH AHMED | "ROTIMI FANI-KAYODE" | WRT 109

Nashwah Ahmed is a first-year student with the School of Architecture. Her piece, "Rotimi Fani-Kayode: 1955-1989" is a brief analysis of the greatest works of a revolutionary photographer. She is excited to see her first ever published piece.



TASKINA TAREEN | "THE PLIGHT OF THE ANGRY TWEET" | WRT 413

Taskina Tareen is a recent graduate from the School of Architecture. Her essay, "The Plight of the Angry Tweet," discusses the relationship between rhetoric and ethics in contemporary digital debates. Originally from Lusaka, Zambia, Taskina is currently working as a designer in Boston's Downtown Financial District.



SIDDARTH SENTHILKUMARAN | "TRAFFIC TYRANTS" | WRT 109

Siddarth Senthilkumaran majors in International Relations, Newspaper & Online Journalism, and Citizenship & Civic Engagement at both the Maxwell School of Citizenship & Public Affairs and the Newhouse School of Public Communications. His piece, "Traffic Tyrants," describes peak rush hour on a major thoroughfare in the highly populated metropolis of Chennai.



WENDY REYNOLDS | "AWAKENING" & "TEA AND INTUITION" | WRT 255

Wendy Reynolds is a Food Studies Major at Falk College. Her essay "Awakening" sorts through her struggle to acknowledge mental illness in her family, and argues that we should not have to lose our identity or reject our idiosyncrasies in order to achieve wellness. Her short piece, "Tea and Intuition," honors the memory of her mystical grandmother whose advice helped her hone her intuition and escape danger.

Layout by Richelle Gewertz.

Raw Recall

The traffic doesn't seem to be moving for more than a few miles. I bang my head against the wheel in a quiet sense of frustration. I reached my destination, late as usual.


Sirens sing me to sleep most nights now. What sound sings Mike to sleep? Is it the frantic sound of secret writing, stealthy thieves pilfering words in the shadowy night? Or is Mike the one being robbed?

She reminded me to think about my inner desires as she poured, and asked me to drink the tea with reverence and focus. The candles would flicker as I sipped; she told me this was a sign that the spirits were with us.

When the journey was finally over, my father

whipped me up into his arms and we stood on the edge of the thin iron fence on the top step. Looking out around us, the world seemed endless.

In this opening passage, taken from the stories in this section, we hear different voices, different authors telling different stories. The human experience will always generate memories in its wake just as a ship generates waves while it travels across the ocean. How we handle those memories is subject to change depending on the perspective of the person whose eyes we are looking through. That's the beauty of the written word. In one sitting, we can be taken to a place where we are dealing with a long distance relationship or sitting in traffic in India. With the simple turn of a page we can be transported to somewhere else en-



tirely. We can gain an insight into what it's like to sail in a ship other than our own. We can see the wake left from other human experiences, and we can be told about them in voices that may be unfamiliar to us.

The stories in this section feature detailed recollections that bring the reader on a journey alongside the author as we are temporarily transferred from our own vessel to that of another. While on this unfamiliar ship, we have the opportunity to study the unique wake it leaves behind. In certain special circumstances, we may even be afforded the privilege to look up to see what stars guide this vessel and compare those to our own. Though these stories are centered around the fleeting, mundane moments in life, they do not fail to evoke the nostalgic feelings that arise from the simplicity in

the moments authors chose to share.

As you read these pieces, you might be tempted to put your own experiences on hold in order to focus on the author's raw recall. Or you might think about your own histories and connect them with those shared by the author.

This is your opportunity to leave what you know behind and venture forward into what is unknown. Challenge yourself while on this journey to analyze not only the wake left behind but also the horizon that stands ahead. Look up from the ships of these authors, try to see the stars by which they navigate and ask yourself: in the quiet moments when you look up from your own helm to find your way, are the stars you see the same?

—Destiny Renee Anderson, Zach Barlow,
Aidan Kelley, and Joy Muchtar

Layout and photograph by Zach Barlow.



TEA & INTUITION

WENDY REYNOLDS



When I was a child, my grandmother would invite me to her kitchen table and prepare a pot of loose leaf tea. I sat in silence as she dimmed the lights, lit the candles, adjusted her scarf and poured the brew into my beautifully decorated cup.

She reminded me to think about my inner desires as she poured, and asked me to drink the tea with reverence and focus. The candles would flicker as I sipped; she told me this was

a sign that the spirits were with us. I drank with trepidation, mystified and excited by the unseen forces in the room.

Once the cup was empty, she advised me to turn it upside down and make three passes over my head, always in a circular motion and always with closed eyes, so as not to offend the spirits. Then I would set the cup facedown on the saucer and await the reading. It was always eerily correct.

My grandmother told me that I shared her gift, she could see it in the leaves.

“What is the gift?” I asked.

She told me the gift would reveal itself to me when I was ready, that I was too young to understand. “When you become a woman,



then you will know. You will feel it in your bones,” was her standard reply.

When I was a teenager, my grandmother became ill and the readings stopped. The cancer destroyed her health and her ability to interpret the leaves. She passed away, and I distanced myself from the leaves, along with any other practice that reminded me of her mysterious gift.

The gift found me when I was working in a men’s maximum security prison. It was intuition, and it would keep me out of danger. I knew because I felt it in my bones, as my grandmother predicted. I was often surrounded by hundreds of inmates, many of whom had no effect on me, but every once in a while my gut would churn or my skin would prickle when I interacted with one. Some men made me icy with fear, a fear that made my bones ache. I could hear my grandmother’s voice in my head, and I knew her words were true.

During a particularly long night on the midnight shift at the prison, I was making my quarterly rounds when the icy feeling took over. An inmate had asked me a question about the television, a seemingly harmless query, but my body knew there was more to come. As I walked the dark corridor over and over again that night, I was filled with inexplicable terror each time I passed his cell. The gift was warning me, telling me to be alert. The inmate eventually tried to attack me; he was completely naked and had been waiting close to the bars in order to grab ahold of me and do his worst. Thanks to my gift, I was prepared. He missed, and I was able to call for help.

I ended that night with a cup of tea, paying reverence to my grandmother and the spirits with every sip. I believe in the power of tea and intuition, and in the gift from a mystical grandmother who read my tea leaves and saved my life.



Semper Fidelis: Always Faithful

Carol Pelz

Mike left for Marine boot camp on September 8, 2014. His plane departed from New York City and landed in Parris Island, South Carolina. Hell on Earth, as he described it. Beautiful on the outside, torture once you passed through the gates. Which, of course, he did.

This wasn't an experiment in distance. This wasn't an experiment involving 1,000 miles and seven states that acted as an unforgiving fortress between him and me. This wasn't an experiment involving pens that dried out, fragile

lead that broke every time, and the ripping of the crinkly ends of notebook paper so that only a precise crisp edge was left. This was an experiment of him and me. Mike was the independent variable, ever-changing. I was the dependent variable, a result of his decisions. Mike's enlisting in the Marines changed the path we were following, one which began in the tenth grade, hand in hand, always together. Suddenly, there was about to be a split in our road for the first time since we were fifteen. Ultimately, I made the decision to remain on the path with

Layout and opening photograph by Zach Barlow. Background paper image by Flickr user Chris Palmieri, CC BY-SA 2.0: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/cpalmieri/14769900>.

him, my hand clasped tightly in his until the day he left. Mike and I are only able to communicate through letters now, which I reflect on often.

2300, Parris Island

Write as much as you want baby, I like to stay up and read them.

Sirens sing me to sleep most nights now. What sound sings Mike to sleep? Is it the frantic sound of secret writing, stealthy thieves pilfering words in the shadowy night? Or is Mike the one being robbed? Being robbed of time to write to his family, being robbed of sleep, being robbed of comfort? No one believes a recruit will get a decent amount of sleep at boot camp. I at least thought Mike would get enough sleep that he would be able to rest his weary eyes. I didn't think his eyelids would weigh him down like an anchor, heavy steel constantly dragging him under. Exhaustion was a well-known enemy to Mike before he went to basic training, an enemy who always kept the fight dragging on for too damn long, never compromising, never allowing for peace. Thoughts often kept him up at night, nagging at him like flies. Now Mike denies the Sandman, ignores his drooping eyelids, just to read my messily scrawled words, elaborate musical notes to his worn-out eyes. Words of reassurance, words of comfort, words from me to him.

0700, Parris Island

I'm at the dentist! I'm gonna be losing my wisdom teeth today, hopefully it goes good. It's like 7ish and I've been just waiting and waiting.

It didn't go good :(It really was

painful. They said they were going to treat us really good, but it was bad.

Mike's drill instructor gave him a bulleted list of instructions as he entered the dentist's office to wait for his surgery. **Do NOT lay in your rack with gauze in your mouth. Falling asleep with gauze in your mouth is a major breathing risk. Take your medication as directed. Keep well hydrated with water, juices, and Gatorade type fluids.** He didn't even get halfway through the list before he turned it over and started to write a letter to me. A recruit is lucky if he gets time to write each night, between reading his required books, clearing his space, and holding ten-pound weights out in his completely straightened arms until he is praying to God he can just die already.

Mike's teeth clung to his gums, reluctant to leave. His surgery started at 0815 and ended at 1100. Three hours, four wisdom teeth. Bleeding gums, couldn't talk. Pain filled his mouth, waging a war on his gums. Their weapon was blood. So much blood. A couple of the recruits had been too loud at the dentist's office, so all the recruits in Mike's platoon had to run a mile immediately after the surgeries. One mile turned into two, which became three, and ended up being four. Can't breathe. Can't talk. Can't do this anymore.

1700, Parris Island

A boy in my platoon called out our Drill Sergeant. I took the blame but the Drill Sergeant called bullshit because I couldn't talk. Everyone started laughing, it was great.

A boy in Mike's platoon had the guts, or the plain stupidity, to call a drill instructor out on

his bullshit. When the sergeant demanded to know who had spoken, Mike took the blame by raising his hand. He opened his mouth to talk, and instantly the blood soaked his chapped lips. “Bullshit, you can’t even talk!” the drill instructor screamed at Mike. The boys in the platoon tried to hold in their laughter and disbelief, but their faces broke into undeniable smiles, heads tilted down toward the ground to hide them. Mike had lightened the somber mood. He always does.

2300, Parris Island

I'm here without you baby, but you're still on my lonely mind. I think about you baby, and I dream about you all the time. I'm here without you baby, but you're still with me in my dreams. And tonight, it's only you and me.

The first time Mike and I talked about the song “Here Without You” by Three Doors Down, we were sitting in his kitchen making Jell-O. It was halfway through August, and I think we both felt the feelings that come only during tender summer nights. Carelessness swirled inside us. The nights were endless. Dark skies and light hearts. Loud laughter, quiet houses. Tired eyes, the most awake laughter. Tonight, our stomachs were full of chocolate rum cake. We were outside Walmart, a flimsy bag with three boxes of Jell-O—raspberry, orange, and banana—in our arms, when we saw the stand. The Catholic School from the town over was selling cakes for charity. Thick, rich frosting melted like butter in the sweltering summer atmosphere, the plastic cover offering no protection from the ever-present heat. We rescued the chocolate rum cake, a knight and a princess, sweeping up the cake before it melted

underneath the fiery breath of the dragon sun. It was safe until we devoured it in a booth in the back of McDonald’s, with plastic forks held like pitchforks between our sweaty fingers.

The Jell-O was cooling as I sat cross-legged on a stool in Mike’s kitchen while he leaned against the table, mixing water and cotton candy-blue powder like a chemist. A Jell-O mold rested on the table, outlining various animal shapes—lion, giraffe, elephant, zebra, monkey. I played with my toes as the music blaring from his iPod switched from an angsty male voice to something softer, more melodic: “A hundred days have made me older, since the last time that I saw your pretty face. A thousand lies have made me colder, and I don’t think I’ll ever look at this the same.”

“Who do you think he’s singing about?” Mike asked me.

I contemplated this for a moment before responding, “I don’t know, probably some girl.”

Mike opened his fridge, which was vacant except for two other bowls containing artificial red and mango orange liquid. “Why do you think he can’t see her?”

“I don’t know, sounds like he’s in the military or something.” I said this cautiously, carefully watching his face.

Mike had told me he’d enlisted in the Marines two weeks before this. It wasn’t an easy time for me. It started with his ignoring me for weeks. He was Neptune, the coldest planet, constantly freezing me out, and I was Earth, small and blue with ocean tears. It took forever to get him to finally talk to me about what was going on. It just so happened I was driving by a gas station, the one his family used to own, when I saw him filling up the Mustang. I parked, got into his car, and refused to get out until he told me what was up. He told me he

had enlisted in the Marines and could leave as early as next June, right after graduation.

“What about pole-vaulting, Mike? You know you are already getting scouted by colleges, and you still have one more season to go.”

Mike had broken and set every pole vault record at our school over and over for the past three years. He was the section champion and went to State. God, every time I watched him pole-vault, I swore he could fly.

“Carol, you know I can’t do that. If I could go to college and be content, I would. But I can’t, and you know that. I need to do this, and I’m going to. Leave if you want, but I have to do this.”

I could lie and say this was a surprise to me, but it wasn’t. I knew the boy I had met in tenth grade wanted to be a Marine. He wanted to be brave. He wanted to be unafraid. He wanted to be a hero.

He just didn’t realize he already was my hero.

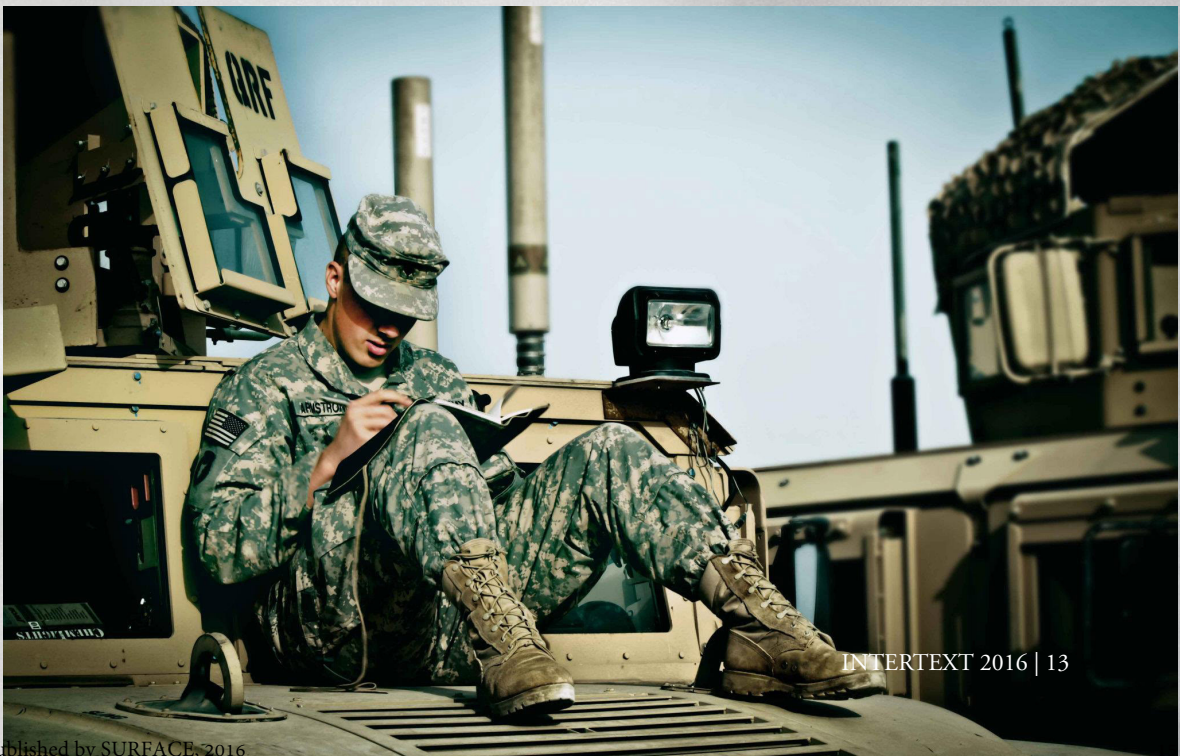
Back then, I didn’t realize what the song was about. I didn’t understand how it felt to be so far away from someone you loved. I didn’t understand how the pain of loneliness felt sharper than the blade of any knife. I didn’t understand how memories could pierce through your mind and make your stomach drop lower than the Mariana Trench is deep.

I get it now.

2400, Parris Island

**So let’s just say pull up bar, shoelace, kid,
you figure it out.**

I stared at that piece of paper for a solid half hour. Mike always claims to love my naivety, my simplicity, but sometimes I am just too hopeful. I try to see the silver lining, the brilliant comet shooting through the empty, black sky. There





is no comet here. There is no silver lining in a recruit's feeling so overwhelmed and distressed that he tries to hang himself with tied-together shoelaces on a pull-up bar. There is no comet to light up this sky. It is dark. It is empty. Does that boy have a girl who writes to him every day? Does that boy have a family that threw him a going-away party before he left for boot camp? Did his proud family line the porch with balloons and hang signs wishing him the best of luck in training? Did they know he would get so distressed he would reach for his shoelaces in the dead of night, tie them together, and try to take his own life? No, they didn't know.

They probably still don't.

1700, Parris Island
We're gonna make an adventure this summer, you'll never forget ever, ever!

California. It had always been the dream. Mike has family there, so every summer he left for two weeks to visit them. The first summer he went, the summer before tenth grade, involved a teary goodbye, two weeks of nonstop texts, and

him surprising me when he came back, throwing rocks at my window and scaring the shit out of me. The last summer he went, the summer before college, I didn't even know he was going. I was getting ready for my best friend's graduation party, halfway through curling my hair and already late, when he pulled up in my driveway on his motorcycle. I watched him talk to my parents for about ten minutes before I decided to go outside, hair still only half-curled, to see what he had to say. We hadn't spoken in months. I was going off to college, and he was going into the Marines. Talking wouldn't have changed that. We were going on two different paths; or so I thought. This led to the first time I rode a motorcycle and the first time I decided to give someone a second chance.

We drove back to Mike's house on the motorcycle. I was already dressed for my friend's graduation party, and my floral shorts and flowy rose-colored tank top did not do well in the wind. Still, the wind blowing through my hair felt good. Once we got back to Mike's house, he told me he was going to California with his father. I was sad to hear he was leaving so soon, before I was to even leave for college. He told me I probably wouldn't get to see him again before he left for Parris Island. He was very matter-of-fact about it. Sometimes the timing just doesn't work out. The ticking of a clock is a very cruel thing. After talking for a couple of hours, I left for my friend's graduation party, and that night he left for California.

Sometimes life cuts you some slack. Mike ended up coming home from California two weeks before I left for college because of family reasons. Something changed in him during this time. I don't know what to attribute this to. I don't know if it was the endless hours on the back of the motorcycle when he had time

Photographs provided by Carol Pelz.

to think of all the different people he had met on his trip and talked to about the Marines, life, and the people you need in your life. Either way, we got back together a couple of days after he came back from California, and I had no doubt in my mind I had California to thank for this.

This summer wasn't going to involve a teary goodbye—well, I guessed it would when his leave was up, but no tears about California would be involved. The idea of Mike and me in California this summer became my saving grace; it was our promised land.

We all talk about what we miss most and what we are going to do when we get out, and literally all I want to do is see you.



Fall. Wind blows the golden and auburn puckered leaves through the crisp air. The sweet smell of apples fills my nostrils. Thick, chunky-knit sweaters cover my skin. I clutch my sleeves over my hands as the wind stings my nose and gives me earaches.

47 days.

The gas chamber. The gas blows into Mike's reddening face as he is forced to stand in the gas chamber. The chamber is made to teach recruits how to protect themselves and breathe calmly while wearing a protective mask. The

gas, the same gas police used to stop riots, burns his skin. It's a psychological test as well as a physical one. The recruits aren't allowed to leave the smoke-filled room until they have taken their masks off.

35 days

Winter. Crystal snow coats the ground, the perfect foundation for improv snow angels and slushy snowball wars between flirty campus couples. I pull my scarf tighter around my neck. Romanticism fills the freezing air. The fur of my parka tickles my goose-bumped neck and walking to Marshall Street to mail letters leaves me icy and red-cheeked.

14 days.

The Crucible. Sweat coats the recruits as they march. They march for over forty-five miles. They are subjected to fifty-four hours of hell. Sleep deprivation and lack of food is the name of the game. This is the defining moment for Mike, for every Marine, the point of basic training. Mike is excited for the Crucible, as it will be the first time he is in a real warlike situation. He is going to give it his all, no matter what. The recruits won't forget this experience for as long as they live.

Who would forget Hell?

10 days

Mike will leave Parris Island on December 6, 2014. His parents are driving down to South Carolina with his grandparents for Family Day and then his graduation ceremony. I will be taking my finals while he is home. Waiting to go home will be torturous, but it will all be worth it when I walk through the door and finally jump into his beautiful arms. Which, of course, I will.

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TRAFFIC TYRANTS

Siddarth Senthilkumaran





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Chennai has the perfect combination of the traditional religious population and the urban IT population. The city has as many software companies as temples. Engineers, bankers, and private business owners all converge at the Saidapet signal at around 8 a.m. Chennai’s main mode of public transport, apart from the bus, is the auto rickshaw. There is no quicker way to get from point A to point B in Chennai. These yellow, three-wheeled vehicles are the most prominent sight on the roads. While all auto rickshaws are required to have a meter, some drivers charge exorbitant rates to ignorant people. While most roads around the city have “peak hours,” meaning the traffic is extremely high for a specific time frame, Mount Road is bustling with vehicles the entire day.

Office hours are similar for all professions, and few want to get a head start on their travel. The scorching heat isn’t any help either. Frustrated and half-awake drivers make a recipe for disaster. Generally, Indian drivers are poor at following road etiquette. Lane discipline is rarely followed in this part of the world. Traffic jams are characterized by every kind of vehicle you can think of—container trucks, cars, buses, motorcycles, scooters, minivans, auto rickshaws, jeeps, even animals like cows and goats.

Harish is a young engineer who just graduated with a bachelor’s degree in engineering from the Indian Institute of Technology Madras, the most prestigious engineering college in India. While half the country is struggling to get jobs, Harish was spoiled with choices. He was a brilliant student and by the time he was a senior, job offers were pouring in. He chose Cognizant Technology Solutions, a multinational information

technology company, one of the technology titans situated in the famed Chennai IT corridor. But this means that he has to pass through almost the entire stretch of Mount Road to get to work by 8:30 a.m. This is just his second week of work and he's still getting acclimatized to his schedule. He rides a red Bajaj Pulsar, which is a common motorcycle in India. He leaves his house at around 7:30 a.m. and hopes that the traffic isn't as bad as it always is. But he is disappointed.

The traffic doesn't seem to be moving for more than a few miles. An experienced motorcycle rider, he tries to squeeze past bigger vehicles and make some progress. As he

Although motorcycles and auto rickshaws fill up most of the road, there's a considerable population of cars too. Owning a car used to be a privilege in India, but globalization and a steadily growing economy means that cars have become much more affordable. The sight of Jaguars and BMWs has become increasingly common. Madan owns the latest Jaguar—the F type. He has been taking great care of the car since it was delivered three weeks ago, and doesn't even let his ten-year-old kid touch the exterior. While he knows the car is prone to getting scratched in the heavy traffic, he also loves to show off. The sequence of people watch-



maneuvers his way through the traffic, he observes chaos all around. Auto rickshaw drivers are constantly blowing their horns while their passengers keep questioning them about how long they will have to wait. Children stranded in the traffic are crying. Young and middle-aged motorcyclists alike are trying to squeeze themselves past impossible gaps in the traffic all while making sure their toes don't get crushed. One rider asks an auto rickshaw driver to move just a little to the right so he can narrowly squeeze through. The auto rickshaw driver impatiently replies, "You're going to be stranded behind the bus anyway." The rider eventually coaxes the auto rickshaw driver and moves forward.

ing and dropping their jaws in awe makes Madan happy. He is filled with pride while going to work. He is a respected senior manager at Tata Consultancy Services, another major company in the IT corridor.

After squeezing himself past a few vehicles, Harish finds himself in some space and the traffic starts moving. He covers half a mile in no time. Then the traffic stagnates again. Harish decides to manually work his way through another portion of the traffic. He sees more frustrated auto rickshaw drivers and passengers. He notices the old, but never forgotten, Spencers Plaza to his right. It was once a popular place, but everyone now prefers the newer malls. He looks wist-

fully to his right. Then he hears a loud bump.

Madan hears the thud and says to himself, “This better not be what I think it is.” He looks at his rear view mirror and sees a young motorcycle rider hastily trying to back up his motorcycle. Madan gets out of his car and walks over to the rear bumper. He sees a slight dent, accompanied by a small scratch near the nameplate. The dent is so tiny that it would be impossible to notice it from twenty feet away. Madan mumbles a few words while staring at the dent, and then he glares at Harish.

Harish hurriedly says, “I’m extremely sorry; it was purely a mistake.” Madan questions, “How is it that you skipped past all the crappy cars in the traffic and decided to crash into my Jaguar?”

Harish responds, “I didn’t do it deliberately; I lost my balance. I’m sorry.” He glances at his watch quickly and sees that the time is 8:07 a.m.

Noticing that, Madan raises his voice, “So are you in a hurry to get somewhere now? You thought you could just crash into my car and escape?” People waiting in the traffic turn their heads towards the Jaguar. The traffic doesn’t seem to be moving and for many, this is a source of entertainment during their early morning travels.

“Sir, I said that I am sorry and that I am willing to pay for damages, if any.” Madan detects sarcasm at Harish’s reply. Madan is furious now. He says, “I don’t need your dirty money for the damages.”

“Then what do you expect me to do now, Sir?” Harish’s nonchalant reply further infuriates Madan. School students waiting in auto rickshaws are engrossed in the argument, and so are most of the passengers in the vicinity.

Madan unleashes a tirade of expletives at Harish, who is shocked at Madan’s immature behavior. “Sir, I already said I was willing to pay for the damages. What more do you want?”

Suddenly the traffic in front of the Jaguar clears up, and the vehicles start moving. But this is the narrowest segment of the road and people behind the Jaguar can’t move unless the Jaguar itself makes way. Ram, the on-looking auto rickshaw driver, intervenes in the argument. He requests Madan to stop arguing because the dent isn’t that big and not worth keeping other people stranded. Madan responds angrily by pointing at the dent and saying, “Do you know how expensive this car is? Could any of you even afford this car?” Ignoring his question, Ram respectfully asks Madan to leave. Madan reluctantly walks away, but not before berating Harish and Ram again. The crowd applauds and the path clears.

Harish looks at his watch again and realizes that he has only ten minutes to get to work, which is impossible even in an empty Mount Road. He hurries to put on his helmet and get his Pulsar started. As he heads towards the tail end of Mount Road, he thinks about the situation that just happened. But Harish has been in this situation multiple times in the past. He doesn’t always crash into Jaguars, but any car driver, like Madan, would give an exaggerated reaction to the slightest dent on their car. And there is usually a Ram, who attempts to break the fight and clear the traffic for the others to pass. Mount Road is home to such situations every day. Some accidents are more serious than just minor dents, but it is usually these minor dents that produce the ugly arguments.



A SIMPLE TIME

Angela M. Anastasi

Fireflies blinked around the berry bushes that lined the front steps of 110 Orchard Road. The bushes never actually produced edible berries, a fact my brother and I were always reminded of every time our mother would thoughtfully swat the round, ashy spheres of potentially poisonous fruits from our hands. Regardless, the alleged venomous fruit never scared away the millions of tiny fireflies that hummed around the bushes at dusk on each humid summer night.

The sky was a watercolor of orange, blue, and purple as my brother, dad, and I climbed the five steps to the front porch of our cozy twin home in Ridley Park, Pennsylvania—a town filled with people who sought out more from life, hoping that this residency was merely a stepping stone to something more. Plenty of people come here looking for a house; absolutely no one comes here looking for a home.

Our five-room house was tight, and the neighborhood lacked luster and excitement, but I was three years old and unaware. The hike up those five stairs was a journey. My pigtails swung in the summer breeze as I lunged forward to make it up those giant steps to the front door of our castle, with one hand out to protect my little brother, and the other in the safe grip of my father's hand.

When the journey was finally over, my father whipped me up into his arms and we stood on the edge of the thin iron fence on the top step. Looking out around us, the world seemed endless. In his arms, I pointed out the most beauti-

ful and wondrous objects in the far and wide world with my best three-year-old vocabulary, “See the moon, Daddy? See the moon?” It was large and bright and amazing. Everything seemed amazing, back when I thought poisonous berries were the only things my mother had to protect me from. When my father still had time to spare each evening. When my brother still wanted to go on adventures with his older sister. Each night in the park was infinite, just like the summer nights and the lightning bugs and the life we had on 110 Orchard Road.

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POST-IT PRESENCE

It was a yellow Post-It note that had only a few words on it. I had been receiving them for years...ever since I could read and appreciate the value of the money that it was stuck to. The last one came on a Friday, when I was returning from a night out. I was still floating from the intoxicating night of singing and dancing, but the weight of the envelope pulled my body back to earth and anchored my heart to the ground.

I saw the tiny envelope in my mailbox, and instantly knew its contents from the handwriting that I had become so familiar with. My hands began to tremble as I slid my finger under the white tab of the envelope. Knowing exactly what it was, the familiarity suddenly filled me with a sadness that I could not explain. I pulled

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out the twenty with the yellow Post-It and read my grandma's catch phrase: "Treat yourself to something you like." No signature necessary.

She was hundreds of miles away from me, and yet, here she was; her presence in the form of a two-inch sticky square paper. I could feel her droopy eyelids, tired from years of cooking and cleaning and nurturing, smiling at me

through her thick bifocal glasses, knowing what shenanigans I had just engaged in, yet content that I was enjoying my life and making my own mistakes. Words of pride and praise echoed in the background as I read the six words over and over again, though I had committed them to memory years ago. Those six words said everything that I needed to hear.



TALKING HANDS

My mother has the hands of an old maid, leaving the impression that she has spent her life scouring dishes and laundering by hand. They are wrinkly and by no means pretty. They look like they should belong to an elderly grandmother and, in fact, they do—my grandmother bears the very same burden. Even in the peak of her youth, photographs show her wilted, gray hands gripping her wedding flowers, the waist of her small boy, and the hand of her now deceased husband. Her hands have experienced life.

In conversation, their hands wave at each other as if they are yelling—in reality it is just a signal of friendly gossip. It is the unspoken language that bonds them together. My hands speak the language too, oftentimes to people

who don't know it as well as I do. People notice my hands. Their movements and gestures finish sentences when my words cannot. I look down at my own hands and I see the life of a thousand years' time. I am only eighteen years old, yet I am always reminded that my talkative hands are three times that age.

The three of us convene in the kitchen together. Our hands smooth icing over homemade sugar cookies, set dozens of forks next to sets of mismatched plates, and greet the people that walk through the door. Through their kind gestures, they progressively age.

My grandmother is proof that the gestures will never stop, and the language will never die. People respond to our dry, wrinkly hands, but with each wrinkle comes strength, and each dry patch shows pride.

Illustration by Flickr user Ashley Van Haefen, CC BY 2.0: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/wikimediacommons/16396454115/>.





SOCIETY AT LARGE


The world always seems to be socially divided, especially recently. Globalization along with greater means for communication have made social issues and the discussions surrounding them more available. But these advantages have not made our interactions better. In fact, we seem to be quick to judge or dismiss. We still live in a world where injustice is ignored and people suffer. While these experiences and injustices sometimes feel ingrained in society and nearly invisible, greater outcry and voices are making them known. This section illuminates the failings of the education system, social media's negative influence, and the mishandling of veterans' affairs. The authors in this section are people who are not willing to settle for what the world gives, who take on institutions and accepted norms as things to be challenged.

They are game changers, people who transform our world and inspire us to do the same. They are brave voices who catch our attention on a diverse range of issues that affect the Syracuse community and the world. "Moving Off the Education Conveyor Belt" by Morgan Conover deals with the questionable worth of higher education and how it often fails to produce students who are willing to learn and discover because they are taught to obey social norms and the institutions that make them.

"Separate But Unequal" by Abigail Covington explores how the public education system fails children of color, while "The Plight of the Angry Tweet" by Taskina Tareen makes us question how social media is misused as a battleground for larger social arguments. In "Sharing the Scourge of War," veteran Peter McShane describes the impact his service had on his family's health long after his deployment. While all the selections are different, each author sheds light on broader issues by confronting them on a personal level. Feel what they feel. Get angry with them. Challenge them.

We are ultimately left with a sense that the solution to these social dilemmas starts with discourse. We encourage you to not let this be the end of the discussion. The first step in creating a society that is more inclusive and just is to step out of your comfort zone.

—Chloe Martin, Joy Muchtar, and Dabota Wilcox



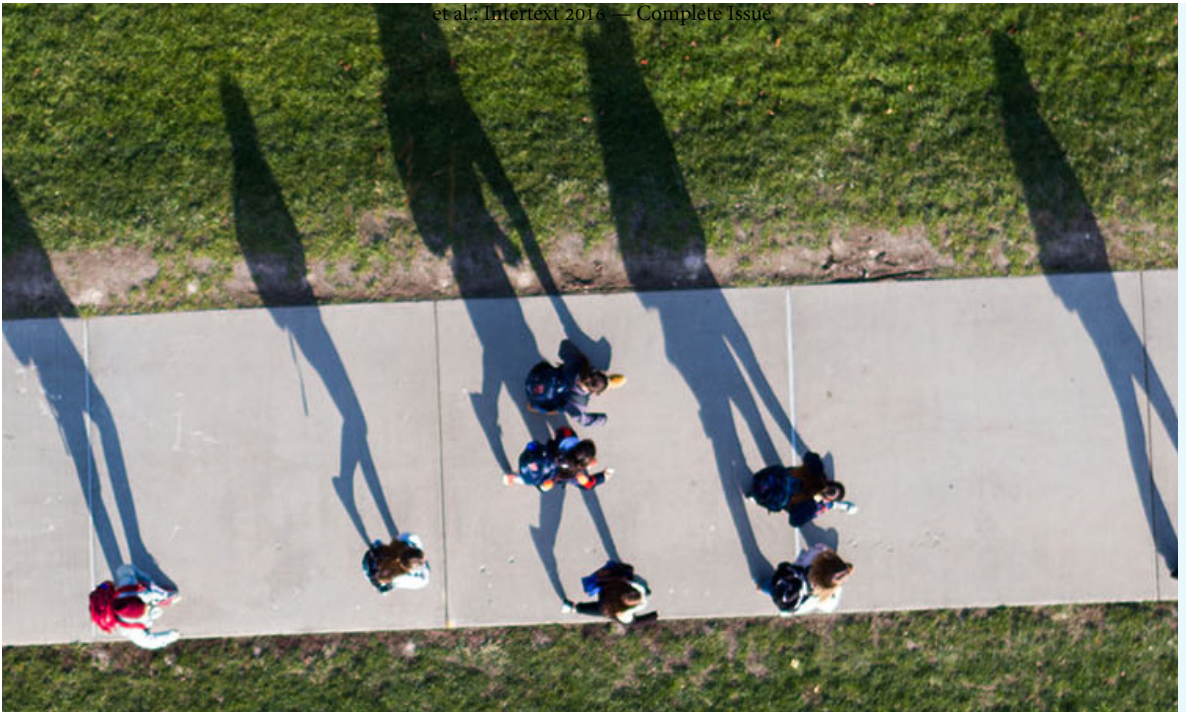
MOVING OFF THE EDUCATION CONVEYOR BELT

MORGAN CONOVER

If the purpose of school is to educate young people to become productive members of society through realizing their full potential, then the public school system is failing dramatically. The mechanization of education has led to an unforgiving system in which creativity is stifled or suppressed altogether, and a one-track path to white-collar work dominates. Education's goal seems to have devolved into facilitating the creation of a homogenized population, which has impacted everything from the job market to mental health.

The public education system of today did not develop organically; it arose from the needs of industrialization during the nineteenth century. There are two main implications of this: that the most useful subjects for work are at the top, and that universities designed the system in their image—thus, nearly every high school in the U.S. is essentially offering, as Ken Robinson puts it, “a protracted process of university entrance.” Ironically, this

system does not produce the diverse workforce necessary for a balanced and productive society for which it was designed and upon which it relies; instead, it creates an imbalanced demographic, as most students are advised (and feel compelled) to go to college. Because most people seem to regard college as “an extension of compulsory schooling” (Crawford 143), many students begin college directionless and graduate only slightly less directionless. In his book *Excellent Sheep: The Miseducation of the American Elite*, William Deresiewicz observes that the system of higher education “manufactures students who are smart and talented and driven, yes, but also anxious, timid, and lost, with little intellectual curiosity and a stunted sense of purpose: trapped in a bubble of privilege, heading meekly in the same direction, great at what they’re doing but with no idea why they’re doing it” (3). The college students of today have learned how to be a student—do your homework, get the



answers, ace the test—rather than think independently and realize something larger is at stake in their education (13). As a result, these “ultra-high-achieving elite college students of today” focus almost exclusively on expanding their resumes—not with things they particularly enjoy doing and are passionate about but rather activities that best situate them for an award, an elite graduate program, or a high-paying job (7). This drive to accrue credentials rather than learn and experience delays or suppresses realizations of truer and more satisfying individual callings.

Not only does compelling students to attend college create a conveyor belt of higher education in which all students seem to converge on the same homogenized self—the upper-middle-class professional—but funneling students into college also creates perversities in the labor market (Crawford 143). According to UNESCO, in the next thirty years more people than ever before will be graduating from

educational institutions worldwide due to both increases in population and the revolutionary impact of technology on the working world. Such a vastly educated world offers profound benefits, but the difficult, distressing reality is that suddenly degrees aren't worth anything. Dr. Randall Collins from the University of Pennsylvania Sociology Department argues that “increasing the number of credentialed people competing for a finite number of jobs tends to ratchet up the educational requirements for those jobs without increasing anyone's income” (Weyrich). This rampant credentialism creates a lopsided demographic in which college graduates with exorbitant student loans find the job market so glutted that they are unable to find work that pays well enough to let them discharge their debts (Weyrich).

The origins of these problems stem directly from the public education system's increasing mechanization and “conveyor belt” structure. In “Signs of the Times” (1829), Thomas

Photography by Chase Gutman.

Carlyle argues that the mechanization of our world has fundamentally changed our manner of existence: “Men are grown mechanical in head and in heart, as well as in hand.” Education is a prime example of how this mechanization works. Nearly all levels of the current public education system are heavily dependent on standardized tests: Students are pressured to get good scores because this apparently determines their intellectual worth, teachers are graded on their ability to teach based on how well their students do on these tests, and schools’ funding is tied to test scores. Standardized tests are predicated on the notion that knowledge and intelligence can be boiled down to scientifically quantifiable data. The tests are scored by a machine, and the fact that these cookie-cutter tests are based on the assumption that knowledge is quantifiable changes people’s perception of what knowledge and intelligence are. The pervasive definition of intelligence as solely associated with academia is misguided. Intelligence is diverse: People learn visually, audibly, kinesthetically; they think in movement, think in abstraction, think in concrete experience. Intelligence is dynamic, distinct, and “wonderfully interactive” (Robinson). Robinson says, “Creativity—which I define as the process of having original ideas that have value—more often than not comes about through the interaction of different disciplinary ways of seeing things.” Indeed, creativity does not apply only to the traditional arts, as most people presume; it is essential for nearly every discipline.

Whereas instruction, “that mysterious communing of Wisdom with Ignorance,” was once an undefinable and uncertain process, requiring attention to individual aptitudes and a continual variation of means and methods, it is

now a “secure, universal, straightforward business, to be conducted in the gross, by proper mechanism” (Carlyle). For instance, writing an essay for the SAT for which there is no defined audience and no context whatsoever is only testing a student’s ability to work within a form, typically the standard five paragraph essay—so restricting in its contrived simplicity. It teaches students that writing is an exercise completely removed from the communication of something one truly cares about and believes in. Good writing is rhetorically situated.

If perceptions of intelligence were expanded, this would prompt a revolution in how schools teach children, and by extension, working environments might improve and people might be happier. In an 1882 lecture on work, John Ruskin notes: “[I]t is among children only, and as children only, that you will find medicine for your healing and true wisdom for your teaching.” Children, he says, are constantly asking questions, and they recognize that they do not know everything. They are “full of love to every creature” and happy always whether at play or duty (Ruskin). Children also have an incredible capacity for innovation, and they are not afraid to fail. But the current education system, as Robinson notes, squanders these talents. In schools today, there is a right and a wrong way to do things. As a result, very little learning takes place, because the emphasis is not on learning, but on being correct. The letter grade awarded at the end of the term is seen as more important than the knowledge acquired during it. Children are effectively being educated out of their creative capacities. By adulthood and even by the teenage years, most people are afraid of being wrong, a fear that represses creativity. It is imperative to encourage creativity-promoting

traits in children rather than crush them; as Ruskin argues, “it is the character of children we want,” because “that’s the great worker’s character also” (Ruskin).

The conveyor belt structure of the public school system also has significant consequences for children’s mental health. Kids develop complexes and insecurities because they are forced to attempt things they aren’t ready for or suited to do and then are blamed when they are unable to do them. The pressure to perform well induces stress and anxiety. Moreover, little attention is paid to the fact that no two people have the same disposition. Crawford observes that “it is a rare person who is naturally inclined to sit still for sixteen years in school, and then indefinitely at work.” Naturally, this extends to the workplace. Schools are “preoccupied with demographic variables” and “sorting into cognitive classes” that “collapse the human qualities into a narrow set of categories, the better to be represented on a checklist or a set of test scores.” This serves institutional purposes for quantifying “success,” but the stark reality is that students come to view their worth “in light of the available metrics, and forget that institutional purposes are not our own” (Crawford 72). Similarly, Carlyle asserts that the faith in mechanism, in the all-importance of physical things, “is in every age the common refuge of Weakness and blind Discontent; of all who believe, as many will ever do, that man’s true good lies without him, not within” (Carlyle). So when kids are shuffled into a system that prizes a select few dispositions (those best suited for the life of the mind), many highly talented, brilliant, and creative students become discouraged because their talent is not valued or is actually stigmatized (Robinson). The human

mind is the most complex structure in the universe; to compartmentalize it and make its development so strictly regimented crushes creativity and inhibits growth or can even lead to stagnation.

Everyone has a vested interest in education because it shapes the minds of children, the future of the human race. Education has a huge role in the formative years of youth because it has a vast impact on identity formation. But the emphasis on expediency and utility has left the public school system bereft of creativity and the ability to cultivate wonder and purpose in students. It seems that contemporary public education has become so mechanized and regimented that the true goal—to teach students how to learn and think critically—has become obfuscated. The current education system is perhaps best summed up by a quote from Albert Einstein: “Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid.”

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SEPARATE BUT UNEQUAL

ABIGAIL COVINGTON



Layout by Dabota Wilcox. Photograph by Flickr user Robert Couse-Baker, CC BY 2.0: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/29233640@N07/7846338906/>.

My mother has been an educator in the public school system for twenty years, with each school year bringing new students and their varying personalities. Working in some of the toughest neighborhoods in Washington, D.C., my mother and her fellow teachers had to manage the added issues of low educational achievement that plague black students. One school she worked at, Ruth K. Webb Elementary in Northeast D.C., had a gloomy, prison-like setting and was surrounded by a housing project. With dim lights and damaged property, it was a place of general unhappiness. The predominately black community neighboring the school was underdeveloped, violent, impacted by low socioeconomic levels, and afflicted by drug abuse. My mother regularly worked late into the night grading, preparing lesson plans, and literacy development programs to better her students. The students often struggled to keep up with the curriculum and were continually below grade level in reading and math. Though my mother was a fifth-grade teacher, she repeatedly had to get books from the first- and second-grade classrooms, even taking our literary educational program “Hooked on Phonics” as a supplement. While I believe my mother’s students benefited from attending her class, her experience as a teacher in a poorly funded school system raises concerns about students across the nation who face similar destitute learning environments.

Society’s Failure of Black Youth

Tamika Thompson reports that only fourteen percent of black eighth-grade students “scored at or above the level of proficiency to pass the eighth grade.” She notes that “on average, black twelfth-grade students read at the same level as

the white eighth-grade students.” According to the Schott Foundation, the national graduation rate for black males in 2012-2013 was estimated at fifty-nine percent in comparison to eighty percent for white males. These statistics reflect how the educational system forces black children, black males in particular, out of the academic world by the time they finish middle school, pointing to the massive disparity in the quality of education for black students. Why are black students failing on almost every level within the education system? Why is it a question that has yet to be adequately addressed?

Research suggests poverty is the long-term aggravator which gives way to unemployment, violence, low educational achievement, and a plethora of other social issues. Although low educational achievement falls under the umbrella of poverty-related issues, it’s still a very broad problem in itself, like a tree with many branches. While there are a variety of reasons for low educational achievement, it happens disproportionately amongst black children because of three factors: an absence of representation in school faculty and curriculum, methodologies and formatting of instruction that do not consider the composition of the student body, and the lack of attention teachers afford toward the individuals in their classrooms. By way of poverty and socioeconomic dynamics, the American educational system is failing black students.

Lack of Representation

The lack of representation in the classroom often goes unnoticed. Many black students find it difficult to identify with their teachers, who in the United States are likely to be middle-aged, middle-class, white women, living outside the community in which they teach, preventing these students from envisioning themselves in

that leadership role. Similarly, these teachers cannot identify with their students on a racial, socioeconomic, and geographical level. Nathaniel Sheppard at St. John Fisher College has researched ways in which poverty has exacerbated low educational achievement amongst black youth. In his research, Sheppard found the lack of identification students have with their teacher to be a major issue.

It's a representation issue that's even more intense for black males. Black males are sixty-six percent more likely to live in a single-parent home headed by mothers. It is important that they see black men in positions of power so as not to emasculate their ideological beliefs on what they can accomplish.

Sheppard suggests that the representation of black individuals in positions of educational power as necessary to close the achievement gap between race and gender. Specifically, black males are regularly emasculated by society and their experience in school initiates the process as early as primary and intermediate education.

Additionally, black students are often unable to identify with the subject matter found in the format of the school's curriculum. For children of color, their history and cultures are taught as a sidebar and not required as part of the core curriculum. My interest in writing was sparked when I began to look for representation of my

importance. Black students would possibly be more engaged and interested in their coursework if their race was reflected in their studies. There are black pioneers, engineers, scholars, musicians, artists, activists, and revolutionaries that can accompany any lesson plan, but school systems tend to neglect this fact and attempt to streamline the education to mirror the majority.

There is No "One-Size-Fits-All" Solution

In their 2013 study, "Teacher Education and Black Males in the United States," faculty members from the University of Pittsburgh, H. Richard Milner, Ashley Woodson, and Amber Pabon, as well as Ebony McGee, a faculty member from Vanderbilt University, argued that teachers in the United States are not effectively educated on properly teaching students with diverse and, sometimes, complicated backgrounds. The authors studied an array of statistics, including the differences in proficiency rates between black and white males, sociological studies on the mindset, task force initiatives to end the educational achievement gap between races, and their individual methodologies. They concluded the way in which black males are treated by those within the educational system needs to change before any genuine systemic societal change can occur. In this study, McGee shared her personal

"their history and cultures are taught as a sidebar and not required as part of the core curriculum."

race in literature that was not included in the syllabus. This inequality is present in various K-12 curriculums nationwide. The history and cultures of all students, especially those who are marginalized, should be taught with equal

story about her experience as an educator who helped white teachers discover new methods to teach students from diverse racial backgrounds. During her consultation with her coworkers, she noticed they desired a one-size-fits-all so-

lution to educating a diverse body of students. When McGee explained the importance of gender and racial intersectionality, she was met with confusion: “It complicated their notions of a predetermined and packaged rubric

sensitivity, or awareness during instruction.

The responsibility of an educator is to ensure the best possible education and learning environment for their students under any circumstance, which sometimes require instructors to

“The responsibility of an educator is to ensure the best possible education and learning environment for their students under any circumstance...”

that would serve all historically marginalized students” (Milner 254). Students come to the classroom with different knowledge and experiences, particularly black children from rough, urban environments, and teachers should have a sensitivity to these differences, adapting the instruction as necessary.

Individualized Instruction

Children might enter the school system with anxiety, anger, depression, and exhaustion as a result of various life stresses, which many instructors may not take into consideration. Children cannot be expected to abandon their personal problems while at school, as these issues impact all aspects of their lives. Due to mandated reporter laws, teachers are obligated to contact authorities if they suspect one of their students is in a potentially life-threatening situation; however many who go into this field neglect this part of the job description. It is necessary for teachers to know if there is a present issue prohibiting their students from achieving the highest success and, ultimately, attempt to fix this. Frequently, there are teachers who do not personally know their students and have no desire to have a relationship with them. As a consequence, this can create a hazardous learning environment with no empathy,

be more flexible than they would like. When I reflect on the teachers who went above and beyond educating me, I realize they provided experiences no one can ever take from me and I will never forget. Those lessons, whether social or academic, remind me that I do not have to be a statistic, and that systemic inequity has no hold on my potential greatness. Regardless of race, gender, geographical location, and socioeconomic class, all students should be ensured the opportunity for a quality education.

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Sharing the Scourge

When I was diagnosed with diabetes in 2001, my uncle, a World War II veteran, said that the VA had linked Type 2 diabetes with exposure to Agent Orange, a powerful dioxin used extensively to defoliate the jungle in Vietnam. This was news to me; we routinely sprayed the jungle foliage surrounding our A-Camps. I hadn't paid much attention to news reports in the 70s and 80s in which Vietnam veterans blamed Agent Orange for cancers and other horrendous medical conditions, as well as their children's birth defects.

But proving individual exposure was a problem for some veterans, depending on where they were stationed. The VA steadfastly claimed that there was no conclusive scientific evidence of a direct link between Agent Orange exposure and these illnesses. Yet several of the manufacturers of Agent Orange settled a product liability and class action lawsuit in 1984 filed on behalf of men and women who had served in Vietnam. It took another seven

years for the passage of the Agent Orange Act of 1991, which set forth the presumption of exposure to all Vietnam era veterans. That act directed the VA to compensate those veterans without the need for proof of exposure. The act detailed the many physical ailments caused by Agent Orange, notably ischemic heart disease, certain leukemias, multiple myeloma, Hodgkin's and Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, Parkinson's disease, and prostate cancer, among others. Diabetes mellitus Type 2 was the first to be identified with the others, added only as it became obvious there was a connection with Agent Orange. The Agent Orange Benefits Act of 1996 addressed the offspring of poisoned veterans by adding spina bifida and associated physical birth defects, but it did not address developmental defects.

While building my case for VA disability compensation in 2006, I perused veterans' Internet forums to help me understand how to deal with the bureaucracy. Amidst the grouches of veterans unhappy with their ratings,

-Layout by Charlotte Oestrich. Photography by: Flickr user Jean Lemoine. CC BY-NC-SA 2.0: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/malova/2074001443/>.

of War

Peter McShane

there was talk about children with autism, ADHD, OCD, and bipolar disorder. With further research, I found studies confirming that developmental delays, learning disabilities, and attention deficit and behavioral disorders have indeed been discovered in children and grandchildren of exposed veterans.

Growing up, my three sons displayed evidence of delayed development. My wife and I weren't alarmed at the time because children develop at their own pace. We held our two oldest back in the first grade because they needed time to "mature," as the school psychologist said. While our oldest son passed successfully into second grade, our middle child had difficulty grasping tasks and concepts. A battery of tests discovered he had developmental disorders, specifically problems with short-term memory, verbal expression, and social skills. So did our youngest child, but to a lesser extent. Ultimately, both of them received special educational preferences throughout primary and secondary school.

My grandchildren have also experienced developmental problems. One has been diagnosed with Auditory Processing Disorder, and three display some of the same symptoms as their fathers, i.e. problems with short-term memory, verbal expression, and social skills. It remains to be seen whether my five youngest grandchildren will have similar learning disabilities.

The VA intimates that additional birth defects beyond spina bifida may be covered under the Agent Orange Benefits Act, but the defects must have resulted in a permanent physical or mental disability, and it's up to the veteran to prove it.

How would I go about proving that my children and grandchildren may have been poisoned by Agent Orange? My war wounds detailed in my VA medical records clearly gave them all the proof they needed to support my claim for compensation, but I had to fight for it. Isn't it enough that veterans have been stricken by the scourge of war? Must our families carry that burden as well?

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The Plight of the





Angry Tweet

Taskina Tareen

I have never interjected in an Internet war of sorts. I believe this mainly stems from my apprehension with the highly public and transparent forums of Twitter and Facebook. But I have often wondered if I am disadvantaging myself by not participating in the digital realm that we have now come to understand as our most public forum. Perhaps this is our critical space for public discourse today, like the courts of Athenian democracy or the public squares outside 15th century town halls. However, I conversely question whether an “Internet war” is really the only form of public discourse that our generation has been reduced to: the endless replies with hashtags attached to opposing views, the circulating of oversensationalized topics through multiple postings and inappropriate analogies, the taking of “sides” by condemning those who think differently. American journalist Conor Friedersdorf shares my concern in an article for *The Atlantic* by thoughtfully explaining how today’s digital norms are worsening the culture wars.

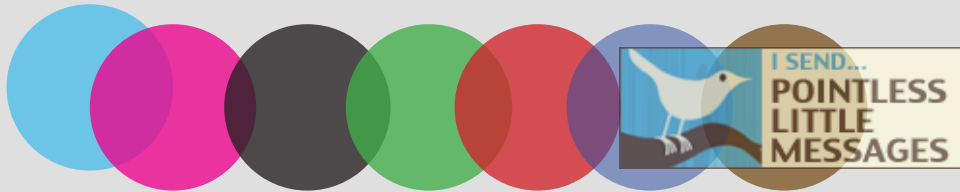
In “Why a Shirt With Scantily Clad Women Caused an Internet Fight,” Friedersdorf discusses the role of digital “collaborative journalism” in worsening the state of ongoing contemporary culture wars. In this short piece, he hones in on a controversial issue that focuses on Matt Taylor, a British scientist best known for his involvement in the Rosetta Mission, a project that saw the unprecedented landing of a space probe on a comet. While most of the world was

likely occupied with watching the live-stream of such a historic scientific event, Friedersdorf notes that a significant number of people, including well-known tech writers such as Rose Eveleth and Ed Young, were considerably distracted by Taylor’s choice of wardrobe during a televised interview. The talented scientist sported a garish shirt depicting scantily dressed women with firearms, an outfit choice that prompted a series of Internet debates between two groups of people: one that was indisputably offended by his unwarranted depiction of women and the other indubitably aggravated by the people who were offended by his choice of clothing.

Through a respectable attempt to understand and represent both sides of the argument, Friedersdorf cautiously explains that the controversy behind this controversy lies not so much in whether Taylor intentionally wore that shirt with misogynistic intent or not, but how contemporary digital debates, prompted by social media such as Twitter and Facebook, have, in fact, overshadowed the initial controversy and turned it into a leeway for amplifying ongoing culture wars on the Internet. The war here is between those digital groups who condemn Taylor for his unfortunate choice of clothing and those groups who condemn those that choose to criticize him. The point of the war essentially is to prove which group’s opinion trumps the other. It is not about, as Friedersdorf ultimately expresses, having a critically informed conversation about a given issue. In this

Rose Eveleth’s twitter post: 12 November 2014.

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case, the issue involved one scientist's less than thoughtful decision to don an informal piece of clothing for an important worldwide event celebrating an important scientific achievement.

The article begins with Friedersdorf channeling a welcomed thought that I like to assume many of us have when viewing intense debates on the World Wide Web—"but what if behind those disrespectful words and phrases being thrown about are actually two people trying to have an honest and considerate discussion about a pressing issue?" While many writers have conveyed optimism for such a hopeful form of conversation to take place in public discourse, Friedersdorf takes it one step further by actually writing out a fictitious discussion he imagines to have taken place between persons with two opposing viewpoints on the Matt Taylor controversy. What follows is a series of conversations between person A and person B that situates an argument through level-headed discussion, one in which both parties are given the right to speak their minds, but never does so with the intent of condemning the other. The point that Friedersdorf is trying to make here is that such public discourse lacks a certain degree of understanding of differing views. Of course, this is neither a novel nor a substantial claim on its own.

Friedersdorf is careful when he explains that a prominent part of the Internet debate regarding Taylor's "sexist" attire was prompted by a tweet sent out by tech-writer and his colleague at *The Atlantic* Rose Eveleth. Her statement alongside a snapshot of Taylor in his shirt reads as, "No no women are tooootally

welcome in our community, just ask the dude in this shirt." He repeatedly explains in parentheses throughout the article that he writes on behalf of no one but himself. He then goes on to say that his intention lies not in weighing in on the dispute regarding the proper/improper decision to wear that particular shirt, but rather how such an event becomes the platform for a larger unintended dispute.

Though I feel his notions regarding this come across as somewhat of a cop-out on the argument, he most definitely has an opinion, but undoubtedly tries to cover it up by choosing not to include in his discussion, at least not primarily, those writers who have been highly critical of the scientist's choice of a shirt. Instead, Friedersdorf decidedly takes an empathetic approach by writing about Taylor's position in connection to his own. He does so by comparing the scientist's ordeal of having to deal with the overwhelming negative posts about himself on the Internet with his own experiences confronting mass Internet spews about himself. He thoughtfully adds that it is not surprising that Taylor ultimately cried while giving his apologetic statement on television regarding his choice of attire that unfortunate day, because as a scientist he has never been exposed to such profane forms of public scrutiny, with some tweets rendering him a misogynist and others calling for his death. Even if Taylor knew that the angry tweets did not reflect the actual intentions of those who posted them, it nevertheless can take an exhaustive toll on one's emotional state.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of this

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article lies in the inherent need for us, the audience, to take “sides” in arguments that are prevalent on the Internet, especially through the use of public forums such as Twitter. Of course, taking sides in an argument is not necessarily a wrong thing to do, but what is more critical to understand is the way we choose to convey our arguments. The grossly exaggerated lashes and assertions that are thrown about Internet forums every day are redolent of a society occupied with getting its way. This method of approaching arguments on the Internet is undoubtedly, in this case, just an end in itself rather than a means to better understand the situation so we can appropriately intervene.

It seems that we are so occupied with being right or what we perceive as the right thing to do that we no longer approach issues of public concern with a genuine interest in finding a coherent solution. We assert our own solution through hostile and hyperbolic language. Of course, such forms of language are not confined to arguments on Internet forums. It is seemingly becoming an everyday part of our lives and the way in which we approach public discourse, whether it be the media oversensationalizing certain news topics or when in a heated debate with a friend over even the most trivial of subjects.

Wayne Booth, in his book *The Rhetoric of RHETORIC*, expresses that it is ethically wrong to deliberately produce rhetoric that tries to convince or win the votes of an audience through mishandling or disproportioning of information. In the controversy regarding Matt Taylor’s choice of clothing on international television, some viewers felt that his shirt belittled women who joined the science industry while others argued that his shirt could not

possibly represent the entirety of his personal nature, especially towards women. The former argument is no doubt prompted by an inherent preoccupation our society has with issues of sexism and feminism and countless other -isms in contemporary culture, where any fragment of misrepresentation can be appropriated to unfathomably sized arguments. The latter opposing argument is prompted by people who take issue with the very concepts of sexism and feminism, citing their inappropriate assertion into all matters of everyday life. One can argue that the middlemen in this argument are those people who support and bring to light issues behind representation of females in society, but feel that this was not the opportune moment to do so. Perhaps I situate myself more within this category of people.

As a young woman pursuing a technical field in college, I empathize with the many young girls who are left feeling somewhat apprehensive about their career choices after watching a respectable man in science donning an apparently sexist piece of clothing. However, there is a contextual boundary for any reasonable argument, and as Friedersdorf goes on to explain in his piece, the hostile and exaggerated tones of language used by several people targeting Taylor on the Internet were certainly out of place and out of context.

Practicing empathetic journalism is perhaps a more successful way for a writer to convey his or her opinions in a sound manner that asks not for condemnation of a given subject but rather, an informed account of what it actually means to be the subject of a public controversy. Empathy in journalism can begin to allow journalists to transcend preconceived notions by following a pursuit of understanding. This does not mean one has to agree with

the way a subject behaves but, more so, understand why the subject behaves that way. In her article, "How Close Is Too Close? When Journalists Become Their Sources," Elizabeth Fakazis, professor of Media Studies at the University of Wisconsin, explores the value of empathy in journalism by explaining that practicing empathy will not only foster a greater understanding of a given issue, but also promote trust between journalist and audience. In this case, Friedersdorf conveys his position on the controversy at hand by choosing to understand the position of Matt Taylor. In doing so, Friedersdorf thoughtfully asserts that by all means, had he been there that day when Taylor decided to wear that shirt to the press event, he would have been the first to ask him to reconsider his choice of attire. Ultimately, Friedersdorf is expressing to us, his audience, that he, too, has found issues with the less than appropriate article of clothing. He is also telling us that there is more to the story than this man choosing to wear such an atrocious shirt, and those who choose to condemn him for his one misinformed decision are indeed acting inappropriately.

It is here, perhaps, that we begin to hear Friedersdorf's voice louder than ever before, and we undoubtedly understand his position regarding the controversy. He dutifully explains with emphatic intent that there are serious concerns not only when a subject of a controversy is unfairly scrutinized for his or her role, but especially so when the controversy itself becomes the subject of gross hyperbole. It is particularly here where Friedersdorf begins to showcase those writers who chose to do this—from blogger Rod Dreher comparing the Taylor oppression to Stalin's Gulag to Glenn Reynolds describing the feminist

groups that criticized Taylor as "lynch mobs." Despite his clear subversions to the plethora of exaggerated accounts, Friedersdorf cautiously introduces Dreher as a "normally excellent" blogger and Reynolds as someone who "normally avoids hyperbole of this sort." While some may view the inclusion of writers who contest his article as a safe approach, it can also be argued that it further enhances his argument by showcasing that writers can inevitably convey only certain sides of arguments.

In her essay, "The Raw and the Half-Cooked," Patricia Williams, Professor of Law at Columbia University, writes about the detrimental conception of the humanities in terms of commodification rather than the value of relations. She is critical of the use and selected representation of language in public life and ultimately how our perceived conceptions become objectified and translated into determined laws that leave little room for vital interpretation. Surely Taylor's shirt conveys one facet of his story, and it seems reasonable enough for us to agree with Friedersdorf that this one caption does not explain the whole.

However, such hyperbole and over-sensationalization in journalism and writing is unethical for a variety of reasons. As Friedersdorf aptly explains through the relationship between figurative language and analogy, when, "Real-life lynch mobs are to being murdered as 'online feminist lynch mobs' are feeling pressure to say sorry," there is a critical exaggeration that asks readers to think a certain way. As Williams explains in her essay, such an amplified expression of one facet translates into quite an uninformed understanding of the larger issue at stake.

It is perhaps this exaggeration that Friedersdorf has the greatest problem with regarding

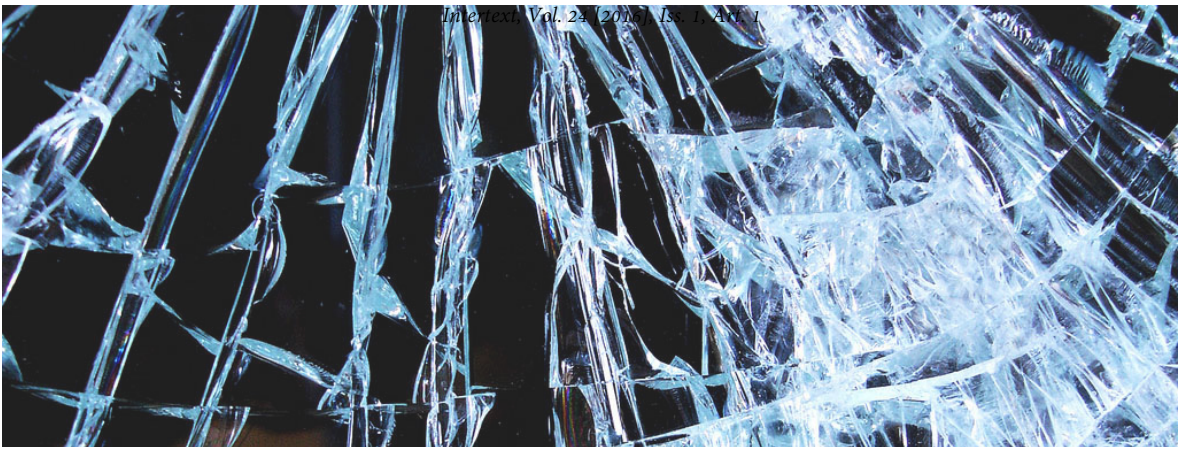
the Matt Taylor controversy. It is the exaggeration or particular captioning of the story that gives rise to a series of wars on the Internet. Friedersdorf asserts that over-sensationalization becomes the “driver of dysfunction,” and that all at once, it becomes not about whether Matt Taylor intentionally or unintentionally wore a “misogynistic” shirt, but rather whether those “groups” criticizing his shirt are the victims or “lynch-mobs,” or conversely, whether those who are opposed to the anti-Taylor group are the victims or the “lynch-mobs.” Friedersdorf suitably adds here that it did not matter if, say, Taylor chose to wear a pro-abortion t-shirt or Che Guevara tank top. The outcome would have been the same: a crazed culture war with Internet groups unduly arguing for a position that looks to confirm their own while condemning the other.

Friedersdorf is well aware of the very social dynamics that hinder a civil exchange from taking place in public discourse on the Internet. He attempts to bring the issues to light by writing about the undue reactions to public controversies recorded on web forums, where one opinion from a member in a group can be translated into the opinion of the whole group. Such an understanding of public forum, as Friedersdorf explains, is precisely what is letting us down. The issue here lies in understanding that as human beings, we have the ability to reason instead of reacting to impulses; we retain a sense of rationality to determine the way we convey our arguments. Such rationality, however, is not to be looked at as solely through an external objective lens, but through a lens that duly

combines intellect with understanding. But of course, to begin with, we have to look to understand and not simply to prove through malicious rhetoric. Such a way of approaching arguments in public discourse cannot be a chance event, but must be practiced in our everyday lives. Perhaps we should live with virtue, the Aristotelean way of life that simply requires that if one does not live with virtue, then one is not prepared for the logic of ethical arguments and hence cannot bring ethical principles into action.

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All I Know...

Mackenzie Stone

I'm staring at my closet, which seems to be mocking me at this point, and I have nothing to wear. Dorm room closets are by no means large, but there are way too many garments crammed into the stupid thing for me to have nothing to wear. No, the problem isn't the size of my wardrobe—the problem is my size. Or so I thought. At this point, the therapy, self-help books, and health magazines have trained me well enough to know that the problem is my mindset, not my body. My inner perfectionist has a tendency to fixate on whichever of my features looks flawed that day. For example, when I try on the navy blue t-shirt, I take one glance in the mirror and my mind immediately hones in on my less-than-tiny waistline; slanderous thoughts crowd my mind before I remind myself how important it is that I focus on the good rather than the bad. Nevertheless, I can't bear wearing the t-shirt in public, so I quickly pull it off and throw it in the hamper. It's the same story for the leggings. I'm brave enough to try on that day. Oh my God! My thighs look—wait—stay positive, I

must remember to stay positive. Still, another article of clothing goes in the hamper. At this point, the sun is streaming in and I've already wasted an hour of this rare, beautiful day in Syracuse. It doesn't take long to finally give in to the not-so-terrible leggings and put them back on, but I layer on an oversized sweater in order to cover my legs as much as I can. It's sad to think that this is the healthiest relationship I've had with my body in years.

In the beginning, it was never about the weight. I chose to eat healthier and to exercise for my health instead of losing weight. I was halfway through my freshman year of high school, and the chapter about nutrition in health class had me itching to make a lifestyle change. I started with a workout routine of training on the elliptical for ten minutes every morning. Next was my lunch routine. I began packing a lunch for school every day: half a turkey sandwich on wheat, a handful of baby carrots, some strawberries, and a Special K bar. Pretty soon, ten minutes on the elliptical became twenty, twenty minutes became thirty;



Layout by Charlotte Oestrich. Photograph by Flickr user Leanda Xavian, CC BY-NC 2.0: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/xavian/2672532168>.

I began to fear finishing my half turkey sandwich on wheat, the handful of baby carrots became no more than three, and some strawberries turned into one or two. Breakfast and dinner promptly followed this pattern. My inner perfectionist latched on to the newfound control and my rationality was beginning to slip away from me. I was losing weight and I was enjoying it too much.

By the time the summer heat rolled around, I found myself deeply entrenched in what doctors call orthorexia nervosa—a personality disorder in which the subject forms an unhealthy fixation on clean eating and exercise, often to the point that their efforts to become healthy actually make the subject sicker. The very restricted meal plan I had established for myself was already starting to take its toll. My strict routine during the week ended on the weekends when I loosened my dieting leash and ate whatever I could, and as much of it as I could, because it felt like I was never going to be able to eat it again. To this day, it's too painful to call this habit what it really was: binging. It's like there's some sort of shame in it.

I told myself that eating so much of that “unclean” food on the weekend would make me sick of it for the rest of the week. Nevertheless, the guilt of what I ate would weigh me down every Monday. But I never threw anything up (because, in my mind, that would have meant I had a serious problem). I would try to stop the guilt by “undoing” what I had done on the weekend during the week. My “purging” manifested itself in the form of exercise. Most days I made time for at least three workouts, mostly cardio and about an hour each. I did everything I had the resources to do: running, elliptical training, biking, horseback riding. By the week's end, I would've

clocked in at about thirteen hours of exercise. If this wasn't bad enough, that summer was probably one of the busiest times of my life.

For some reason, I made a point to keep my schedule full, whether it was volunteering to be a counselor at the local Kids Kamp, taking online classes at Academy of Art University, or attending every horse show made available to me, there wasn't a whole lot of down time. I can't remember if I chose to keep so busy because I wanted to tailor my resume for college or just because I wanted something to keep my mind off of the fact that I wasn't eating what I wanted for five out of seven days. Whatever the reason, there's no denying that I was biting off a lot more than I could chew.

There was a week that became so hectic I could only manage to get one to two hours of sleep per night. But of course, I still managed to squeeze in my workouts. It was a lot. Four hours of working at the Kids Kamp followed by an evening, and much of the early morning hours, doing homework. I was trying to get as much of my homework done as possible before heading to Pebble Beach the following week to compete in a horse show because it was imperative that I got my work done for my fashion construction class; you can't exactly take a sewing machine on the road with you to an out-of-town horse show—especially when you barely have time to take a breath, let alone sew a skirt.

I remember one of the few moments I had to rest during that week; I was lying on the soft, green grass while my friends sat on nearby benches. I remember the sun being blindingly bright. The trees were our canopy, the shade our cooler. The children were inside of the church that hosted the camp, so we counselors had some time to ourselves. We were laughing about what little terrors some



of those children were. One of the worst ones was in my group—he always managed to find a reason to throw a tantrum every ten minutes. The louder his screams became, the more I daydreamed of being at home in bed. I didn't want to tell my friends that I had only gotten an hour of sleep. I didn't want to tell them that I could've gotten two hours if only I had skipped my morning workout. These girls had been my best friends for about as long as I could remember, and I didn't want to tell them that I was consumed with homework, consumed with thoughts of self-loathing, consumed with the fear of gaining weight. Fatigue clouded my thoughts and weighed down my limbs, my body was aching, my stomach was growling, my mind was reeling, and I didn't want to tell them. I just wanted to lie on the fluffy green grass, close my tired eyes, and pretend that everything was fine.

I suppose there were a few instances where I initially acknowledged the fact that I wouldn't be able to maintain my torturous routine. I remember how during sophomore year I would almost dread coming home after school because of the immense pressure I put on myself to squeeze in an extra workout before starting homework. I remember the disruptive growling and pain of my hungry stomach while I did my World History reading assignments while feeling too guilt-ridden to even consider having a carrot or two as a pre-dinner snack. But by the time I began to realize that my "clean diet" and strict workouts were running my life, I had already lost the weight I wanted, and the idea of gaining it back was a hell of a lot more torturous than constantly thinking about food and exercise.

Friends and family began commenting on my appearance by the time I neared my low-

est weight. But my obsession poisoned my thoughts, almost allowing me to get a sick pleasure from people's worrying about my sudden weight loss.

"Have you lost weight?"

"When did you get so skinny-mini?"

My mind was diseased—diseased with the need to be skinny. A need to be skinny that stemmed from a need to be perfect. Everything else was in line: The grades, the friends, the sports...so my mind fixated on the one thing which seemed to stray from the society-driven image of idealism—my body. Unfortunately, my battle was not quite as private as I wanted it to be.

I remember the many identical discussions I'd have with my aunt and her partner, both of whom were also my riding trainers, about my "issues." The horse show would be coming to a close. Everyone running around, gathering the bridle, the saddle, the helmet they'd left here and there; the grooms reluctantly breaking down the fabric walls of beige and maroon that housed us at every show. My aunt would ask me to come to the tack room, the office, the dressing room—whichever one was still intact—"so we could talk." I'd step down from the cloud nine I was on after winning my last class, and I'd mentally prepare for an all-too-familiar end-of-show tradition. Their opening statements were always laced with embellished notes of compassion and sincerity.

"We're beginning to worry about you, Mackenzie..."

My aunt would go on to tell me that she knew what I was going through—that she too had a thicker body type at my age, as if that would make me feel better. Next, they laid into me with a lecture about how self-destructive my habits were becoming, "eating

too little” and “exercising too much.” I never spoke much during these talks. I cried a lot, occasionally I would fit in an “I’m fine” or an “It’s okay” between tears, but for the most part, I kept quiet. I would try to focus on the bustling voices of people packing up outside. I tried imagining myself anywhere but in that tent with those two somewhat well-meaning women. I just remember thinking how hypocritical they were being, telling me to change my “poor” eating habits while they were starting their new diet on Monday. I would insist that I wasn’t nearly as troubled as they thought and I’d promise them that I would eat more. They would tell me that they were doing this because they cared. We’d hug. My tears, which started as streams, would be rivers rolling down my cheeks. They’d leave the tent and go home feeling better about themselves. I’d try to clean myself up. I’d try to focus on the fact that I had a good show. I’d try not to let one bad moment ruin a great week. And although I do think that in many ways, yes, they did care, I’d wonder how people who claimed to care so much could make such a private issue such public knowledge. I swear, sometimes they told strangers about my “issues” just to make conversation, not caring enough to refrain from telling my barn friends, my parents, or my cousins about my struggles. As much as I denied it then, this was an incredibly difficult time in my life and the last thing I needed was everyone knowing about it.

At the end of the day, no amount of “talks,” “discussions,” “lectures,” or whatever you want to call them, was going to make me change. At the end of the day, you can’t just turn off the obsessive compulsive tendencies that come with a need to be perfect. I got into the mess that was my eating disorder because of my

need to control; therefore, I wasn’t going to get out of it unless I did it on my own.

It was halfway into my junior year. I just got so tired of it all. Tired of constantly worrying about what I was eating or how much I was exercising. I finally acknowledged the fact that diets and exercise had come to control my life, and I began to question whether it was worth it.

I remember a conversation between my mom and me, after my having lost control during a potluck at school that day. I still remember the bittersweet excitement that consumed me when I laid eyes on all of the scrumptious goodies that I couldn’t eat. My mind began racing with ways to rationalize indulging in this little feast and I was a goner. I didn’t normally eat that much on the weekdays. I was terrified that because my eating schedule was thrown off I’d immediately gain weight that week. I tried to make up for it with a forty-five minute run after school (this was after the forty-five-minute workout I completed that morning) but I knew I still hadn’t burned off everything from the feast. I couldn’t focus on homework, couldn’t watch TV, couldn’t sit still. I felt so guilty that I’d deviated from my routine. When my mom finally got home from work I mustered up the courage to tell her about the critical mistake I’d made. The conversation quickly turned into one about my eating habits, my exercise habits, my growing impatience and restlessness with it all. She knew that I’d become obsessed, but she also knew that I wouldn’t listen to anyone who told me I was wrong, that it was a private battle. When she told me she thought I could afford to gain some weight I was relieved. I was so sick of killing myself with the workouts, guilt, and pressure that I just needed an excuse to



put an end to it all. There was no more pressure to obsessively keep the weight off. This was probably the first step I made toward recovery.

I remember the lightness I felt in the weeks following that talk. As soon as I could, I went to the grocery store to buy all sorts of food—mostly healthy, but some indulgent. I ate a lot. But as a compromise, I ate mostly healthy foods: sweet potatoes, raisins, nuts. This high lasted for a couple of weeks, but it wasn't long before the honeymoon phase was over. Though my more dangerous habits began to fade that day halfway through junior year, my troubles were far from resolved.

Eating disorders are a tricky thing because they usually stem from a fear of gaining weight or becoming fat. Yet one of the main side effects of recovering from an eating disorder is gaining weight. Let's be honest, there aren't many women out there who actually enjoy watching the number on that scale climb higher and higher, but to the diseased mind of a girl with an eating disorder, this very superficial, very insignificant problem is one of the most painful things to go through. After all, she just spent weeks, months, or years trying to lose the weight and keep it off, and now it feels as though all of that mind-consuming, relentless work was for nothing. It wasn't long before I felt as though the weight gain was slipping out of my control, so I promptly turned to dieting.

This was another beast all by itself. Trying to find the balance between a diet and an eating disorder proved tricky. I began obsessing over new eating regimens and workout routines for myself. This time was different, though; my fear of gaining weight was now competing with my fear of falling back into

obsessive, orthorexic ways. For a few weeks, I remember making a point to bring nothing but a carrot for lunch to school. When that became too tiresome, I switched from just a carrot to a very small salad. That too got old, and so I tried counting calories. I went on just about every diet there is. And though these regimens don't sound any better than the habits I'd tried to abandon before, the difference was that I couldn't succeed on any of the diets I started. Partly because diets don't work and partly because the concern of falling back into my orthorexic habits was always lingering in the back of my mind.

For a long time, it was hard for me to face the fact that none of the diets I went on were working. Once I finally acknowledged this, I was able to step away from the yo-yo dieting. I found this wonderful book called *Intuitive Eating*. I learned how corrosive diets are—not just to your health but also to your mind. I learned that I could stop dieting and not worry about becoming “fat.” I learned a lot, but I didn't fully understand it all, at least not yet. I wasn't ready to give up diets completely, I wasn't ready to face the fact that my issue wasn't my weight. The perfectionist within me was not satisfied and I wasn't ready to realize that it never would be.

It was the beginning of my senior year, and I was on the first diet I'd been on since the start of summer.

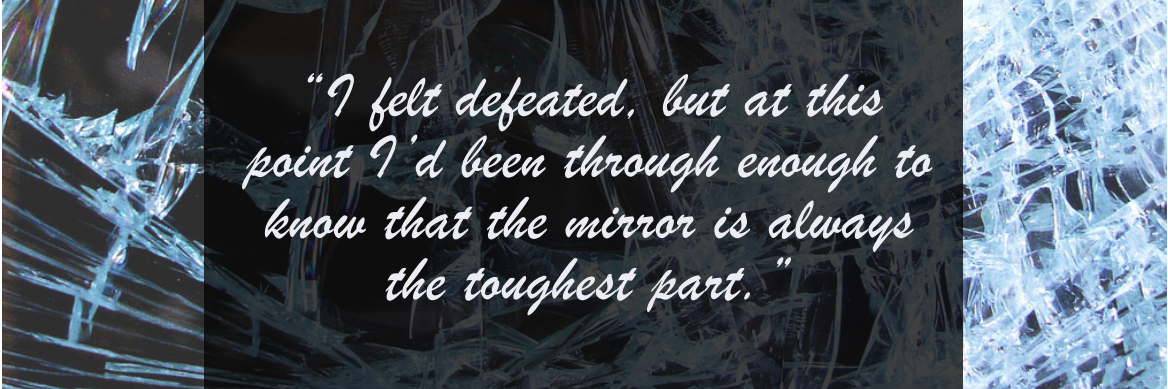
I remember getting ready the afternoon before the Homecoming game. Having just gotten home from school, I didn't have a lot of time. But I was nominated to the Homecoming Court and I was determined to look flawless. I prepped for weeks. I did my research and mapped out a strict diet plan. I scoured the Internet to find the perfect dress: not too



fancy, but not too casual. I made sure to stick to my workout routine religiously; I even threw in some extra workouts when I found the time. I was finally ready: hair was done, makeup done, dress on, sash in place. The first thing I noticed when I looked in the mirror was my torso—*I dieted two months for THAT?* Next were my legs—*I hope it's the tights making them look that thick!*

As I scanned my reflection, more imperfections found their way into my thoughts. I tried adding waist belts, I tried changing my tights, but it was too late. My mind was already a mess with anger and sadness and irra-

It took me a few more diets, and a few more meltdowns, to finally understand that the battle really was with my mind, not my body. When I did, I went back to the *Intuitive Eating* book, ready to give up on the meal plans, the workout regimens, and the perfectionism. I don't know that my incessant worrying and body-hate will ever be completely behind me. I would be lying if I said that I don't still occasionally consider dieting or that I don't occasionally consider going back to the intense regimen of my orthorexic past. But every time I do this, I remind myself of how far I've come. I remind myself that I am capable of eating a slice of cake with-



"I felt defeated, but at this point I'd been through enough to know that the mirror is always the toughest part."

tionality. Thank goodness my mom was there to assure me that I looked "adorable," at least in her eyes. I felt defeated, but at this point, I'd been through enough to know that the mirror is always the toughest part. At this point, I was better able to put things like this out of my mind, and I didn't let it ruin my night. Though I'd be lying if I said it didn't put a damper on it. The thing is, having been at a weight too low to maintain before, and having not yet understood the fact that skinnier isn't always better, even now, I have a hard time tolerating my figure, let alone liking it.

out feeling guilty or like I need to finish off a couple pieces more just in case I decide to go on a diet the next day. I remind myself that I'm strong enough to be living an entire country away from home, so I'm strong enough to resist the deceptive temptation of an eating disorder. I remind myself of what a blessed life I have, filled with wonderful friends and family. My orthorexia left me scarred, and I will likely be healing from it for a long time, if not the rest of my life. I don't know if I will ever have a healthy relationship with my body. All I know... is that I'm going to try.

BEYOND THE RIGID

CONFINES

A tremendous power lies within us all—the power to connect and identify with the unique characteristics that produce our budding sense of self and place in this unpredictable world. Too often, however, we are fearful of breaking away from the “norm,” intimidated by others’ perceptions rather than coming to terms with our own individuality. In a society that encourages and upholds homogeneity, it can be challenging for an individual to openly accept his or her true self without the fear of being branded as “different.”

The contributing authors of this section embody the enormous courage that is necessary for braving and confronting the criticisms of diversity which flood our everyday interactions. Ingrained within each of these pieces is the notion that one’s sense of self, often highly altered by societal misperceptions and expectations, can sometimes fail in representing one’s true identity. These stories represent the fluidity of identity, not as a static, unchangeable state but rather as a continual evolution, shaped and expanded throughout our journeys toward self-discovery.

Each of the selected stories in this section illustrates the achievement of a more profound self-knowledge through active reflection. Nashwah Ahmed begins the section with a reflection on the work of Nigerian-born

photographer Rotimi Fani-Kayode, who challenges cultural norms about race and sexuality.

“A Father’s Smile” by Benjamin Fox and “Piled High” by Laurie Thompson portray the anguish an individual can experience when witnessing a loved one encountering turmoil in his or her life—a life contained within an outline of who one desires be, but not who they desire to be. The authors of these two pieces act as outside observers peering through the cracks of the undoubtedly despondent times experienced by family members. They reflect on the most memorable moments of their childhoods, revealing how their identities have been formed through their own unique familial experiences.

In “Awakening,” readers are exposed to the harmful ramifications of the labeling of mental disorders and the ways in which this classification system may inadvertently stigmatize an entire population of individuals. Wendy Reynolds questions the pigeonholing effect of grouping particular people or experiences as “normal” and others as “abnormal.”

We hope these stories will motivate you to tap into your own power to identify yourself beyond the rigid confines of society’s guidelines, so that you may be able to obtain a more sincere sense of your own self.

—Madison Firkey, Richelle Gewertz,
and Aidan Kelley

Photograph by Flickr user fdecomite, CC BY 2.0: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/fdecomite/449785187>.

Rotimi Fani-Kayode: 1955-1989

Nashwah Ahmed


Raw, exotic, provocative. These are the first three words that spring to mind when viewing a collection of Rotimi Fani-Kayode's most iconic work, which was on display in the Light Work exhibition at the Kathleen O. Ellis Gallery in Syracuse, New York in the fall of 2015. Produced during the latter part of his life, in collaboration with his partner Alex Hirst to celebrate their budding relationship, Fani-Kayode's portraits boldly explore and celebrate sexuality, ethnicity, and hybridity—three areas that have contributed greatly to shaping the core of his identity. Despite being inspired by Robert Mapplethorpe's work, Fani-Kayode's photography was never a derivative of it. Instead, his work was primarily and significantly influenced by his personal struggles as he found himself caught in the conflict between his homosexuality and his traditional Yoruba upbringing.

During his lifetime, most of Fani-Kayode's work was considered too political in nature and, hence, unsuitable for viewing in a gallery. His identity as a Nigerian homosexual photographer was not respected due to societal ignorance. In Africa, his family's social standing prevented him from practicing photography; in the Western world, his work was often

overlooked. It is important to note that his photographs are far more than a mere display intended for shock value or an elaborate form of self-expression. They are a depiction of the richness and diversity of his background, a visual narrative of his own personal experiences. In Fani-Kayode's own words, "It is photography, therefore—Black, African, homosexual photography—which I must use not just as an instrument, but as a weapon if I am to resist attacks on my integrity and, indeed, my existence on my own terms." (Rotimi Fani-Kayode, 1988).

The show opens with a relatively simple, black and white photograph of a man with his arms crossed. His hair falls past his eyes, obscuring them from view. As one walks around the gallery, it becomes evident that this concept of "blindness" is a recurring theme throughout the collection. Eyes shut tight, hands pressed firmly against eyelids, a single blindfold wrapped around—all symbolic of man's unflinching ignorance, his vain attempts to see only the things he chooses to.

In "Nothing to Lose XII (Bodies of Experience)," fruits are strategically placed to convey a sense of pure desire in a manner that manages to be simultaneously loud and subdued. However, that is not the only message delivered



by this collection. The careful placement of the exposed subjects against a black, indistinct background with a soft, glowing light that gently highlights only some of their features leaves room for interpretation. Their haunting, melancholy expressions collectively contribute to an air of vulnerability, ambiguity, and sensuality. The lighting creates an interesting interplay of shadows and highlights that gracefully transition into each other, enhancing the theatrical nature of the photographs.

Through his work, Fani-Kayode's primarily transmits emotions. He does not employ euphemisms to alleviate the impact of his photographs, making, instead, a sincere effort to preserve the raw, gritty nature of the image. "The Golden Phallus" (1989) is perhaps the most gripping photograph in this collection, the highlight of the show, the culmination of Fani-Kayode's career. It is a marvelous, abstract representation of how lust and desire are feelings triggered by circumstances beyond our control. The portrait perfectly captures and portrays the feeling of shame and uneasiness one is trained to experience when confronted with questions and matters of sexuality—the constant need to hide behind a mask, to be ashamed, to be afraid. The mask, in this case, offers a barrier between the model and the viewer, providing the model with anonymity and possibly rescuing the viewer from the uncomfortable experience of looking into the eyes of the subject.

In addition to exploring sexuality and the popular perception of homosexuality as something illicit, Fani-Kayode's also addresses the issue of belonging. He famously described himself as "an outsider: in matters of sexuality; in terms of geographical and cultural dislocation; and in the sense of not having become the sort of respectably married professional my parents might have hoped for." "Maternal Milk" (c.

1986) is a black and white photograph of a solitary figure shrouded in obscurity that accurately conveys the feeling of loneliness experienced by "outsiders" like Fani-Kayode's. The endless, desperate pursuit of support and acceptance is best represented in "Every Moment Counts" (1989), which features two subjects cherishing their rare, precious moments in each other's company.

Strangely enough, for a man so explicitly homosexual, Fani-Kayode sought to transcend worldly restraints and find his true spirit through his photography. Infused with spirituality, some of Kayode's photographs also incorporate elements from ancestral rituals to depict suffering and hope. "Nothing to Lose VIII" (1989), which presents a solemn subject, donning a tribal wreath and pendant, and gripping a knife, is strongly symbolic of the sacrifices that "outsiders" such as Fani-Kayode are forced to make in an attempt to fit into a mold shaped and deemed acceptable by society.

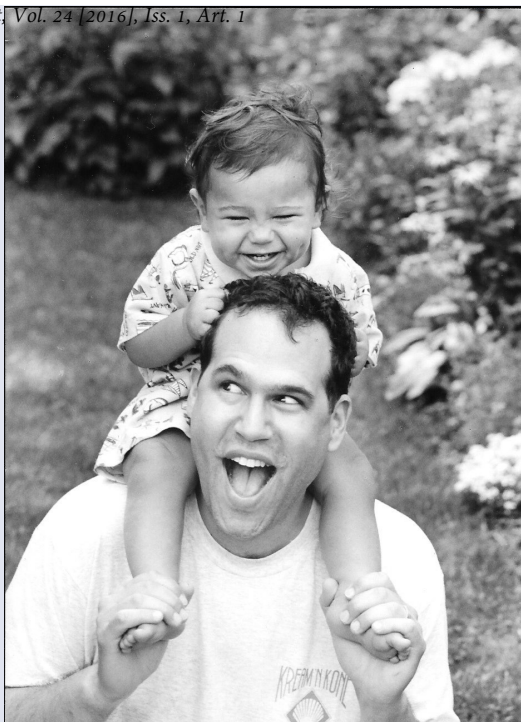
Fani-Kayode uses his photography to create a fantasy world where the concepts of date, time, and location are irrelevant. These photographs represent acts, fragments of plays created by Hirst and Kayode, relating to cultural dislocation and disruption. They depict the black male body as a means to interpret and probe the boundaries of spiritual and erotic fantasy—of cultural and sexual difference.

There is no doubt that Fani-Kayode's work is still generating waves in the photography world long after his passing. His legacy continues to be an active part of the battle against prejudice in the fight for the eradication of stereotyping and labelling. His vivid photographs are a source of enlightenment—the kind of photographs that remain etched in memory and refuse to fade away with time. Whether you love or hate Fani-Kayode's work, one thing is glaringly evident; his revolutionary, bold ideas will continue to make a statement for many years to come.

Layout by Destiny Renee Anderson. Photograph: Rotimi Fani-Kayode, "Nothing to Lose VIII."

A FATHER'S SMILE

BENJAMIN FOX



After my father left us over two years ago, my mother did her best to extinguish his fading presence from our home. His office was emptied, his side of the closet stripped down, the old shows he'd watched deleted from TiVo. If it weren't for the photos, one might not have known that I had a father at all.

Those photos were all that remained. One photo of my father and me always caught my attention in those infrequent weeks I spent home from college. It was placed above our unused fireplace, an old black-and-white remnant of the days when I still wore diapers and Dad still smiled with relative ease. I sat on my father's shoulders, hands gripping his dark black hair and my long white shirt covering me like a dress. I smiled with the kind of natural happiness only toddlers have, a big toothy grin that extended down from my face across the rest of my small, pudgy body.

Dad was smiling too. He hadn't changed

much since that photo was taken, at least not physically. He still had the same thick black hair, a gift from the gods that caused strangers to think he was fifteen years younger. His arms that gripped my legs were the same ones that shook my hand after graduation. His eyes were still brown, the same color as mine. The only difference was the smile, which over time grew so forced and hollow that it became a mockery of what it once was.

There was a period in my memory when Dad did not smile much at all. It was a time when he seemed to be out of the house more than he was in it. I never really understood why he was so distant until much later, but it was clear to me from an early age that he was incredibly unhappy, deep in a part of his soul that I would never be able to reach. The sadness was there even when he laughed, made jokes, and kissed my mother on the cheek.

The man whose shoulders I once rested on was a stranger growing up. He was a figure from

the distant past who I thought was to never return. Little did I know that this person was still in my father somewhere, forgotten but not completely gone. For this man to return, my father needed to go on a path, one that he knew would change my family permanently. Sometimes I wondered if it was worth the journey just to see that smile again.

My grandparents often fought during my childhood, and still do to this day. Their battles would begin with an innocuous comment, a slight criticism, or perhaps a repeated request. One would raise his or her voice and the other would reply with even greater frustration. The two would go on like this, sometimes for hours, until the argument fizzled out, usually with a bit of help from their daughter, my mother.

I used to hate their fights. I hated the idea that perhaps they didn't love each other. Perhaps they were going to separate, perhaps all the times I'd witnessed happiness were really just a lie.

My own parents never fought like that, at least not in public or in front of me. Fights between my parents usually involved subjects of great importance, or at least that was what I assumed since they happened so rarely. Not so with my grandparents.

Eventually, I'd had enough. During one such shouting match, I stood between them, a hand on each of their stomachs, my childish, high-pitched voice raised high.

"Please stop fighting!" I yelled.

And for a moment there was silence.

That day my mother explained to me that how my grandparents acted did not signify a broken relationship, but instead a powerful one. My grandparents' love for each other outlasted arguments each day, every day, for more than sixty years. They survived raising three

kids, growing old, as my grandmother's sisters went through broken marriages and inevitable divorces. The constant teasing by my grandfather. The reluctant smiles by my grandmother. The contagious laughter and nostalgic stories which came only moments after another voice-raising row.

That was love.

As I grew older, it became more obvious how mistaken I was about my grandparents' relationship. What I once thought were hurtful words I came to recognize as playful teasing. Though they didn't have the type of relationship I wanted when I was older, for them it worked. I was a junior in high school when I finally recounted this revelation to my father. The two of us often had our deepest conversations while driving in the car. The insulation of glass and metal allowed me to feel a greater level of comfort with my father than I normally did. Though I had no real proof of it, I always assumed that our drives went by Vegas rules.

What was said in the car, stayed in the car.

"You know what I've realized?" I told him as he weaved through suburban traffic.

"Let's hear it," he replied, slightly distracted.

"Grandma and Grandpa are always fighting," I began. "I used to think it was because they hated each other, but then I realized they were just so in love that the arguments didn't really matter."

I waited for my father to make some sort of response but was only met with silence. After a few painful moments, he spoke.

"Do you think that your mother and I don't fight enough?"

"What do you mean?"

"It's just..." he paused. "Sometimes I feel that we don't talk about things in the open as much as we should. That we don't talk enough

about how we feel.”

For reasons I could not comprehend, I suddenly felt very afraid. My father seemed to imply much more by that statement than its simple meaning suggested. I began to tear up.

“What do you mean?” I asked, voice cracking. “Are you and Mom alright?”

He looked over at me, surprised. He didn’t seem to realize the effect his words would have on me and quickly began to backtrack.

“Of course everything is alright,” he said. “Look, forget what I said. I didn’t mean anything by it. Your mother and I are doing okay.”

Though I knew he was holding back, I managed to calm myself down. We spent the rest of the day picking up presents and ignoring that lingering, uncomfortable moment.

My father left for a business trip soon after we arrived home. I spent the rest of the day going through the motions of my normal weekend routine. I surfed the Internet in the old guest room that we had converted into my makeshift “office” a few years earlier. Funny pictures and blaring hip hop distracted me, but the conversation still lingered in the back of my mind.

Later, my mother knocked on the door and entered in silence before I had a chance to answer. She sat on the couch on the other side of the room.

“Dad told me about the conversation you two had earlier,” she said. “Do you want to talk about it?”

At first, I didn’t. All I wanted was for the memory to delete itself like an embarrassing photograph, and for him to never bring it up again. But curiosity got the better of me. I knew that something important was happening behind the scenes of my parents’ lives, and I told myself I was finally ready to throw the curtain away.

I sat next to my mom and repeated the question I had asked my father earlier that day.

“Are you and Dad alright?”

Mom hesitated, thinking how exactly to put the words, before answering me.

“We’re trying, Ben,” she said. “But we’re going through a very difficult situation right now.”

In that moment, something clicked in my head. I recalled the many awkward silences during family dinners and the growing lack of affection my parents seemed to have for one another. I spat out the first accusation that came to mind.

“Is he cheating on you?”

“No,” she said, stalling. It was clear she had something she wanted to say, but couldn’t quite figure out the words. “It’s something more complicated than that.”

“Is he gay?”

The words came out before I realized what they meant. The look on my mother’s face said it all. I immediately began to cry and soon she was crying, too. We cried together for a very long time, holding each other, not speaking.

“How did you...” she eventually stammered. “How did you know?”

How did I know? I thought back to all the times I had questioned him, all the times he did things that just didn’t add up. The time that I borrowed my father’s phone and discovered a picture of a shirtless man he had searched on the Internet. Or when I first became stuck in the midst of teenage sexuality and my father sat me down and told me, “it’s alright to look at men the same way you look at women. You’ll figure out what you like eventually.”

Maybe it was the way he conformed to certain gay stereotypes. My father loved fashion, hated sports, loved art, loved Broadway.

But in the end, those details were only the



backdrop to a simple truth I had always known about my father. For a long time, he wasn't happy. For a long time, he didn't smile. For a long time, I didn't know why. And now, for the first time, I did.

Two and a half years previously, I learned my father was gay. Two years previously, he moved out of the house. One year and four months previously, I told my closest friends.

It's a process.

My father had made offers before. There was a service for the Jewish holiday of Passover targeted at gay men. There was a speaker at the local college who was a major figure in gay rights. There was a performance of the play *Kinky Boots*, a story involving transgender women, at a nearby theater. Each time I said no.

When my father asked me to join him and his company in marching with the DC Gay Pride parade, I was prepared to respond as I always did. But this time, something stopped me. In a sudden realization, I knew I was ready to see that part of my father's world for the first time.

I made my way through crowds of people covering the blocked-off city streets. It seemed

like the entire city was shut down for today: a bubble of pride smack in the middle of our nation's politically-charged capital. Men in drag flaunted their newfound femininity for various admirers, their sparkling dresses glinting in the summer sun. A large group of men walked by with eyes hidden behind large sunglasses and bodies covered only by bright red speedos. Their heads were held high, calculatedly oblivious to the attention their presence commanded. I recognized one of them as my freshman year ceramics teacher. It was awkward to say the least.

I walked toward where my father and his coworkers were stationed near the back of the parade line. We all wore matching blue T-shirts, given out from a truck that also held beads, pens, cozies, and other merchandise emblazoned with the company logo. Dad was talking to Brian, a friend who he introduced me to a while earlier. It was obvious from the way they interacted that they were more than friends.

My father looked happy here among the rainbow flags and flying beads, and though I felt slight discomfort as an outsider, I pushed it to the back of my mind for him.


In the memories I have of that day, one thing stands out more than anything, more than the penis shaped balloons, the run-ins with old teachers, the men in bras, sparkling underwear, and the blazing summer sun.

As I took in the next stage of my father's life, I recognized that man in that old photo above the fireplace. The one my mother still kept there years after he left our home.

A man who still gets called forty-five as he creeps closer to sixty. A man with thick black hair, who finally is starting to show a little gray. A man who smiles. A man that I am proud to call my father.

Awakening

Wendy Reynolds



W e had met before when seed met egg, when one life had burst forth from another. He was there through early tears, fevers, and tantrums. He stayed long enough to leave me with an impression of a strong-nosed face, the muddled sound of a thick Boston accent, and the warmth of a paternal embrace. I took those memories with me, reliving them as I traveled through moist, green mountains and small, lifeless towns to the modest home of Bob Boyd, my estranged parent. It would be our first meeting as cognizant beings, an opportunity to soak up his absent essence and mold it into the cracks and crevices of my broken soul. With watery eyes, my mother left me in his care, relinquishing her only child for a week to a man she had once loved but had never trusted. It was on this day that I learned about the serpent; its quiescent coil and the violent release that forever altered my father's psyche. After I was settled in, my father sat down with me and explained that he was different from other people, something of a mystic or holy man. He had experienced a Kundalini awakening—the release of a life force that resides at the base of the spine in the form of a coiled serpent. My father described this experience as a “powerful white light” that illuminates a being “like the sun,” and thereafter allows “an energy to flow up the spine

*“I sit in
ecstasy, every
prick of
the needle
sending a
white light
of energy
flowing up
my spine
to my mind,
exploding.”*

nonstop.” Once the serpent had been awakened and the energy released, my father was “tuned in to the frequencies of the ruler of time and space” and he held a connection with a higher power—not a direct line, but more of an open awareness. Like how the man with a metal plate in his skull picks up the local news, my father picked up the humming and throbbing of the universe, the connectedness of his existence and the mirror maze of lives reaching forward and backwards, blurring into inextricable oneness. His open heart poured compassion and loving kindness on all who crossed his path. He was one of the enlightened.

Feeling frightened by the energy surge and believing certain side effects were making him uncomfortable, my father sought help from various yoga instructors, shamans, and holistic healers. However, none of them could guide him, and a majority had said he just needed rest, that this was an abnormal Kundalini experience—a crisis. They told him the Kundalini awakening sometimes causes symptoms such as sleeplessness, irritability, swirling thoughts, changes in lifestyle, an increase or decrease in sexual energy, difficulty maintaining a job, relationship troubles, excessive energy, and shifts in mood. Nobody suggested counseling or medical attention. The yoga community celebrated his awakening and encouraged him to embrace his newly acquired sensitivity, hoping the associated negative side effects would pass. They ignored his pain and fear, never mentioning that “religious and spiritual experiences usually are not distressing to the individual and do not require treatment of any kind” as a Western therapist might have advised (Lukoff 41).

Following the awakening, my father’s academic life crumbled, stating “after a year or two, it became difficult for me to focus on

studying without feeling like my mind would come unhinged,” and as a result, he was unable to finish college. He experienced severe headaches and impulse control problems during his high-energy phases, moving residences frequently and marrying four times. The rest of his life was spent alternating between periods of high energy and low, tormented energy until he figured out how to modify his moods and maintain a moderate amount of control over his body. Starting a forum for those who had also experienced Kundalini, my father provided a safe place where people could share their awakening stories without judgment and he could warn them of the associated dangers.

When I returned home and shared my father’s story with my stepfather, a psychiatric nurse schooled in Western medicine, he shouted, “That’s ridiculous! Is he out of his mind? You’re not going back there, the man is insane! Psychotic!” To convince my mother of the potential danger of allowing me to visit my father, my stepfather pulled out the *DSM-IV—The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*—and looked up the definition of psychosis. Reading from the book with authority, he listed the symptoms as “grandiose delusions, hallucinations, and social dysfunction.” He then exclaimed, “That’s him! It’s all right there. He’s probably manic-depressive, schizoid, or delusional. He’s not normal!”

In spite of my stepfather’s concern and medical “proof,” I was not convinced. I had spent a week with my father and he seemed otherwise normal, having been nothing but kind. He was intelligent, interesting, quirky, held a full-time job, and had neighborhood friends. I knew he was not insane. What was wrong with him believing he had connected with a higher power? Would he benefit from

a label of mental illness? Or would it hurt him, further damaging his quality of life? At that time, I preferred the story of a Kundalini awakened father to that of a mentally ill father.

My own doubts about my father’s experience and his mental health did not arise until my twenty-fifth year, when I had an awakening of my own during a seedy tattoo session.

A mangy man with a weeping wound rests a breath away from me, leaning his dandruff ridden and grease-decorated body against my pristine black t-shirt. He is missing several teeth, has sores on his hands, and twin fetuses tattooed on his stomach—blue and red blobs. They’re watching me from his bloated belly, distended, diseased, dangling dangerously over his worn-out jeans. I sit in ecstasy, every prick of the needle sending a white light of energy flowing up my spine to my mind, exploding. My filthy companion suddenly develops a yellow haze around his body; is he glowing or am I? Maybe my light energy is reflecting off his red, splotchy skin. It might be my last real moment or my first. I leave the chair and hug my amazing artist. Everything is blurry, foggy. I’m glowing, floating, and full of bliss. Suggestive, seductive, sedative.

Months later, I am getting a physical and being tested for every condition imaginable. I’m horrified, convinced I have a disease from the irrational, possibly illegal, and filthy ink exchange. I question why I did those things and what the white-light energy experience was. Could it be related to Kundalini? Am I crazy? It takes a few years for me to realize that therapy might help, but I finally muster the courage and make an appointment.

I sit on a wicker couch and look at my therapist perched on her chair, looking down her beak at me with compassionate but judgmental

Layout by Madison Firkey. Photograph by Kyra Lucas Semien.

eyes. I tell her about my experiences and she asks about my parents. I disclose I do not know much about my father because we had limited visitation. I tell her that he is an interesting character—he used to wear a suit to the beach and unabashedly entertain strange women in our home. He is spiritual and mystical, having experienced a Kundalini awakening. She arches her eyebrow in obvious disbelief. She believes I have bipolar disorder and mentions my father has classic symptoms of this disorder as well.

I didn't accept her diagnosis and asked for some explanation. We had previously agreed that I met the criteria for depression, but bipolar disorder had a frightening sound to it.

The idea I was unstable did not sit well with me. She told me bipolar mania, or hypomania, involves behaving impulsively and engaging in pleasurable, high-risk behaviors. When a person is in a manic state, they can become psychotic and that often involves believing they have special powers. In all of its forms, bipolar disorder is characterized by unusual shifts in mood, energy, and behavior, from the high of mania or hypomania to low, depressed states and everything in-between. If left untreated, it can result in damaged relationships, poor job or school performance, and even suicide (NIMH RSS).

I think back to my periods of multiple affairs followed by many months of anorgasmia and disinterest in sex leading to damaged relationships, as well as my uncharacteristic tattoo experience, extreme high energy in which I talked all night, the weeks when I could barely get out of bed, the fluctuations in my weight from unhealthily thin to obese, and excessive spending. None of these experiences stood out to me as being particularly dangerous or outside the realm of sanity. Maybe some were a little weird,

others a bit risky, but now that I am labeled as crazy, can I trust my judgment? Could my father be trusted as the narrator of his story?

My therapist then revealed bipolar disorder tends to run in families and has links to schizophrenia. It occurs to me that my father's family is saturated with mental illness. Both his parents were admitted to mental institutions for severe depression. His grandparents were crippled by drug and alcohol addictions, as well as undefined mental health problems. His brother suffers from schizophrenia, his sister is an alcoholic depressive, and his other daughter is medicated for major depressive disorder. My therapist told me it is not unusual for a person with bipolar disorder, or other disorders where psychosis can be involved, to believe their mental illness is a spiritual awakening.

I went home feeling confused and frightened by her diagnosis, questioning everything. I began to research the topic and found the journal article "Physio Kundalini Syndrome and Mental Health" by A. Valanciute & L.A. Thampy, which acknowledges confusion surrounding the understanding of Kundalini and whether or not it is a psychosis. The research suggests the boundary between spiritual awakening and mental illness lies in the realm of the individual's behavior post-awakening. Valanciute and Thampy state, "A majority of the Eastern-centred spiritual practices are based on the attainment of a state of spiritual sublimation, inner peace and tranquillity whilst at the same time maintaining normal social integration and functioning" (Valanciute & Thampy 81). The article proposes that in order for an awakening to be considered pathological, it must have a negative impact on an individual's ability to hold down a job, fulfill obliga-

tions, and lead to strange behavior or cause problems with thinking clearly. I reflected upon my father's situation, remembered his suffering and inability to conform to society's expectations, losing the ability to acquire an education and living a disorganized life. I was still not convinced he was suffering from a mental illness, but it was starting to become hard to fight the diagnosis.

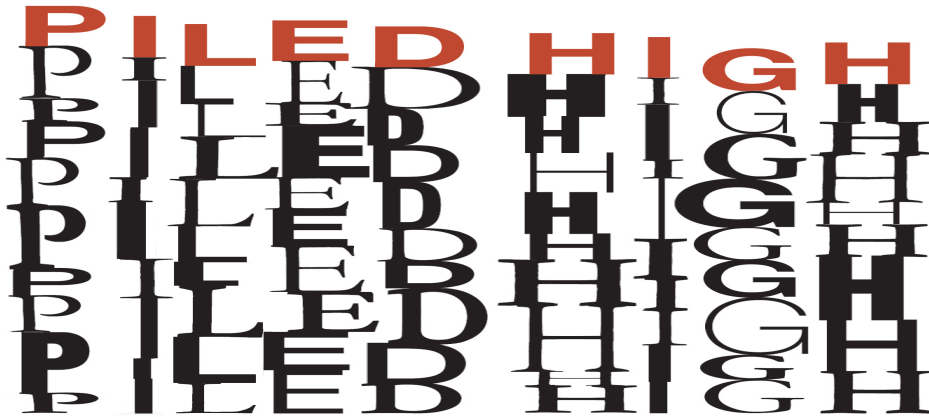
Ellen Forney, an artist diagnosed with bipolar disorder, chooses to embrace her diagnosis and celebrate the unique abilities associated with it in her graphic memoir *Marbles: Mania, Depression, Michelangelo + Me*. I found striking parallels between her life, my father's, and my own, and discovered she had a similar tattoo experience to mine, including white-light energy. Although she does not mention Kundalini specifically, she depicts a bright white-light electrical charge traveling through her body in the illustrations (Forney 3). In *Marbles*, Forney celebrates the positive aspects of her bipolar disorder, while acknowledging the dangers associated with it and the satisfaction and balance she found in life after her experience with therapy and medicine (Forney 195). This approach could be a step in the right direction for therapeutic care, allowing the patient to maintain a strong sense of self-esteem, while helping to reduce suffering through guided reflection and possibly medication.

Despite my resistance to a diagnosis, I admit therapy has helped me find stability and meaning in my life; however, at first the label of mental illness made me feel like I was less than normal. It seems as though the tendency to use language that excludes individuals from normalcy could be a barrier to those who are seeking help. My father should not be stripped

of his Kundalini experience, which brought him a sense of personal satisfaction and self-worth, but rather offered a treatment plan allowing for flexibility and freedom to maintain his spiritual identity and creative self-expression while simultaneously receiving treatment. Would my father's life have been different if he had explored the possibility that his situation was beyond spiritual? Who would we both be today if we did not have the story of Kundalini? In my opinion we would be more aware human beings, but we would be deprived of a fascinating story and a sense of uniqueness that has propelled both of us through troubling times. With education and appropriate open-minded shifts in the process of therapy, we could retain our spirituality and develop the ability to function normally within our culture, which seems like a perfect balance.

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Controlled by the Clutter

Laurie Thompson

The dining room table is draped with a puzzle from several Christmases ago. It was one that took her a long time to complete, wanting to display it for years as if to show an accomplishment, an excuse to leave things as they were. Underneath the table, there is a basket of birthday and thank-you cards, naked and ink-less, stacked so high that the envelopes spill out the sides like graceful gourds stuck in time. In a plastic box of mismatched trinkets sits a McDonald's toy still in its wrapper (*There are people who collect these things*), a Barbie's fuchsia high heel, a lonesome piece of colored plastic (*I'll find what it belongs to one day*), a screw or two, a half-sharpened yellow colored pencil, and dust. A cardboard box is hidden underneath the table, filled with black-and-white photographs from her childhood mixed with holiday portraits of us as kids. I had desired greatly for the pictures to be in albums, ones I could flip through and laugh at and ask for the stories that they carried. It was too overwhelming to sort through each picture individually, crumpling up the sides and mangling the timeline of memories. I would move one item on top of another, pushing it out of my way, only to find

myself creating another mess I couldn't fix. I would often give up.

On a shelf loaded with miscellaneous and useless Tupperware, there are several Dixie Stampede boot-shaped, plastic glasses from a feast of an entire chicken far too large for my child-size stomach; green alien cups from Kennywood amusement park that would pair perfectly with globs of fudge at the end of the night; mugs in the shape of the stubby alien creatures from *Toy Story*; and wooden salad bowls that would make me fear a mouthful of lettuce and splintered wood on my tongue. I've asked numerous times if we could throw these things away—seeing that we never use them anyway—but she insists they remain there, plastic memories from my brother's and my childhood.

As I touch the wooden table, shivers run through my nerves as I imagine what dinners could have been like here. Conversation between my mother and me was never dull. I would call her from my dad's to ask a quick opinion and it would turn into an hour-long conversation about anything on our minds, ending only because we would both have to

pee. At the dinner table, we might have had one of these conversations. Maybe my brother would have joined in, even if it were just for the food. But it wouldn't matter what the food was—we would at least have felt connected.

Each year she would make another promise for change, but I learned to ignore these promises. Every Christmas she would buy us some sort of game—either a mini ping-pong set, a new Scrabble board or another Monopoly to add to our collection. She would beg me to play with her, saying it was her motivation to clean up so that we could make use of these new activities as a family. The poor ping-pong set has been lost amongst the other untouched gifts that held meaningless hope.

As I make my way into the adjoining “computer” room, in which three nonfunctional computers sit on a desk, I stub my toe on the end table where Mr. Yuck Post-It notes are scattered, my face distorting in pain like the circular, green creature's visage. On my tiptoes, I try to avoid the touch of the cold wooden floor, all the while tracing my fingers against the spines of books by Anne Tyler, Nicholas Sparks, Alice Hoffman, Sarah Addison Allen, and others I have yet to read. Using a great deal of strength, I pull open the closet door in the back of the room. I get butterflies in my stomach just thinking about what I might discover:

A tiny, porcelain mask trapped in a box, caked in green eye shadow and deep violet lipstick with a joker's hat flopping on either side like a bloodhound's ears. I'm in awe—there is something about masks that make me smile... the mystery, the secrecy, the anonymity.

Brand new, rubbery spoons for infants with a sticker that read “Buy one get one half off.” They were bought because of the sale, but for no infant in particular. I wonder if she'll still

have these by the time I'm ready for a child.

A Kermit the Frog notebook filled with jumbles of words about past boyfriends; there are several words I cannot decipher due to the youthful urge to write it all down.

There were times when I actually enjoyed the clutter, because it meant I got to rummage through things that hadn't been touched in years, things that had been forgotten from my mother's past. It was the only thing that kept my motivation high when I cleaned—the promise of a new treasure. The masks remind me of my childhood and the desire to dress up and pretend to be something I wasn't. The old notebooks my mom kept when she was in her twenties and thirties allow me to glimpse into her adolescent mind.

It is time to start. I begin with the stacked books, wanting to organize them alphabetically. Holding a few in my hands, I attempt to push more in between other spines, but to no avail. The books are crowded already, wanting to breathe, wanting to be taken down and felt, desiring a mind to absorb their stories. I frown and stuff the books one on top of the other, hiding the titles, isolating them from the world.

Maybe try somewhere else.

The desk. Maybe I could do my homework here one day. But first, I test out all of the pens. No use in being surrounded by dead pens. Sitting at the desk, I scribble pens, highlighters, markers, and sharpies onto a ripped piece of colored paper. My eyes drift to the rest of the room once again. Why am I wasting my time testing out pens when there was no path to the mysterious closet? My skin tingles with goose bumps as I imagine her thirty years from now, inundated with neglected books, drowning in useless knickknacks and old magazines she could not bear to throw away. All of it being

too much for her to handle, she is holding her mind hostage to the feeling that she would want these things one day, that she would find use in things that I saw as useless.

During my last few years of high school, I tried to make it a goal to clean some part of the house once or twice a week during the couple of hours before she got home from work. I would start in one room, but find myself getting distracted by something interesting I never knew we owned.

"I took at least six bags of crap up to Dad's to throw away," I admitted to my brother.

"You should just do that like every week," he laughed. We both giggled, finding Mom's problem funny when we felt like we were fixing it. I felt an immense sense of relief when I could rid the house of several garbage bags of junk. There were times I felt guilty for doing this behind her back, but I came to realize it was the only way I could help. When I first started, I made the mistake of throwing items away in the kitchen garbage can. I should have known she would look through it.

One time, I heard her from the kitchen, making an agonized gasp as if she broke precious china she could never replace. She came into the living room and asked me if I had done it. Done what? *Thrown away my cartoon.* For a moment I debated whether to just lie, say it might've been my brother. But I felt guilty. Yes, I'm sorry, I didn't think it mattered. *It does matter. This is important to me. Stop going through my stuff—seriously. Why would you do that?* I apologized again and again, but eventually stopped and went to my room, not wanting to feel the guilt anymore. I had not purposely thrown out that cartoon. It must have been collected with other pieces of paper and crap I knew were worthless. Or, I thought was worthless. I'm sure she didn't even

remember it existed, and I bet she'll never think of it again, never find it again in the rubble. It would have been better off in the trash.

Sometimes, we could laugh about it:

"Just so you know, I threw away some of the candy in that bowl," I told her.

"What!" she said, throwing her arms up in the air.

"Mom, I'm pretty sure it's fifteen years old."

She laughed. "You're actually probably right." I nodded, making a face that read I know I am.

"Hey! At least I'm not like one of those hoarders on TV," she said proudly, wanting acknowledgement.

"Sure yeah, okay, you don't have ten dead cats hidden under junk. Congrats."

It seems like a dream that there was a squirrel in our house for nearly a week. My mom and I were sitting on the couch cushions that hardly supported our weight, feeling more of the springs than the cushion, when I saw an animal perched on the top of the loveseat sofa across the room. It must have gotten in through the chimney, late at night, when the house was filled with sleeping bodies. I still get chills just thinking about how long it had been watching me as I did my homework. After frantically telling my mom, I ran as fast as I could up to my room and closed the door, leaving her to deal with the rodent. I imagine it frozen there, in shock, not knowing which path to take: perhaps he considered the piled-high celebrity magazines from the '80s, using them as stepping stones to some unknown destination, or maybe he would have put his hairy paws onto the Santa Claus cookie plate, covered in more dust than it ever did Christmas

cookies. He probably desired nothing more than to find some forgotten crumbs—he might have even enjoyed a fifteen-year-old lollipop—but he would have to take a journey through the skyscrapers of magazines, the buildings of abandoned board games, and the mounds of empty gift bags and tissue paper stuffed into the corner to get there. I felt sorry for him.

At the end, all that's left of you are your possessions. Perhaps that's why I've never been able to throw anything away. Perhaps that's why I boarded the world: with the hope that when I died, the sum total of my things would suggest a life larger than the one I lived. —Nicole Krauss, *The History of Love*

If there were ever a situation where I had to leave my house immediately, granting only enough time to grab an item or two, I would scavenge for my journals, my scrapbooks, and my photo-albums. Memory is hard to hold on to, and for me, there's nothing more satisfying than looking back on how I viewed life as a young teenager, laughing at the weird photos my friends and I took as spirited middle-schoolers. These are the things I'd mourn for if lost. But for the past several years, I have had a hard time grasping the sadness in a loss of possessions like decade-old magazines and dusty amusement park souvenirs. When I see what they have done to my mother, all I feel is anger. All I want to do is get rid of them, shovel away the problem at its roots, leaving nothing that could cause stress. I suggest one step at a time: starting with the plethora of magazines. All she needs to do is throw them away. But she can't—she has to look through each and every one of them, making sure she doesn't need to see that one picture, that one article, that one faded crossword puzzle.

"I know you hate when I try to clean, but I'm just trying to help," I say over the phone,

finding it easier to admit this when I wasn't facing her.

"Sweetie, I know you are, but it's better if I just do it myself," she responds gently.

I left it at that, not wanting to upset her more, not wanting her to know I feared she would never actually do it on her own.

"Why haven't I ever seen the inside of your mom's house?" A friend of mine once asked in elementary school.

"I dunno, it's just kind of a mess..." I replied.

"Oh, I don't mind! My house is messy too sometimes," they would say.

"You just can't."

And eventually, they would stop asking.

My mom adores Scrabble. She had played with her mom growing up, the only person that could beat her at the game. I would play with her sometimes, but she would always have to help me. Even with assistance, I always lost. I will probably never master the way words go together in this game, just like she may never fully know how I have felt in her house, surrounded by things I loved as a child, but grew to despise the existence of for their calamities.

Mom, I want you to not have to say, "Excuse the mess," or "Just warn them about the mess..." or "I'm just stressed about the mess." I don't want you to get upset because I'm trying to help. I want there to be room to play Scrabble on the dining room table, not on a small square space near the TV where you complain about back pain. I want you to laugh when the Scrabble pieces fall off the table onto the spotless hardwood floor; easily found, not lost in the couch cushions. I want you to be independent from the trap you have set yourself in. I want you to see how it's a trap that you have the ability to free yourself from. Go ahead, use Scrabble as your motivation, and I promise I'll play with you whenever you want, no complaints.

MEET THE EDITORS



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Aidan Kelley is a junior from Wyckoff, New Jersey, majoring in Writing & Rhetoric. He transferred to Syracuse this year, and plays the trumpet for the Sour Citrus Society in his free time. Aidan has a passion for astronomy, and hopes to one day write scripts for science and nature documentaries.



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Charlotte Oestrich is a sophomore from Bethel, New York with a dual major in Writing & Rhetoric and Political Science. She writes for *Misguided Wanderer Magazine*, serves as President of Watson/Sheraton Halls, and interns for NYPIRG. In her sparse free time, she enjoys fine arts and adventures.



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Dabota Wilcox is a senior from Randolph, Massachusetts. She is majoring in Architecture and minoring in Writing & Rhetoric. Although she gets very little sleep, her passions in her waking moments include design, writing, and art. She honestly has no idea what she wants to do with her life because she is a confused twenty-two-year-old, but hopes to continue designing and reading amazing pieces.



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Madison Firkey is a sophomore from Hampton, New Hampshire, with a Psychology and Neuroscience Integrated Learning major and a minor in Writing & Rhetoric. She is also a resident advisor in Day Hall and a research assistant for the Syracuse Clinical Psychology Department. In her free time, she enjoys running, watching *The Walking Dead*, laughing at cat videos, and traveling the world. She would love to work in the field of Clinical Psychology one day.



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Chloe Martin is a junior Writing & Rhetoric major with a double minor in Communication & Rhetorical Studies and Women's & Gender Studies. She writes for SU's *VergeCampus* and *Mixtape Magazine*. She is from the Syracuse area but hates the cold and hopes to become a world famous author, somewhere warm.



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ZACH BARLOW

Zach Barlow is a sophomore majoring in Writing & Rhetoric from Seattle, Washington. He enjoys long walks on the beach, a nice crisp breeze on his face, and taking photographs of things that move him. He is currently the assistant photo editor of the *Daily Orange* and hopes to one day work in publishing.



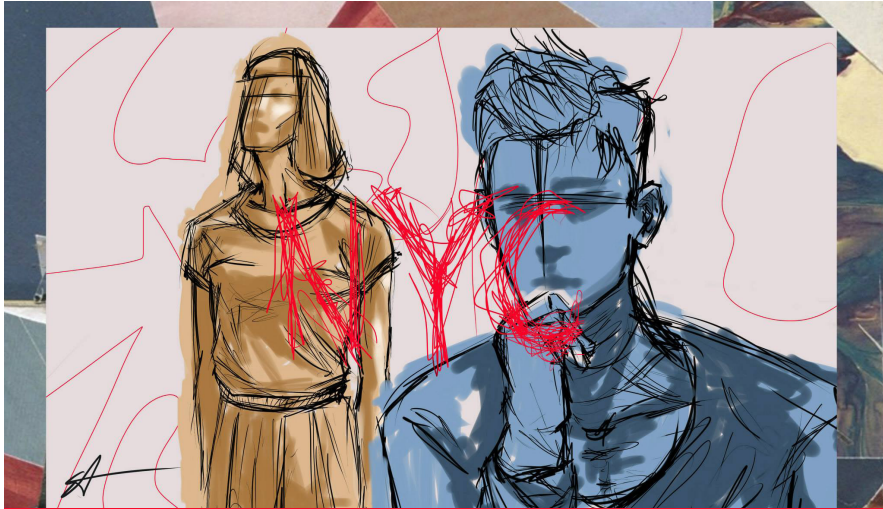
RICHELLE GEWERTZ

Richelle Gewertz is a 5th year Architecture student and Writing minor from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. When not working on her thesis, she is working on her thesis. Even so, she is excited to make the most out of the remaining time she has left. After graduation, she looks forward to starting full-time employment at a prominent architecture firm in Boston.

Layout by Richelle Gewertz.

ARTISTS

Special thanks to the artists who allowed us to feature their work in this issue.



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Elijah Ayodele Akinbamidele is a student at Syracuse University majoring in Sociology and minoring in Political Science. After graduation, he plans to further his education in the field of law. Nevertheless, he says, "I am blessed to have art as a hobby because it surrounds me with resonant joy, which has molded my aesthetic character."

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Chase Guttman is an award-winning travel photographer and drone photography expert who won Young Travel Photographer of the Year three times and is currently authoring a book on drone photography.

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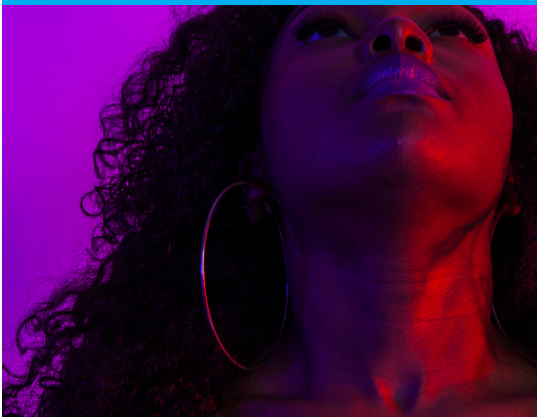
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